

CAREER DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS:
QUESTIONS, CHALLENGES, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the nature of career developmental stages for secondary public school instructional leaders. The study had three sub-purposes: to examine the role instructional leaders perform throughout their careers to determine if there is an identifiable set of career developmental stages through which they progress, to offer an incipient description of these stages, and to identify and explicate implications these findings have for professional development decisions at the state and local levels. The participants in this study were part of a purposeful sample which the researcher identified as being secondary school instructional leaders who had served varying amounts of time in their careers in the field of education. There were sixteen participants, eight male and eight female. The participants were of varying ages and educational background.

The data for this study were derived from interviews with each of the sixteen participants. Through the utilization of basic qualitative methods, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis of the data. This analysis allowed the researcher to organize the data into manageable strands. Through the theoretical framework of the study, the researcher coded the data in an attempt to connect the data to the research questions. There were six themes identified in the data analysis: (a) induction, (b) stabilization or establishment, (c) professional, (d) distinguished, (e) frustration, (f) professional development.

The researcher did identify four distinct career developmental stages for secondary school instructional leaders. The researcher was also able to identify characteristics and descriptions associated with these career developmental stages. Additionally, the researcher was

able to identify professional development opportunities which have proven to have been helpful to the participants in this study, as well as identified professional development needs which may be lacking. The findings in this study offer school districts in the state of Alabama a description of the career developmental stages which instructional leaders experience, as well as suggestions for appropriate professional development opportunities to meet their needs at each of the particular career developmental stages.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My wife Dana, who inspires me to try to be great and whom I love with all of my soul. She has been my rock through this and all of my other projects. My children: Hannah, Lindsay, and John Adam. I appreciate so much their understanding and love while their Dad has been participating in this process. Also to my parents, John and Betty Berry. The work ethic and love you have instilled in me have allowed me to reach my dreams. Thank you for being there for me. I am honored to have had you in my life.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Education in the 21st century is widely recognized as the dawning of the age of accountability. There is more scrutiny from stakeholders as school officials attempt to implement state and federal regulations that are ever changing. Additionally, school districts are faced with budget cuts, safety concerns, and a myriad of other structural and social issues; ensuring that all staff members are fully prepared to engage in their careers has not been a distinct priority. As school districts begin to face shortfalls in their financial receipts from governmental entities, the initial items on the “chopping block” have been funding for programs such as professional development for teachers and instructional leaders. This lack of commitment to providing appropriate professional development leads many to leave the field of education for other pursuits. Instructional leaders are not only leaving the field, the average length of service for an instructional leader is rapidly decreasing. Hence, new personnel must be employed with additional fiduciary responsibilities for the district, as well as additional training provided, in order to acclimate the new staff to the professional and social environment of the school. Coupled with the loss of quality staff members and oftentimes many years of experience, school districts choosing to cut professional development funding will face additional costs not measureable in financial terms. Appropriate professional development plays a critical role in the nurturing of faculty and staff, but often overlooked is the role professional development has on the career of an instructional leader. As school administrators progress through their careers, much care is taken by them to ensure the teachers in their building are equipped with the proper tools to perform the core task of teaching and learning. However,

many school districts are not addressing the needs of these same administrators to enhance their personal and professional development.

For instructional leaders, the added burden of accountability creates an even greater need for professional development. Instructional leaders face many obstacles in their daily experiences. By attempting to focus on the core task of teaching and learning, the building principal has the opportunity to increase student achievement, which is the ultimate goal of the instructional leader. Unfortunately, there are a plethora of issues and concerns which take away from this important focus. These issues include student discipline, parental concerns, faculty socialization, changing standards from state and federal governments, district politics, etc. Quality school administrators are able to manage all of these forces, while achieving gains in student achievement. This balance creates a tremendous amount of stress on individuals regardless of the school district where they are employed. These stressors point to the importance of quality and appropriate professional development for administrators.

School districts face a lack of consistency in school leadership, many times because of their own hiring policies. As previously stated, the length of service which local school administrators are serving in individual schools is rapidly decreasing due to the internal and external forces facing school leaders (Earley and Weindling, 2007). Many of these changes are due to promotions within the district. Some administrators who perform their duties well are placed in positions in other schools to effect change in poorer performing schools. Other administrators may be promoted to positions in the district office where they are able to enhance student achievement for more students. Still, many others decide to leave the field for a variety of reasons, including lack of support from district offices. Lack of a reasonable degree of continuity in the crucial position of the secondary school principal in regard to instructional

leadership hampers the ability of schools to grow and can lead to a decrease in student achievement.

How does the instructional leader in the 21st century balance these issues and concerns, while maintaining the critical task of student achievement? The answer to this question may be answered by observing instructional leaders as they develop professionally over the course of their careers. There has been quite a research focus that will be discussed in the next chapter, with much written regarding the developmental career stages of teachers. The literature review conducted in developing a rationale for the proposed study revealed very little research attention to the developmental career stages of the local school administrator, particularly secondary school principals. Just as faculty and staff have needs personally and professionally, so do the principals of individual schools. These needs must be identified and addressed for districts to secure and retain quality school administrators. This identification and direct involvement from the district will allow local schools to avoid facing frequent transitions to new personnel, which will save time, money, and other resources over time. Additionally, are there distinct career developmental stages in which school leaders experience socialization, growth, confidence, stagnation, influence, or frustration? If these career developmental stages exist, the school district has a responsibility to identify the appropriate professional development activities required to ensure the instructional leader is properly equipped to manage these difficult circumstances. By addressing these concerns, districts have a greater opportunity to effect change in student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of career developmental stages for secondary public school principals. Using and building on the career developmental-stages and socialization literatures for teachers and principals, this larger purpose has three sub-purposes: 1) to examine the role secondary school principals perform throughout their careers to determine if there is an identifiable set of developmental stages through which they progress; 2) to offer an incipient description of these stages, detailing questions and challenges which may exist at each stage; and 3) to identify and explicate implications these findings have for professional development decisions/strategies at the district and local levels.

Rationale and Justification of Study

Career developmental stage research is certainly not unique to the field of education. However, research regarding how secondary school principals orient themselves into the field of education is limited at best. There are some studies in this regard, but not as many as are apparent in other areas of education, such as research regarding career developmental stages of teachers. This research will attempt to fill the gap regarding how secondary school principals progress through their careers, as well as how districts can assist them in handling the challenges of the most difficult position in education. Secondary school instructional leaders were chosen for this study due to the unique nature of the position. The instructional leaders at secondary schools face challenges with supervision and discipline, as well as athletic activities. The research reviewed for this study indicated a gap in relation to specific types of instructional leaders.

As school districts struggle with the decisions regarding school accountability, utilization of resources, shrinking budgets, as well as a variety of other issues, identifying and employing

the correct instructional leader for individual schools must be a priority. The importance of student achievement is at an all-time high. Districts are evaluated and rated based on data such as graduation rates, standardized test scores, Blue Ribbon School status, etc. These evaluations place districts in a position where they cannot take a chance on an administrator unable to handle the complex role of the instructional leader. Many districts are struggling to identify qualified candidates due to the nature of the shrinking pool of applicants who can perform the task. Not only is it incumbent upon districts to identify instructional leaders and place them in schools, there is the added responsibility to develop building principal capacity as it relates to student achievement. Due to the nature of these and other issues school systems are facing, the more information school districts can obtain regarding characteristics of instructional leaders, the more effective districts will be when choosing the most qualified applicant for administration positions. Additionally, school districts will be better equipped to develop instructional leaders and reduce the amount of transition within the rank of building administrators.

A beginning instructional leader must go through a period of induction, or socialization, into three distinct cultures. The first culture is that of the specific role in which the new instructional leader will be serving. As a new building principal, understanding the roles and responsibilities associated with the position is an important component of the socialization process. Secondly, the beginning instructional leader must situate himself/herself into the school culture. This induction can be problematic if a person is given the opportunity to be promoted from a classroom teacher to a building administrator directly into a position of authority over individuals who previously were colleagues. Many of these colleagues will demonstrate resentment toward the new instructional leader, often identifying their former faculty member as “one of them”. This creates feelings of anxiety for the instructional leader. It is important that

school districts recognize this anxiety as another stressor to an already difficult role. The third culture is that of induction into the school district itself. Each person who enters the field (whether hired from within or outside the district) may face socialization issues within the district itself. Many districts have attempted to utilize teacher induction programs to provide beginning instructional leaders with tools (professional development) and/or establish a mentor/protégé program.

The second component identified is that the induction program must be needs-based or individualized. For example, if an instructional leader enters the field from a similar position in another district, there would be no reason to subject her to the same professional development which may benefit a classroom teacher who has been promoted to a school administrator position. Induction and socialization into the culture of the district would, however, be appropriate in this example. The local school district should empower the new instructional leader by providing the appropriate level of professional development necessary to help the instructional leader “find his way” in the new role.

The third and final characteristic of an effective induction program is that it should be a comprehensive program maintained by the entire school district. The induction program should not be a program designed for short term use. There should be stated goals and objectives which mirror the vision of the school district. These induction programs should be systematic and reviewed periodically by the district leadership to address the changing culture of education leadership.

The induction process is a critical tool in the development of a newly hired instructional leader. This induction process will allow instructional leaders to perform in a manner in which they are comfortable as a decision maker, as well as in a socialization role within the school

building itself. This is underscored as important as well because, as instructional leaders progress in their careers, the effectiveness of the induction program may determine the career stage direction an individual may follow. This will be discussed further in later chapters of this research. Positive experiences in induction programs may lead instructional leaders to never experience the difficulties associated with frustration and stagnation, although they will be exposed to the same stressors as those instructional leaders who will have these experiences. Principals who have not experienced an effective induction program may leave the field because they do not feel as prepared for the pressures and stressors they will face from all of the stakeholders involved in the school setting. It is a major responsibility for school districts to not only hire effective instructional leaders, but also to provide appropriate induction programs to ensure their socialization needs are met.

Instructional leaders in schools face many difficulties and crises. These difficult circumstances can lead to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Whitaker, 1996). The emotional exhaustion can be attributed to a variety of factors, including work load and compensation, macro constraints of the job, impact of the job, intrinsic rewards, work environment, school district characteristics, community characteristics, safety, and support (Shen, Cooley, & Wegenke, 2004). The manner in which an instructional leader can manage these and other factors may determine how his/her career developmental stages as an instructional leader will develop throughout his/her tenure.

The instructional leader able to manage the myriad of issues faced can have an enjoyable experience during their tenure as an instructional leader. All school leaders will experience periods of frustration during their careers. Professional development and mentoring programs may allow the principal to be better equipped to handle the external pressures of the position

itself. Oftentimes, frustration may lead the instructional leader to become more driven, which is an internal mechanism for coping with the various stressors in educational leadership.

Instructional leaders who are well received by their faculty and staff are often promoted to a position at the district level. This type of promotion may create the opportunity for the professional instructional leader to affect more change; however, it does lead to possible issues for the successor in acclimating to the new school environment.

The concerns districts encounter not only have to do with hiring practices or how instructional leaders fit in the day-to-day operations of a public school, there are also issues associated with appropriate types of professional development for instructional leaders to ensure they are growing as individuals, both professionally and personally. What can school districts do to assist each individual in meeting their particular needs as school employees? What responsibility lies with the district to meet the professional and personal needs of the instructional leaders which it employs? Are there general characteristics with instructional leaders which can be identified and utilized to assist districts in identifying problem areas? If so, what are areas districts can improve upon to identify problems early so that professional development can be targeted to meet specific needs? These, as well as other questions, will serve as a guide to determine the importance of career developmental stage research for instructional leaders.

Research Questions Guiding Study

Utilizing the work of researchers who have studied teacher and educational leader career stages, coupled with instructional leader career developmental stage studies, and building on the purpose of this study as stated above, the following questions will guide this study:

1. Are there discernible career developmental stages that secondary school instructional leaders move through in their careers?
2. If so, what are these developmental stages and what are the characteristics of each developmental stage?
3. How might these developmental stages and the characteristics or dimensions of each stage inform professional development decisions/strategies at the district and state levels to place educators in a proactive position to build the leadership capacity of principals?

Overview of Research Design

This study will be a phenomenological qualitative study exploring career stages for instructional leaders. The research will be conducted utilizing Alabama public secondary school instructional leaders in various employment developmental stages of their careers as the study sample. Sampling will be conducted through interviews with instructional leaders who have served districts over a range of years. Instructional leaders participating in this study will have a variety of positions which they have served, as well as varying lengths of service. The interviews will consist of open ended questions asked of each of the subjects. There will also be follow-up questions from the researcher based on the responses given to the open ended questions. The interviews will be tape recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed prior to analysis. The data will be analyzed by developing themes to search for patterns in the responses of the school administrators. These themes will be utilized to determine if career stages for instructional leaders exist, and if they do exist, identify the types of professional development necessary to ensure growth on behalf of the school administrator.

For clarification purposes, there are various methods this study will use to refer to school leaders. The term currently adopted by the state of Alabama is instructional leader. For the

purpose of this study, the term instructional leader will be used in most instances. However, other terms, such as building principal, building administrator, principal, and administrator will be utilized. Many of these terms are used in the review of the literature so as to be consistent with the language from the authors of the studies which are cited.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this research, the following definitions will be provided to assist the reader in understanding the nature of this study:

career developmental stage – A developmental model which describes an ongoing process which takes place throughout the course of a life cycle. For the purpose of this research, teacher and administrator developmental stages are separate entities, although both of these share common characteristics.

formal socialization - Refers to planned efforts by school districts to acclimate new employees into their role as a teacher or administrator.

induction – Practices and events which are utilized to assist new and teachers and administrators develop competencies regarding their position, as well as assist them in developing their effectiveness in the school setting.

informal socialization – Acclimation to the new role which takes place at the school site itself, and is not driven in an organized format created by the district.

Instructional leadership – The actions which a principal takes which promotes student achievement.

socialization – The process of acclimation to the new role. Induction in this context will refer to teachers, as well as to school administrators. This process typically occurs during the first year

in a new role, whether as a teacher or building administrator. As will be discussed in chapter two, as building administrators transition from one position to another, this process can be repeated.

Organization of Study

This study is organized to allow the reader to follow the general purpose and rationale of the study, read an overview of the previous literature related to administrator career stages, review the methodology of the study and data analysis, and conclude with a discussion and analysis of the research conducted. Following is a discussion of how each chapter will be aligned.

Chapter One will be the overall purpose of the research. This is the opportunity to identify what the research questions are and why they may be relevant for a study. Career developmental stage research for administrators can provide an important tool for school districts in their hiring practices. Additionally, if distinct career stages are identified, districts may benefit from understanding what professional development opportunities should be provided to ensure growth.

Chapter Two will be the review of the relevant literature related to career developmental stage research. There is a plethora of research regarding various career stages for various individuals, including those in education. There has been extensive work done in the area of teacher career developmental stages. There appears to be a void in the literature when it comes to career developmental stage research for instructional leaders. *Chapter Two* will serve as a guide to what the research indicates, as well as begin to develop the proposed model for administrators.

The methodology of this study will be discussed in *Chapter Three*. This will include a description of the research setting and participants, data collection, interview protocol, and the type of qualitative research being conducted.

The data collected will be analyzed with a description of this process occurring in *Chapter Four*. This chapter will detail the themes and patterns which have developed as a result of this research study.

Chapter Five will offer a discussion of the research findings. This chapter will also include a review of the purpose for the study and the research questions, an overview of the significance of the problem, the conclusions of the study, limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

Finally, the appendices will consist of the transcripts of the interviews, data analysis, the interview protocol, and the researcher's notes regarding the development of the themes and patterns of the career developmental stage research for administrators.

CHAPTER II - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of career developmental stages for secondary public school principals. The research questions developed for the study guided the review of the literature by studying future implications and needs for further research. Previous studies were examined by the researcher, which are associated with the research questions proposed, as well as various descriptors.

The research was conducted using primary resources, such as educational journals and books by authors in the field of career developmental stage research. Secondary sources included statistical data, symposium and conference papers, and doctoral dissertations. These sources provided the necessary information for investigating and answering the research questions. General references utilized were *Academic Search Premier*, *Scout*, and *Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC)*. These sources provided author's names, journal citations, abstract information, publication date, and title.

Electronic descriptors were used by the researcher to obtain articles for the study. These descriptors included *career stages*, *career developmental stages for teachers*, *career developmental stages for administrators*, *mentoring*, *transition and recruitment of teachers*, *transition and recruitment of administrators*, *challenges of administrators*, *new teacher induction*, *new principal induction*, *professional development of school administrators*, *professional development of teachers*, *ethics in education*, *teacher ethics*, and *school administrator ethics*.

The organization of chapter two will contain several distinct areas in regard to research on career developmental stages. The first portion of the literature review will be a discussion of the work of Donald Super from 1957. Super proposed the first model of career developmental stages in general. There will be a brief discussion as to the importance of career developmental stage research in education, followed by a review of the literature regarding teacher career developmental stages. These areas are important to this study in that they provide a window into what has been examined in the field of education. A discussion of the research regarding career stages of school administrators will then be examined to determine if distinct career developmental stages have been identified in previously reported research efforts. The next subsection of chapter two will be an examination of some commonalities of research regarding career developmental stages for teachers and school administrators. This will be done in an attempt to identify certain characteristics and themes that are consistent for the teacher and instructional leader. Finally, there will be a discussion of professional development opportunities for school leaders in the state of Alabama. These opportunities are divided into eight distinct categories which were developed by the Alabama State Department of Education.

Review of the Literature

The framework of this study begins with the work of Donald Super, who first proposed the theory of career developmental stages (Super, 1957). Super proposed this as a general theory to explain why people matriculated through a career path, as well as a general idea of what the distinct characteristics were at each particular stage. Super built on the work of Eli Ginzberg's Theory of Career Development. Super's model was based upon men and their career stage characteristics. Later, this model was extrapolated to offer a theory involving women, which he says was validated in subsequent studies of female workers (Freeman, 1993). Super does

acknowledge that this model was an oversimplified and general approach to career stage research. However, many of the career stage developmental theorists use general characteristics based on the work of Super.

The Super Career Stage Developmental Model proposed four career stages for individuals. Each of these stages was proposed to contain certain psychological tasks. The first career developmental stage is the trial stage. It is within this developmental stage which an individual attempts to identify interests, capabilities, how their self-image fits into their work, and their professional self-image (Ornstein, Cron, and Slocum, 1989). It is in this developmental stage where individuals may be less committed to their job, less involved, and less satisfied than those in Super's other career developmental stages. This characteristic could be attributed to this stage being exploratory in nature. As workers enter the career path they have chosen, few know the precise direction in which they will travel. Oftentimes, socialization into a new position will hamper growth and lead the employee to seek opportunities not only in a different setting, but possibly in a different career.

The second developmental stage proposed by Super is the establishment stage. This career stage is characterized by a greater commitment to the career, career advancement, and growth within the career, as well as with the individual self. As individual's settle into an occupational position, they become more committed to the organization itself. Individuals in the establishment stage will be more effective employees than those in the trial stage. This can be attributed to their experience and commitment to their chosen career path. Since individuals will utilize this developmental stage for advancement, there is also a strong desire for promotions within the organization. This desire for promotion, according to the theory proposed by Super,

occurs more in the establishment stage than in any other career development stage (Orstein, et al., 1989). This applies to the field of education as well.

Super's third career developmental stage is the maintenance stage. This developmental stage is predicated on the desire to hold on to past accomplishments from the establishment stage. Employees in the maintenance stage seek out opportunities for professional growth through pursuing advanced degrees or further technical training in their field of expertise. As teachers have moved into administrative roles, there is a greater need for professional growth due to changing requirements throughout the field of education. Appropriate professional development is needed to ensure the instructional leader has the tools necessary to lead their schools into the 21st century. There doesn't appear to be any change in the commitment to the organization at this career developmental stage, as job attitudes and job performance remain at approximately the same levels as during the previous career stage (Orstein, et al., 1989).

The final career developmental stage of Super's theory is the decline stage. This stage indicates the time in which employees are beginning to settle in toward retirement. Employee job attitudes are at their lowest point in this developmental stage. Employee output is also significantly reduced at this stage as well. It is within this career developmental stage in which individuals would be least likely to consider a move to a different location (Orstein, et al., 1989). Many prefer to finish their career in the position and location in which they are currently assigned. As retirement approaches, some individuals completely break away from their employment, while others will work as either consultants or on a part-time basis with the company.

The general model of career stage development developed by Super (1957) has allowed other career developmental stage theorists to apply his theoretical positions to different career

fields and employment positions to his model in which to develop additional theories. There are numerous models for teacher career developmental stages which have evolved over time. This research study will build on Super's theory, as well as on research from the field of education and other general career developmental stage research. While there appears to be many theories which directly relate to teacher career developmental stages in the research, as well as career developmental stages in other disciplines, there does appear to be a gap in the literature in relation to career developmental stages for secondary school administrators.

Importance of Career Stage Developmental Research. School administrators have a wide variety of experiences in the span of their service. These experiences have a tremendous degree of difference throughout the course of a career. Employees have different goals and aims, as well as experience different dilemmas at various points in their careers (Oplatka, 2010). While a beginning school administrator has to tackle issues such as identification of major players in the school and learning the school culture from within (Carozza, 2012), a veteran administrator has different issues, such as energizing and motivating teachers to bring out their best for student achievement (Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992). The development of a career developmental stage model for secondary public school administrators has been an area which has received little attention, although career developmental stage research differentiates developmental change processes into observable career stages in general (Super, 1992).

Career stage developmental research is an important component in the study of individuals within organizations. Career developmental stages may be used to identify and understand individual's attitudes and behaviors in an organization setting, particularly an organizational setting as bureaucratic as schools and school districts. Career developmental stage research is an important component in studying teachers and administrators as employees.

As a person matriculates through her career, the individual needs for professional development will more than likely change (Eros, 2011). Additionally, the needs of school employees in regard to their professional development are different at the various career developmental stages as well (Oplatka, 2012). School districts should understand career stage development so that they may offer professional development which is appropriate and effective for the instructional leader.

An additional benefit for school districts in relation to career developmental stages is that it provides districts with information regarding the characteristics of individuals within the particular stages. It also emphasizes the retention of instructional leaders within the school district. The importance of keeping school administrators in the same school system has multiple benefits, including having an administrator who already understands the culture of the school, as well as a cost savings for the district to reduce training costs. Employers should understand the nature of their organization in regard to hiring practices due to the concept of “fostering loyalty”. By following hiring practices to develop loyalty and trust, employers should look first within their organization (Hoy and Miskell, 2008). Not only does the organization foster loyalty in education organizations when they look from within for school building administrators, there are additional benefits as well. Promoting a teacher from within the school to an administrative post also tends to create fewer changes than if a person was brought in from another district (Earley and Weindling, 2007). This consistency ranges from the implementation of individual policies to the culture of the school itself.

Employers are better able to understand and predict behaviors of individuals within the organization more accurately based upon the career developmental stage an employee may be operating (Ornstein, et al., 1989). If an employee appears to be “stuck” in his current role, the

district would have a means to predict and understand the situation based on the characteristics displayed. Hence, if employers understand developmental stages, then they are able to predict the behavior of their employees, then issues such as resistance to change may be addressed at optimal points along the career continuum (Metzler, Lund, and Gurvitch, 2008).

Career Stages for Teachers. There have been numerous proposed models to analyze career developmental stages for teachers. Unruh and Turner (1973) proposed a three stage developmental model of the initial teaching period, the period of building security, and the maturity period. Burden (1982) described a similar three stage developmental model with stages defined as survival, adjustment, and the mature stage. The Teacher Career Cycle Model is a more detailed description of career developmental stages for teachers (Burke, Fessler, and Christenson, 1984). This developmental model proposed eight stages for teachers: pre-service, induction, competency building, enthusiastic and growing, career frustration, career stability, career wind-down, and career exit.

Additional research has been conducted which discussed how the personal and organizational environment affects the teacher career cycle (Fessler and Christensen, 1992). One five stage developmental model proposes launching the career, stabilizing, encountering new challenges and concerns, the professional plateau, and retirement preparation (Leithwood, 1992). Each of these models describes the characteristics of each stage from the induction career developmental stage of the teacher through the career termination stage. While this is certainly not the totality of teacher career developmental stage research, it does provide an overview of the types of developmental stages described in the literature regarding the careers of classroom teachers.

One particular model appears to encompass the ideas of other career developmental stage researchers. This model proposes six phases to the life-cycle of a teacher (Steffy, B., Wolfe, M., Pasch, S., and Enz, B., 2000). Steffy, et al. (2000) proposes the following stages: novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished, and emeritus. It is important to note there are no shifts in this model to account for teachers who experience frustration or stagnation. The assertion from the authors is that teachers may stay “stuck” in a particular stage for the majority of their career. This particular scenario may describe a teacher who does not seek professional growth in his field, nor feels a sense of responsibility and loyalty to the district. A teacher who experiences stagnation after reaching the professional level may revert to the apprenticeship stage as the career comes to an end. This example may be a teacher who progressed to a particular stage, but somehow became disengaged in the teaching and learning process. This disengagement created the stagnation of the professional growth of the classroom teacher. It is imperative for instructional leaders of schools to identify where this stagnation occurs and provide the appropriate professional development to avoid this from occurring in their districts.

Career Stages for Administrators. The difficulty in defining career developmental stages for instructional leaders may be attributed to the situation which many administrators experience in the course of their careers. Some instructional leaders will transition to different roles over the course of their careers. These roles may be within the same building, moving from an assistant principal to the principal. However, some career movement may occur otherwise. They may move to another building in the district, transition into a role in the district office, move to a different school district, obtain a teaching position in a college setting, or obtain a job with the state department of education. These transitions have created difficulties in defining and delineating administrator career developmental stages.

There has been some debate as to the optimum amount of time for a school administrator to stay in one school or position. It has been suggested that the time frame is between four and ten years, with the seven year mark appearing to be about the right length of time for a school administrator to serve (Earley and Weindling, 2007). The authors contend that at the seven year mark, a full group of students has matriculated at their school and most of the changes the instructional leader wanted to initiate have been put into place. It is here where motivation could become a problem. A research study in the 1980's indicated building principals who have served between four and seven years had the most positive impact on their schools (Mortimore, P., Sammons, P., Stoll, L., Lewis, D., and Ecob, R., 1988). This is an important bit of information to know for the career developmental stage researcher. Professional development in school districts should evaluate this time period for instructional leaders in their current positions to ensure their needs are being met. By being aware of the impact the administrator has in the building, the district can prescribe professional development to ensure that stagnation does not occur.

Administrative roles will have an effect on the transition one has from one developmental stage to the next. However, the role will not be the defining point in which stage the administrator is located. Therefore, career stages are not necessarily linear because some administrators move through the stages at different rates (Hall, 2002). For example, a principal who is operating in the professional stage and is promoted to deputy superintendent would not automatically regress to the novice career developmental stage. Some have suggested principals who take another position in administration revert back to the first career developmental stage (Earley and Weindling, 2007). The contention from this research will be based on the

assumption that administrators develop a skill set which moves them within the model of which the role they are serving is not the driving force.

It is important to note as well there appears to be no automatic movement between developmental stages along the continuum in the teacher developmental model, nor in the developmental model for instructional leaders (Steffy et al., 2000, Hall 2002, Oplatka 2012). Many school administrators will experience “regressions, dead ends, and unpredictable changes” as they progress through their careers (Oplatka, 2012). This is typical in any career endeavor which an individual pursues. There are numerous issues which may arise which could hinder developmental stage movement. Age also does not appear to be perfectly synchronous within career developmental stage research (Oplatka, 2010, Hall 2002). Some administrator career developmental stage researchers suggest there are age ranges for administrators (Earley and Weindling, 2007; Oplatka, 2010), but more commonly it appears age has not been as defined as have other characteristics for the instructional leader. This study will contend that the school administrator model will yield similar results as that of previous research regarding models of teacher career developmental stages.

While there has not been as much research on career developmental stages for school administrators as that of teachers, one particular study suggests a five stage career developmental model (Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992). The stages of this model are survival, control, stability, educational leadership, and professional actualization. The survival developmental stage indicates a period of uncertainty as well as insecurity on the part of the new school administrator. This is the “shock” factor of beginning a position in leadership. This career developmental stage also is indicative of difficulties in leadership. Typically, management is done through crisis mode, as opposed to instructional design. The level of difficulty in managing

day-to-day operations of a school creates additional hardships and stress in an already overwhelming situation for the new instructional leader.

The second developmental stage identified in this model proposed by Parkay et al. (2000) is that of control. There is less focus on survival because the building administrator has settled into the new position. There is a focus on setting priorities for the future, as opposed to just managing the day to day operations of the school itself. The authors of this developmental model contend the instructional leader at this career stage knows what to do and how to do it. The school administrator is better able to identify the “significant others” (faculty, staff, central office administrators) who may judge what is important in the school building and to the community. Not to be overlooked, however, is the sense of fear in making ineffective decisions at this control developmental career stage. The instructional leader also focuses on maintaining control in his school. It is critically important for the school administrator at this developmental stage to understand the stakeholders and be able to identify the specific agenda individuals bring to the table. Decisions at this developmental stage are not necessarily made due to expertise from the building administrator. The lack of administrative experience creates doubt in decision-making for the building principal, as well as creates issues associated with teacher insubordination (Atieno & Simatwa, 2012).

The third career developmental stage in this model is stability. This stage can best be characterized as developing a routine. The everyday tasks become less difficult due to the confidence from the faculty and staff in the instructional leader. The school itself operates in a more efficient manner because the school administrator in the stability stage has more confidence and utilizes her own expertise, as well as being more confident in the skills of her faculty and staff. There appears to be more ownership of the school and how it operates from the

principal. There is less effort to change, because the administrator has reached a “compromise” with the faculty. As one principal who was quoted in their study stated, “The more comfortable with the faculty I get, the more difficult it appears to affect change with ‘em”. This level of comfort the instructional leader feels can lead to more confidence in the role as a member of the school family, but it can also lead to a greater chance of stagnation due to the lack of desire to affect change. There is also a tendency to develop frustration at the lack of progress within the school organization.

The fourth developmental stage identified by Parkay et al. (2000) is that of educational leadership. Once the instructional leader overcomes the obstacles created by becoming more comfortable with the faculty and staff, the principal begins to develop a vision for his school. The instructional leader demonstrates change through this long-term vision. Reluctant teachers who may not be on board with change may struggle with the administrator in this particular career developmental stage. The vision for the school becomes the driving force in the educational leadership stage. As is asserted by the researchers, there may be less harmony among the staff due to the instructional leader attempting to enact change. Again, change may or may not be occurring because of the school administrator himself. Change is almost constant from the state or federal level for the instructional leader. Managing these changes can be quite challenging for the school building administrator. Professional growth and development are beginning to reach their peak at this developmental stage as well. Advanced graduate work, along with additional opportunities to be involved in decision making at the local and state level, as well as with various professional organizations are more apparent within this career developmental stage.

The fifth and final career developmental stage identified by Parkay et al. (2000) is professional actualization. It is within this career developmental stage in which instructional leaders view the faculty and staff in a different manner. The school building administrator has reached some personal actualization and sees the staff as a group who share a vision for the school. She then attempts to develop means to motivate and impel the faculty to reach actualization as individual teachers, as well as the realization of the goals which the faculty has set for the school itself. Since the faculty is encouraged to follow its vision for the school, they are more empowered to follow their goals and objectives without interference from the building principal.

This particular model and its subsequent research have yielded an additional theme associated with instructional leaders who are in the early developmental stages of their careers. The researchers found organizational socialization (the ability to function and operate within a particular school setting) becomes less important to the administrator, while professional socialization (identifying with the profession) becomes more important at this developmental stage. This professional growth allows for instructional leaders to progress through the career developmental stages with the ability to develop a long range vision for their particular school, to understand and establish goals and objectives which promote their school within the district, as well as develop a personal vision for individual professional development (Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992).

A more recent study identified a six stage model for school administrators (Earley and Weindling, 2007). Their stages were numeric and consisted of a suggested time frame, beginning with stage zero being the preparation stage before becoming a principal. This career developmental stage did not have a time frame, as there could be numerous reasons the length of

preparation time could vary. Preparation at this stage included coursework in college, as well as student training as a school administrator. The researchers indicate that no amount of academic course work can prepare the aspiring school administrator for the daily administrator duties of actually being on the job.

Earley and Weindling's first developmental career stage was termed entry and encounter, which takes place within the first few months of becoming a principal. The authors indicate this developmental stage is when reality begins to take hold as a new administrator. Socialization begins at this particular stage. In the developmental model proposed by Parkay, et al. (2000), socialization occurred somewhat later, during the stability career developmental stage. This career stage model suggests the instructional leader becomes accepted much earlier in the other career developmental stage models. This could be the reason putting an exact time frame on career developmental stage model is considered problematic. Administrators, like teachers, develop at different rates throughout the course of their careers. Therefore, there could be concerns regarding this model due to the identification of specific time frames which the researchers suggest.

Stage two is considered the taking hold stage, occurring during the three to twelve month time period. The characteristics of this career developmental stage include making organizational changes, developing a deeper understanding of what the key issues are for the school, and establishing priorities. The authors consider this the "honeymoon period" for the instructional leader. The authors reasoning regarding this assertion is that teachers who work for instructional leaders at this developmental stage are more open to change than at other administrator career stages. It was also noted that this developmental stage could occur sooner if there is a negative reaction to an internal hire as a principal. The researchers contend also that all instructional

leaders will experience this particular career developmental stage. They do indicate, however, that not all school leaders will realize what they are experiencing. The career stage developmental model as proposed by Parkay, et.al. (2000) indicated that this occurs in a later developmental stage.

The fourth career developmental stage is stage three, reshaping. Reshaping takes place during the second year as a school administrator. The second year allows the administrator to reflect on accomplishments and failures from the first year, and evaluate her personal performance on the job. The instructional leader has a greater ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the faculty and staff. The researchers indicate that teachers also know the strengths and weaknesses of the administrator better after the first year. This is an important concept because faculty and staff members begin to get a greater understanding of the goals, objectives, and overall vision of the instructional leader. The school administrator also gains the opportunity to begin to understand the goals and vision of her faculty as well. It is also noted that major change begins to take place at this career developmental stage. Change can begin to take place due to the stakeholders in the school having developed an awareness of each other's vision for the school. The ideal scenario is for the administration and faculty to develop a shared vision.

Stage four is referred to as refinement and is the third and fourth year of a school administrator's career. The refinements refer to the professional growth of the instructional leader, as well as how the policies that have been put into place are being implemented. In the refinement stage, the structural changes which were to be put into place have occurred. This is the "hitting the stride" moment for school administrators. They become more comfortable in

their position among faculty and staff, and transition themselves to instructional leaders as opposed to building principals.

Stage five is consolidation, occurring during year's five to seven. As stated earlier, research indicates the ideal time for an administrator to stay in a particular school is seven years (Mortimore et al 1998). The end of this stage marks year seven for the school administrator. Consolidation is marked by unanticipated changes, both professionally and personally. Instructional leaders who have become comfortable in the refinement career stage find this stage to be more challenging due to changes which occur that are beyond the control of the local district (federal legislation, state mandates, etc.). With the advent of the accountability era, there is more scrutiny on the instructional leader at this career developmental stage. The various stakeholders in the district have an idea of the vision of the school at this stage, and they seek to ensure that goals are being reached. If they are not reached, then the building principal is held accountable and must demonstrate the ability to move the school forward to meet the vision of the school.

The final stage, stage six, is deemed the plateau stage by the researchers. The plateau stage occurs from year eight to retirement. There is a wide range of issues which could arise during this career development stage due to the variance of the length of time after year eight. Some school administrators who stayed within the same school past eight years reported that they still enjoyed their position as instructional leader and referenced their job as the best in the field of education. However, there are some concerns that are associated with this career development stage as well. The plateau stage can be troublesome because motivation can become a factor in the professional growth of the instructional leader. Many stay in the school because they have been overlooked for other positions within the district and develop feelings of

frustration. These administrators typically become bitter and await the day for retirement to arrive.

Another four stage developmental model was presented based on research from previous models (Oplatka, 2010). The first developmental stage of this model is the induction stage. The new administrator goes through a period of “socialization” into the position and the culture of the school. There are numerous challenges associated with the induction stage. These include acceptance by the faculty and staff as the new administrator, insecurity relating to how to perform certain administrator duties and tasks, and understanding the overall organizational culture of the school.

The second developmental career stage proposed by the researcher is the establishment stage. The administrator feels more in control of what is happening within the building and among the faculty and staff. There is greater confidence on behalf of the school administrator. There is less uncertainty and insecurity as had occurred during the induction stage. Oplatka also asserts that at this stage, the administrator no longer has an idealistic vision of the school. The vision becomes more realistic.

The third stage in this developmental model is the maintenance versus renewal stage. The researcher identifies the age range for this stage as between the ages of 40-55. He states that there is little room for professional growth at this stage, which leads to the possibility of stagnation and a loss of enthusiasm as an instructional leader. The researcher does acknowledge that some building principals experience a type of “self-renewal” during this career developmental stage. These instructional leaders have “high levels of enthusiasm and job satisfaction”. The contrast between maintenance and renewal plays a significant role in how

administrators react to change and professional development during this developmental stage of their careers.

The fourth and final developmental stage presented is labeled as disenchantment. This describes instructional leaders who have been in the same position in school administration for quite some time (oftentimes, in the same building). Many of these leaders have experienced stagnation at an earlier point in their career and are anticipating (and anxiously awaiting) retirement. These administrators typically become autocratic, with decision-making being centralized to the front office. They do not respond to change initiatives in a positive manner. Many lack confidence (some have struggled simply with technological advances), while others lose their enthusiasm. The characteristics of this model summarize what many other developmental models have indicated through previous research. Each of these administrator career developmental stage models has provided characteristics which are consistent with the career stage models for teachers.

LEAD Alabama offers a three stage model of career developmental stages in regard to a recommended instructional leader evaluation program. Their model consists of three individual stages: entry, participation, and exit (Stufflebeam and Nevo, 1993). The entry career development stage focuses primarily on certification and seeks to ensure the instructional leader has the proper credentials. The participation career development stage focuses on the area between entry and exit. Finally, the exit career development stage focuses on the instructional leader at the conclusion of the career.

Additionally, there is a four stage model provided by LEAD Alabama which is referred to as the “Levels of Instructional Leadership Development and Practice”. This model identifies five stages. The first stage is the pre-service stage which involves university and pre-induction

programs. The second stage is developing leadership. This stage aligns with initial entry into the role of instructional leader. The third stage is collaborative leadership which is characterized by the instructional leader evaluating their successes on student achievement. The fourth stage is accomplished leadership. This stage is demonstrated by the instructional leader building capacity for others and empowering the staff. The fifth and final stage in this model is distinguished leadership. This instructional leader is not just a leader locally, but provides an example of leadership to surrounding school districts.

As the literature on career stage developmental models for instructional leaders has evolved, there appears to be some agreement on what school leaders face in their careers. This study will combine the work of previous research on administrator career stages, along with teacher career stages. By utilizing and building upon the career developmental stages and socialization literatures for teachers and principals, this study will seek to explore the nature of career developmental stages for secondary school principals. The ultimate goal of this study is to 1) to examine the role principals perform throughout their careers to determine if there is an identifiable set of developmental stages through which they progress; 2) to offer an incipient description of these stages, detailing questions and challenges which may exist at each stage; and 3) to identify and explicate implications these findings have for professional development decisions/strategies at the district and local levels.

Administrator Career Stages Compilation. Following are a compilation of various career developmental stages based on research studies on teachers and administrators. There are numerous issues which face school administrators throughout their careers. Many building principals have a set of beliefs that there is an “inside school” and an “outside school” in relation to their particular school district (Kelchtermans, Piot, & Ballet, 2011). The inside school refers

to the teachers and staff that work as a unit to reach the core task of teaching and learning. There are many factors at play in relation to the inside school. There are socialization issues associated with school administrators and their relationships with faculty and staff. Some administrators who move from outside the district to a new school may face some resistance from faculty, particularly if there was someone within the school organization who they believed should have gotten the job. There are also issues which arise as a result of hiring practices from within a school. It is a difficult task to transition from a colleague to the role of an instructional leader. This can create tensions, particularly when change is needed in the school environment. Many teachers do not make the transition well to having a colleague as the boss.

The outside school refers to entities such as school boards, city councils, county commissions, etc. This can also include the state and federal government. These outside agencies tend to create tension due to the nature of their bureaucracy. Many city and county governments appropriate funding to the local school district. This may create in them a sense of having a voice in the daily management of a school. The anxiety that often exists between school districts and city and county government agencies may also create additional problems for the instructional leader. Many politicians will attempt to influence the building principal for their own personal in an attempt to circumvent the district office. This can create a division between the principal and the district office if not handled in the proper manner (Kelchtermans et al., 2011).

The principal finds herself as somewhat of a gatekeeper between the inside and outside schools. The gatekeeper attempts to balance the outside school and inside school, while at the same time managing to situate professionally between the two groups. The gatekeeper must maintain order within the school itself, while at the same time protecting it from the outside

influences which seem to be in constant opposition. The balancing act which takes place between the inside and the outside school is yet another example of the difficulties facing the instructional leader. If this delicate balance is not handled properly, the principal runs the risk of having difficulty fulfilling the core task of increasing student achievement (Kelchtermans et al., 2011).

Novice/induction. Throughout the literature on teacher career developmental stages, there are many references to the beginning teacher. This time period has been referred to as the initial entry (Eros, 2011) or “launching the career” (Leithwood, 1992). The term novice has been used to describe the first stage for teachers as well (Steffy, 2000). More commonly, the first stage for a beginning teacher or administrator is referred to as the induction stage (Oplatka, 2000). Super (1957) indicates a trial stage for persons entering the workforce. The trial stage in instructional leadership could be viewed differently due to the nature of individuals entering the field after being in education for a period of time. Super discussed the importance of discovering how the self-image fit into the workplace. As school administrators who have typically been in the schools as faculty members, discovering the self-image entails how the new role fits into the workplace. Additionally, Super made the assertion that there is less commitment at this stage as well. School administrators typically have been involved in the education system as teachers and may have already passed the “buy-in” stage of employment. For the purpose of this study, the terms novice and/or induction will be used to describe the first career developmental stage for school administrators.

The novice administrator is typically a former classroom teacher who has been promoted into a position of authority (Sirotnik and Kimball, 1996). These researchers contend these teachers have been actively involved in curriculum-making decisions throughout the course of

their teaching career. Teachers have also been involved in school improvement decisions. Sirotnik and Kimball (1996) refer to these teachers as being “outed” for their careers as administrators. Their assertion is this pool of teachers is the “most promising reservoir” of school administrators.

The induction developmental stage consists of an orientation to the field (Steffy et al., 2000). Research indicates teachers desire to become principals primarily because they felt the need to develop their own careers (Vandenberghe, 2003). Novice administrators experience a variety of tasks in which they have no real experience, such as developing teacher/student schedules, evaluating teachers, overseeing professional development, etc. (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). These new tasks lead to additional stress in an already stressful position (Eckman, 2007). As a beginning administrator matriculates through the induction phase, entering the school culture and environment as a new instructional leader could produce a “shock”. There is a distinct feeling of professional insecurity, as well as personal concerns. As stated earlier, one study referred to this stage as the survival stage (Parkay, et al. 1992). Their research found that beginning administrators reported having feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and professional inadequacy during this early career developmental stage of induction.

Novice teachers enter the teaching field with a set of prior beliefs as to what to expect from the profession (Steffy et al., 2000). Prior beliefs were not found to have changed over the course of a school year for some beginning teachers (Luft, 2009). This notion of prior beliefs of novice teachers may be extrapolated to administrators as well. Administrators who were classroom teachers have a notion of what their ideal administrator would look like. However, when placed in the position of leadership, external factors can limit the successes of the

administrator in the induction phase (Whitaker, 1996). Some external influences which were identified by administrators who were in the induction phase consists of family, colleagues, former principals, school boards, and parents (Vandenberghe, 2003). The induction stage also indicated administrators have a tendency to overreact to situations than in other identified stages (Parkay et al., 1992).

The transition from the school administrator in the induction phase may be difficult to discern. There continues to be a learning curve for the administrator who moves forward to the next career stage, apprenticeship. The difficulty in noting the transition from the developmental stage of induction is the similarity in characteristics between the two stages. The transition to apprentice typically occurs after the building administrator has “settled in” to the new role. At the conclusion of the first year, there appears to be a greater sense of comfort and confidence in decision-making on behalf of the instructional leader. Another transition point is when the novice administrator begins to take full responsibility for what is occurring in the building (Steffy et al., 2000).

Apprentice. The apprentice career developmental stage in school administration again mirrors the stage which teachers experience. This developmental stage typically occurs during the first three years on the job. Three areas have been identified which affect classroom teachers in the apprentice career developmental stage. These are personal and professional needs, reality shock, and teaching conditions (Steffy et al., 2000). These areas tend to present unique challenges to school administrators as well. This developmental stage has also been referred to as the survival stage for administrators (Huberman 1989, and Burden 1982), as well as the control stage (Parkay, et al., 1992).

As a school administrator moves from induction to the apprentice stage, his personal and professional needs change. Acceptance by the rest of the faculty and staff is a factor in this developmental stage (Unruh and Turner, 1970). After the initial period of learning the core task of administration, the apprentice administrator may experience isolation as a result of no longer being included as a member of the teaching fraternity. There are a contradictory set of emotions which apprentice teachers experience. These indicate excitement, a sense of being overwhelmed, discouraged, and rewarded (Steffy et al., 2000). This second career developmental stage for teachers has been referred to as a “danger zone” (Huberman, 1993). It is at this critical point in a teaching career that many choose to follow a different career path (Eros, 2011). The problem associated with choosing a different career path is that in the age of major educational reform and accountability, “schools require stability, not more change” (Earley and Weindling, 2007).

The second area affected in this developmental stage is that of reality shock. As stated earlier, the apprentice career stage begins when an administrator takes full responsibility for her school. This reality shock can lead to isolation (Whitaker, 1996). While the apprentice typically has the proper skill set to perform the task of an administrator, there can be some instances wherein the administrator questions her ability as a leader (Grobler, Bisschoff, & Beeka, 2012). In the age of school accountability, taking full responsibility can be a daunting task in and of itself. The job of a school administrator consists of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload (Whitaker, 1996). The idea of survival mode is more apparent in this area. The apprentice typically has underestimated the amount of time and responsibility the position is going to require (Steffy et al., 2000). It is in this period in which major change will occur, both individually as well as mandated change. This is in part because the faculty and staff have

identified the school leader's strengths and weaknesses during this career developmental stage and can reshape the school to meet the vision set forth collaboratively by the administration and staff (Earley and Weindling, 2007).

The final area affected in this developmental stage is that of teaching conditions. This area relates to school administration as well. New teachers are often given multiple preparations in their teaching load, as well as other duties veteran teachers attempt to pass on to someone else (Steffy et al., 2000). Oftentimes, even with the pressures of beginning a new career as a school administrator, districts will ask new principals to take on added responsibilities (athletics, career tech, scheduling, discipline etc.). These new responsibilities can take up valuable time and resources which could be utilized in other ways. Building administrators also must manage the structural boundaries, such as school boards and teacher unions, to ensure that learning takes place in the classroom (Cherian and Daniel, 2008). The principal relies on the power of the position in this career developmental stage (Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992). School administrators must also play a specific role in the development of novice teachers and their personal and professional growth (Holland, 2009), all the while being somewhat new to the position himself.

Professional stage vs. frustration stage. The stressors in the apprenticeship stage can create an alternative path in the transition to the next stage. The next career developmental stage for teachers is described as professional (Steffy et al., 2000). This developmental stage occurs when the focus moves from the personal needs of the apprentice stage. The focus now turns to the needs of the student. In regard to career developmental stages for administrators, this can also be true. Some researchers in school administration have referred to this as the establishment stage (Oplatka and Tako, 2009), stability stage (Parkay, et al., 1992), and refinement (Earley and

Weindling, 2007). Super's model (1957) describes this career developmental stage as the establishment stage, when there is a greater commitment to the organization itself. This appears to hold true for instructional leaders as well. With the primary focus being increasing student achievement as the primary goal for school administrators (Grobler, Bisschoff, & Beeka, 2012), shifting focus to the student population and their primary needs is indicative of the professional stage for administrators.

There are two characteristics defined during the professional stage for teachers (Steffy et al., 2000). The first is a marked increase in self-confidence. This is the most noticeable difference between the apprentice and the professional. This greater self-confidence also leads to a greater commitment to the profession as well. The frustrations experienced at the novice and apprentice stages are becoming more routinized (Parkay, et al., 1992). School administrators in this developmental stage are actively engaged in professional organizations and are beginning to feel more comfortable in their role as instructional leaders. Administrators in this developmental stage who have achieved a minimum of fifteen years of experience report they are relatively happy and feel confident that they understand their authority and the responsibilities of the position (Bogotch and Riedlinger, 1993). The school administrator becomes aware of his efficacy in this stage, a feeling that he is making a difference, not only in the lives of students, but within the faculty and staff as well. Administrators reported that they were "hitting their stride" as instructional leaders at this point in their career and are interested in refining the changes which had been started in earlier career developmental stages (Earley and Weindling, 2007).

A second characteristic of this developmental stage is continuous growth seeking (Steffy et al., 2000). Super's (1957) second career developmental stage of establishment identifies

personal and professional growth as characteristics at this level, which ties in quite well to the professional developmental stage for administrators. Seeking feedback from others is an important element in this area. School administrators who have a greater sense of purpose are not as intimidated in asking for opinions and criticism from staff and parents. School administrators should utilize an approach to leadership which assists teachers in developing positive perceptions regarding their school climate (Grobler, Bischoff, & Beeka, 2012). By acting on feedback from stakeholders, the professional administrator begins to forge a bond based on trust.

The concept of developing social capital, which is defined as the “intangible network of relationships that fosters unity and trust within the schools staff” (Beaver and Weinbaum, 2012), is important during this career developmental stage. Beaver and Weinbaum (2012) identify four elements to social capital: the development and maintenance of mutual understanding, the development of collective competence, care and concern among faculty and staff, and support for the integrity and the alignment toward mutual goals. For social capital to be developed, the school administrator in the professional stage must provide an environment conducive to faculty and staff experiencing personal and professional growth. Super’s (1957) establishment stage has identified a characteristic of this stage as desiring to move forward toward job promotion. Participating in professional development, such as being active in professional organizations, as well as pursuing advanced graduate degrees in educational leadership indicates an administrator is transitioning himself from the apprenticeship stage into the professional stage of school administration.

An alternate route to the professional developmental stage is the frustration stage. One of the earlier models of teacher career developmental stages identified the frustration stage as one

of eight levels (Fessler and Christensen, 1992). This stage is diametrically opposed to the professional stage for administrators. There appears to be a lack of confidence in the core task of student achievement. The administrator in the frustration stage has survived, not grown. There is also a “sober outlook” in regards to any promotion of change. The frustrated administrator has “struck a bargain” with the staff and is resistant to further change (Parkay, et al., 1992). There is a lack of confidence which does not lend itself to seeking of feedback from community stakeholders.

The frustration stage is where burnout typically occurs for teachers (Fessler and Christensen, 1992). This can be extrapolated to administrators as well. The rising pressures of standardized test scores, lack of parental involvement, discipline, and other factors can be somewhat overwhelming. The tasks which are involved in the everyday grind of the school day have a tendency to overshadow the feeling of accomplishment and self-efficacy felt by school administrators in the professional stage. Many instructional leaders are resigning their positions due to work demands and role conflicts which are created by internal and external entities (Pounder and Merrill, 2001).

The expectations of the organization and the individual himself change at this stage in a career (Peluchette and Jeanquart, 2000). The issues facing school administrators today are even greater due to organizational, political, and personal challenges (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). Organizational conflict may arise between the district office and the local school site (Spradling, 1989). This can be especially troubling to even veteran school administrators. Greater role conflict between district offices and building principals creates frustration in itself (Bogotch and Riedlinger, 1993). The personal emotions of leadership have not been fully examined (Beatty, 2000). The impact on the personal lives of administrators has

led to lower job satisfaction levels, which in part are due to conflicts between the professional life and the personal life (Eckman, 2004). Additionally, larger student populations have led to greater stress for the school administrator, with many reporting the job being “too much for one person” (Eckman, 2007). School administrators are also asked to deal more than ever with the improvement of teaching and learning and being “educational visionaries” (Fisher, 2011). All these factors lead to the frustration of administrators, as well as pushing some veteran administrators into early retirement.

Distinguished stage vs. career stagnation. The distinguished career developmental stage for school administrators is characterized by an immersion in the field of education itself. Others have referred to this stage as reaching educational leadership (Parkay, et al., 1992). This stage has also been described as the maintenance stage, which typically takes place between 40-55 years of age (Oplatka, 2010). Administrators at this stage feel not only the need to help teachers to improve in their efforts to focus on student achievement, but they also strive to assist in identifying and nurturing future instructional leaders in their circle of influence. Through this identification, school leaders are able to extend their legacies by mentoring those who will receive the baton of leadership in the future. Identifying future administrators and serving as mentors for them provides the highest opportunities for success in the field of education (Peluchette and Jeanquart, 2000).

A distinguished educator has been defined as someone who possesses more than “extraordinary” teaching skills (Steffy, 2000). These educators exceed everyone’s expectation of a good teacher. Steffy discusses three characteristics of distinguished educators which sets them apart from others. The first characteristic is passion. These educators have a “vision and a mission”. Administrators at this stage display high levels of enthusiasm for their work (Oplatka,

2012). Distinguished school administrators are driven to empower teachers to create the classroom environment which will maximize student engagement and enthusiasm for learning. There is an understanding at this stage that the instructional leader is not perfect and is going to make mistakes (Oplatko and Tako, 2009). However, the mistakes which have been made are quickly corrected. The passion of educators at this stage expresses a primary focus on students and their futures. This passion is central for educators at this stage to focus on the core task of teaching and learning.

The second characteristic identified was that of leadership (Steffy et al., 2000). This refers to educators who take full responsibility for the learning process. The school administrator exhibits a sense of self-fulfillment, as well as self-renewal in the leadership role (Oplatka, 2012). There is also the underlying characteristic of greater job satisfaction for instructional leaders at this stage (Oplatka, 2010). They are more willing to serve as mentors for fellow teachers and for the students in the building. The technical rules (Clegg, 1981), written and unwritten, which are associated with being an effective administrator, are more clear in this career developmental stage. Currently, with such a strong and demanding emphasis on teacher accountability, school administrators who are in the distinguished career development stage are actively involved in the decision making process through local, state, and national government. The distinguished administrator is willing to have her voice heard, regardless of the consequences.

The final characteristic identified is that of impact. The combination of leadership and passion characterize the notion of impact (Steffy, 2000). Educators in this stage are enthusiastic and growing (Fessler, 1995), seeking to find better ways to assist students in increasing their achievement. Distinguished administrators are those who love what they do, and this passion

lends itself to being contagious with the faculty and staff. Many administrators at this stage will seek to implement new programs and seek new challenges which will have an impact on the culture of the school, such as additional tutoring, after school programs, new clubs, etc. (Oplatka, 2012).

School administrators who are in the distinguished career development stage understand the importance of a vision for their school (Parkay, et al., 1992). There is a belief that there is a greater purpose which lies ahead for the school, greater even than the core task of teaching and learning. While many instructional leaders at earlier career developmental stages know and understand the vision, the instructional leaders at the distinguished career stage can not only articulate their vision, but can also draw others to their vision in a transformational manner (Gordon, 2007). The administrator at the distinguished developmental stage must be forward thinking, with the ability to foresee issues that may arise, such as new legislation or other external changes (Earley and Weindling, 2007). Being proactive in the school vision, the distinguished school administrator is more able to adapt to change than building principals who struggle with long term planning and goal setting.

The parallel developmental stage to the distinguished stage of this model is that of the stagnant stage. Typically, this person would move from the frustration stage into the stagnation stage (Steffy et al., 2000). This developmental stage is characterized by the sense of occupational security and high self-efficacy (Day, 1999). The idea of job security (tenure) for educators can create stagnation in and of itself, which can additionally lead to burnout. Due to others in the professional developmental stage who are often promoted over an administrator who may be in the frustration stage, stagnation can occur because their current position appears to be a virtual dead end. Additionally, there appears to be a feeling of disenchantment and a loss

of enthusiasm in this period of stagnation (Oplatka, 2012). The loss of enthusiasm in school administrators can have an impact on student achievement.

For long standing building principals, they may feel trapped in the position itself (Oplatka, 2010). In comparison to the characteristics of the school administrator at the distinguished developmental stage, there is often little passion regarding the position; since there is not much passion, there tends to be less leadership; without these two characteristics, the impact the stagnant administrator has is often negative. Development of organizational defensive routines such as denial of practices and not admitting to flaws is problematic for administrators who are experiencing career stagnation (Argyris, 1990).

Emeritus stage vs. career termination. Transitioning from the distinguished stage to the emeritus/career termination stage completes the career cycle for administrators. Additional models refer to this stage as the professional actualization stage (Parkay et al., 1992), and plateau (Earley and Weindling, 2007). These school administrators typically are between the ages of 55 to 70 years old (Greller and Simpson, 1999). Although the administrator emeritus is experiencing career termination as well, he is doing so with reflections of achievement from a successful career in education.

There is an overrepresentation of older administrators in the educational system today (Earley and Weindling, 2007). This signifies the importance of utilizing these valuable resources for their experience and expertise for new instructional leaders by passing along their invaluable insights to others. Emeritus teachers may have retired, but continue to be active and involved in the teaching profession in a variety of ways (Steffy et al., 2000). The same may be said of school administrators. Many building administrators who retire are often active in mentoring

programs, act as consultants to school districts, or teach courses at the university level for aspiring administrators.

The emeritus educator has a role in the professional development of new educators (Palmer, 1998). Leadership is defined as the “quality to achieve desired results by giving a proper direction to the organization” (Giri and Santra, 2010). The emeritus administrator displays leadership through greater organizational and emotional commitment to their schools and students than those in earlier career developmental stages, as well as the utilization of a participative and decentralized leadership style (Oplatka, 2010). This decentralized leadership style lends itself to the mentoring of teachers and administrators at other career developmental stages, which allows them to participate in the decision making process, while under the guidance of a veteran administrator. The emeritus instructional leader transcends the long held tradition of “telling” teachers what they wish for them to accomplish in her school, she will empower the faculty to work together to maximize resources to improve the school environment (Parkay, et al., 1992).

There is additional research which suggests that late developmental stage professionals are characterized by career growth (Hall, 2002). There appears to be a deepened expertise in the field at this stage, which manifests itself through the knowledge with which emeritus administrators approach problems (Kabacoff 2002, Lahn 2003). There also appears to be higher ethical judgment in decision-making by emeritus instructional leaders as opposed to their younger counterparts (Weeks, Moore, McKinney, & Longnecker, 1999). Additionally, emeritus staff utilized longer term perspectives in managing people (Kakabadse, Kakabadse, & Myers, 1998).

Due to the growing crisis of the retirement of emeritus administrators, there is a great need for strategies for developing effective strategies for leadership succession/rotation. These strategies for leadership succession/rotation have direct implications for school improvement (Reynolds, White, Brayman, & Moore, 2008). Schools, as well as other non-education organizations, are missing formal succession plans, not only do they lose their continuity, but they also lose the opportunity for revitalization of their organization (Getty, 1993). There is a great need for school districts to develop these formal succession plans to ensure a smooth transition for new instructional leaders. At the same time, it is important to maintain relationships with the emeritus administrators after retirement for the possible development of mentoring programs.

Career termination is the final component of this career developmental stage compilation. Career termination is not necessarily diametrically opposed to the emeritus stage, as were some of the other career developmental stages. There are numerous factors in career termination. There has not been a tremendous amount of research on the late-career stages of school administrators (Oplatka, 2010). Many school administrators will leave the profession and choose to stay away from the field of education altogether. Due to this notion, the career termination stage is not necessarily the culmination of the frustration and stagnation stage. Some research has described this final stage of development as that of “running down” (Vonk, 1989). This running down phase occurs just prior to retirement, and could also be characterized as burnout (Stephenson and Bauer, 2010). An additional characteristic of this stage is the administrator who feels trapped in the position with nowhere else to go (Oplatka, 2012). There also tends to be a resistance to new initiatives being proposed in the career termination stage. There may be the belief that initiatives had been tried and did not work (Oplatka, 2010). This leads to inaction on

the part of the school administrator in regard to proposed changes, which can hamper student achievement.

Career termination is a time of reflection over accomplishments and what opportunities may lie ahead. With so many states allowing retirement after twenty-five years of service, many retirees from education choose to launch into another occupation before truly settling in on retirement. Many will choose to retire in one state and move into another to create additional retirement funds for their future. Others will decide to stay on as administrators while becoming more autocratic in their leadership style. They also will become increasingly more resistant to any change or initiative that is handed down by other stakeholders which would improve student achievement (Oplatka, 2012).

Professional Development. Professional development for teachers has been moderately consistent for decades. Until recently, there has not been a sharp focus on professional development for instructional leaders in public schools. The state of Alabama has recognized the need for professional development for instructional leaders and has established eight standards in an attempt to target the improvement of achievement for all students. The eight standards established by the Alabama State Department of Education are as follows: planning for continuous improvement, teaching and learning, human resources development, diversity, community and stakeholder relationships, technology, management of the learning organization, and ethics (http://alex.state.al.us/leadership/Alabama_Standards_for_Instructional_Leaders.pdf). These standards are intended to help guide school administrators in many aspects of their professional careers, while addressing needs which are consistent with research regarding personal

and professional growth. Each of these standards will be discussed in this research as they relate to career developmental stages.

Planning for continuous improvement. The first standard is planning for continuous improvement. This involves developing a shared vision for the school with all stakeholders. Continuous improvement enables the instructional leader to identify strengths and weaknesses of the faculty and staff, as well as develop the tools necessary for professional and personal growth within the school. The vision which is developed should be focused on the needs of students, as well as defining how the instructional leader can motivate all stakeholders to accomplish the core task of teaching and learning. The instructional leader not only must develop the vision for the school with the stakeholders, he must also manage the goals and activities necessary to reach the school's vision. Utilization of a mentoring system can be a helpful tool in this attaining this standard.

Instructional leaders should be well versed in the ability to align curriculum and instruction with established state standards. All curricular needs must be a part of the vision of the school itself in that they should reflect what is taking place in regard to instruction. The core task of teaching and learning must be the primary focus of the instructional leader in all curriculum and instruction decision making. The school administrator does not have to accomplish curriculum and instruction decisions in isolation. The continuous improvement standard suggests utilizing the ability to delegate some responsibility to others to accomplish the goals and objectives of the school. These goals and objectives should be directly related to the vision of the school developed by the instructional leader, in collaboration with the stakeholders of the district.

Teaching and learning. As instructional leaders, the focal point of all education is the learning process. This standard asks the building principal to “collaboratively align the curriculum” and instruction to ensure students are achieving at their maximum ability. This standard also seeks to ensure that research based curriculum is being utilized for greater student achievement. The standard also reflects a concept that is really important to school administrators at each career developmental stage. The instructional leader should establish a “culture of high expectations” within the school plant. These high expectations should involve all stakeholders in the teaching and learning process. In addition, these expectations are not simply academic. Students and staff need to develop in a culture of high expectations in a social sense as well.

Human resources development. The instructional leader in this standard is expected to improve the professional development opportunities of her staff. There is a relationship between this standard and the previous standard regarding teaching and learning. In this standard, the school administrator is charged with “recruiting, selecting, organizing, evaluating, and mentoring” faculty and staff to accomplish the mission of the school. This is a direct correlation to the core task of teaching and learning (Hoy and Miskel, 2008).

As indicated, the instructional leader has a responsibility to be a mentor in the school. School administrators who are operating in the professional or emeritus career developmental stages are extending their legacies by passing on a system of behavior to their colleagues. This collegial atmosphere creates growth among staff members, both personally and professionally. The standard also indicates the importance of distributive leadership. This concept allows teachers to lead committees, be department chairs, as well as be mentors themselves. Effective

decision-making entails utilizing subordinates to participate in the process (Hoy and Miskel, 2008).

Diversity. This standard is an effort to encourage school administrators to understand diversity and the “larger context of community”. The cultural climate of public schools has undergone dramatic changes in the past twenty years. School administrators must be the champions for diversity on their campuses. This diversity training allows students to feel safe in an environment in which teaching and learning takes place. In addition, professional development in this area informs instructional leaders of the importance of hiring a diverse faculty and staff. Millions of students enter the doors of public schools every day seeking an opportunity to connect with someone. Each student brings a bit of culture in her own unique way. The instructional leader who chooses to place diverse individuals in the classroom has an opportunity for personal growth. Career developmental stages could be relevant here due to the nature of confidence in which instructional leaders hire a diverse staff. There could be some angst in hiring individuals who may be different than the community norm for a novice school administrator.

Community and stakeholder relationships. The instructional leader does not operate in isolation, although a novice administrator might feel as if this statement may be untrue. There are many stakeholders within the school building, as well as on the outside. The effective instructional leader will seek to integrate all community stakeholders to collaborate on attaining the goals and objectives set forth in the school district. One area of instructional leadership that is critical to effectiveness is the ability to communicate. With such a vast array of stakeholders who expect information regarding what is happening in the school, the effective instructional leader has the ability to express the vision and goals of the school. Additionally, the effective

instructional leader also utilizes the inclusion of this group of stakeholders in some decision-making capacity.

This can be a difficult undertaking for the novice administrator due to issues of trust. School administrators who are operating at a more veteran level, such as the professional developmental level, are more open to different ideas from a variety of people. The responsibility of carrying out this communication lies with the school administrator. While there are many voices which are heard coming from within the school itself, the true voice of the school is the building principal.

An additional component in this standard is the utilization of community resources to assist in the development of the learning process. Many families face difficulties that can affect student achievement. These difficulties include, but are not limited to, socioeconomic issues, family structure, home environment, television, and parental involvement (Hattie, 2009). Hattie also notes that there are non-productive and productive activities students may become involved in during after school hours. Non-productive activities include drugs, violence, television, etc., which do not typically lead to success in school. Productive activities include after-school tutoring, community service projects, community recreation, etc. Hattie discusses the growing number of after-school tutoring programs in which students may become involved. These tutoring programs allow students to receive additional academic help, while also ensuring these students are not involved in other non-productive activities. School improvement studies indicate local community organizations such as neighborhood clubs, churches and political organizations can foster trust in the community. These organizations can also be a key component in improving student achievement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton, 2010). The effective and efficient instructional leader will identify the positive benefits

which students may experience in these programs and can communicate their benefits to the stakeholders.

Technology. Instructional leaders today are faced with a vast array of concerns within the school plant itself, as well as on the outside. One area which can be problematic across career developmental stage research is the emphasis on effective integration of technology. The utilization of the appropriate electronic tools in the classroom has risen to the forefront of education today. Instructional leaders must be able to evaluate computer use by faculty to ensure it is used to enhance the learning process. It is also imperative that teachers are utilizing their technology for communication with stakeholders. Many veteran teachers are not as comfortable with technology and it's usage as their younger colleagues. The instructional leader must provide the proper training and professional development necessary for those who struggle in this area.

The instructional leader himself must be an effective user of technology. The ability to communicate via email and the internet has revolutionized the ability building principals have in extending information to parents, students, and other stakeholders in the community. The use of online tools such as Facebook and Twitter accounts has exploded in schools. Superintendent James Thompson of the Bloomfield School District expressed his feelings regarding a new Twitter and Facebook account which was recently established to the Hartford Courant. He indicated that these accounts will be utilized to inform the community of school closings, delays, or emergencies, as well as "showcasing the work being done in Bloomfield" (Goode, 2013). In the same article, Goode interviews Chris Leone, the chief operating officer and director of magnet schools. Leone states the importance of reaching stakeholders "where they are

comfortable”. The ability to disseminate information to stakeholders is critical for instructional leaders to be effective.

Management of the learning organization. This standard speaks to the importance of the instructional leader and her ability to effectively manage the resources available in an efficient and equitable manner. These resources include facilities, personnel, and financial resources. From a facility standpoint, community stakeholders expect building principals will manage these to ensure they are utilized for primarily for student growth and development. However, there are opportunities for school districts to allow other entities to use school facilities for other community activities. These outside agencies should not be allowed to use facilities if there is any conflict which creates an issue with student achievement for those currently enrolled in the school. The instructional leader must manage the school facilities to meet the core task of teaching and learning.

The second component of this standard is the management of school personnel. The instructional leader has a great responsibility to create a master schedule with student achievement being the driving force behind the decisions made. Oftentimes, master schedules are made with adults being the primary operative in the decision making process. This can create problems with student achievement due to courses not being offered to fit into student schedules, teachers who have assignments where they may be least effective, and allowing weaker teachers to teach students who are operating below grade level.

Finally, the third component involves the management of financial resources. Additional funding may not always be available for school districts, but research indicates student achievement may be effected by the proper utilization of existing resources (Rolle, 2004). Stakeholders understand additional funding is not always available. Financial resources for

education have been cut drastically over the past decade. Community leaders have a great expectation that the funding that has been provided is not wasted, but is maximized for greater student achievement. The emphasis on school accountability forces the instructional leader to be acutely aware of where problem areas may exist in relation to school finances. When these areas are identified, the effective instructional leader must not only be aware of where these problems exist, but also must develop plans to address these areas so that efficiency of resources exists for all students.

Ethics. The eighth and final standard from the Alabama State Department of Education addresses ethics. The ALSDE identifies instructional leaders as the “first citizen” in regard to the school district and community. School administrators must always be aware of the importance of the image they project. Interactions of school leaders with stakeholders should reflect the values of the community, with a high moral standard exhibited from the instructional leader. The building administrator must be a consistent role model for students, exhibiting behavior which is consistent with the expectations of the community.

School administrators, who are operating in the novice career developmental stage and have worked in the school community where they are being promoted to the instructional leader, have the opportunity to demonstrate their ethical character over the course of their careers. Instructional leaders who are hired from a different district must be able to instill confidence in school superintendents and school boards regarding their ability to make decisions in a high ethical context. Administrators who have progressed professionally in their own particular career developmental stages have a great understanding of how difficult decisions may be, and can utilize past experiences to determine the correct ethical decisions they face. The utilization of these instructional leaders as mentors for novice school administrators again serves a great

purpose in that it provides these administrators with individuals who have learned from past mistakes, and are willing to share information so that the novice can demonstrate sound ethical decision making.

As has been the case with many issues discussed, the concept of greater school accountability has created an environment that all stakeholders are observing the behavior of all school personnel, but particularly instructional leaders. Being a person of strong moral conviction and high ethical standards is expected of school administrators. Effective instructional leaders 'set the tone' for interactions between individuals in a school setting. Interactions between faculty members, faculty members to students, as well as the instructional leader with all stakeholders should be exemplary in nature. Modeling effective communication creates a school culture in which students feel comfortable, which should lead to greater student achievement.

Summary and Conclusions.

The literature review indicated there are some gaps in the literature in regard to career development stages for school administrators. By utilizing the research which has been conducted regarding career development stages for teachers, as well as the much smaller amount of research on building administrator career development stages, commonalities have emerged. These commonalities reflect the interest researchers have in career development stages in general. Many studies have been conducted which demonstrates their existence in many areas. While many exist in education, the literature does not indicate a significant amount of work regarding building principals. The work that has been conducted, however, indicates there are specific stages which have been identified, although total agreement on what those stages are remain unclear.

In regard to teacher career stages, there are numerous studies which indicate there are, in fact, distinct career developmental stages. Much of the terminology as to the identification of particular stages may be different, but the characteristics of each of the stages are similar. The same can be said of school administrator career developmental stages. While there does not appear to be as much research in this area, there does seem to be some agreement that there are certain developmental stages which can be delineated. As with teacher career developmental stages, there tends to be different terminology associated with career stage research for school administrators. This terminology, as well as the differences in the number of career developmental stages, leads the researcher to believe that this void needs to be addressed through further study.

One area in which most researchers agree is the difficulties facing beginning school administrators. With such an emphasis on school accountability, many new administrators face incredible demands on their personal and professional development early in their careers. The need for professional development at this stage is critical. Many school districts do not place enough emphasis on this area of professional development for instructional leaders. This leads to a greater turnover in building principals and less continuity within the school district. More research needs to be conducted in this area to determine the role school districts have in the professional and personal development of instructional leaders at the novice career developmental stage.

An additional area in which appears to be emerging in the literature is regarding the latter stage of an instructional leader's career. While there are many different paths school administrators may take to get toward retirement, there appears to be some commonality regarding the career exit. Many researchers discuss the final stage of the administrator's career

as a time of reflection over past accomplishments. Even those who may have experienced a career which included frustration and stagnation, these administrators also had a period of reflection at the end of their careers.

More importantly perhaps is the commonality of career development stages of teachers and school administrators. While some attempted to discuss careers for administrators in terms of years of service, most agreed that the developmental stages were not necessarily denoted by years of experience. The same could be said of teachers as well. When reading the descriptions of the career stages identified by Steffy et al., 2000, as well as the descriptions of career stages by Oplatka and others, there were many similarities. These similarities lead the researcher to believe that a comparison of teacher career stages with the research which has been conducted on school administrator career stages could lead to a model being extrapolated from the two to create a new career stage developmental model. This will be either confirmed or denied with additional research through the interview process.

The strengths of this literature review indicate there are significant findings of similarities between career developmental stage research for teachers and administrators. Building on the early work of Donald Super and The Super Career Stage Developmental Model, there appears to be enough evidence to indicate there are discernible career developmental stages for school administrators. An additional strength is there appears to be evidence to suggest there is a need for research to take place. This gap in the literature is evidenced by the lack of research regarding what school districts can do to assist building principals, especially at the secondary school level, in their development in schools. There is some knowledge as to the importance of professional development for the instructional leader. However, there is a lack of evidence as to what has proven to be effective across the span of one's career.

The weakness of this literature review indicates that there does not appear to be much research on the specific professional development needs of school administrators at specific stages in the career development process. The gap in the literature in this regard could be due to the lack of an agreed upon model of career development stages for school administrators. Additionally, it is difficult for researchers to identify career stages for school administrators because so many transition to other positions and do not stay as building principals throughout their careers. Opportunities that arise as a result of advanced graduate work or other factors lead school administrators to leave their school posts at a much earlier rate than that of the classroom teacher. This phenomenon creates difficulty in ascertaining specific career stage needs for school administrators.

The literature review for this study has guided the researcher to be able to utilize what has been written in the past. There are a plethora of studies in regard to teacher career developmental stages. Using the research that has occurred the researcher now can see a contextual framework developing which may be utilized in this study. There appears to be evidence career developmental stages for school administrators in the research. This is due to the research cited in this literature review. The framework being developed will utilize all components of career stage research by constructing interview questions for practicing administrators which will lead the researcher to conclusions regarding the research questions. By extrapolating teacher career stages into a working model for administrators, the framework for this study will take shape.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine three concepts related to administrator career developmental stages. The concepts to be discussed are as follows: 1) to examine the roles principals perform throughout their careers to determine if there is an identifiable set of developmental stages through which they progress; 2) to offer an incipient description of these stages, detailing questions and challenges which may exist at each stage; and 3) to identify and explicate implications these findings have for professional development decisions/strategies at the district and local levels. This study will attempt to fill a gap in the existing literature and create a contribution to the knowledge base in career development stages for school administrators.

Chapter III, Methodology, will be divided into six subsections. The first subsection will be the research design. This section will provide an overview of the qualitative study and the reason this type of method was chosen. The second subsection will provide a discussion regarding the unit of analysis. The third subsection will be the method of data collection. Subsection four will contain a discussion of the sample used and the sampling strategy. The fifth subsection will be a discussion of the data analysis. The sixth and final subsection will be a summary of the information provided in chapter three.

Research Design

The research design will be from a qualitative approach. A qualitative study has ten consistent characteristics which set it apart from other research (Hatch, 2002). The ten

characteristics identified by Hatch are as follows: natural settings, participant perspectives, researcher as data gathering instrument, extended firsthand engagement, centrality of meaning, wholeness and complexity, subjectivity, emergent design, inductive data analysis, and reflexivity. The research questions presented in this study are aligned with these characteristics of a qualitative research study. Each of these characteristics will be discussed and how they apply to the current study.

Characteristics of a qualitative study. The natural settings characteristic refers to how individuals relate their experiences to their everyday lives. There is no lab experience for the researcher or the participants (Creswell, 2007). All research is conducted in the setting in which the participant is actively engaged. In this research study, secondary school administrators and their career development stage will be examined based on their daily experiences as instructional leaders. These experiences occur not only within the school walls, but in every aspect of a building principal's life. This includes interactions with all of the various stakeholders involved in the daily operations of a public school. These interactions reflect the natural setting school administrators experience throughout the course of their careers. The totality of these experiences will be examined.

Participant perspectives entails identifying the perspective of the participants from the world in which they are living (Hatch, 2002). In the context of this study, this characteristic will allow the researcher to view the principalship through the eyes of the secondary school administrator. The researcher wants to identify what is happening in the environment from the participant's perspective (Erickson as cited in Hatch, 2002). The view of the researcher is not as important to this process as that of the participant. As the researcher has been involved in public schools for twenty plus years, it is imperative that the focus remains solely on the participant.

The characteristic of researcher as data gathering instrument is another critical element of qualitative research. The researcher may gather data through a variety of means (interviews, transcriptions of notes, observations, etc.). The data is then organized into themes and then “processed using the human intelligence of the researcher” (Hatch, 2002). In the context of the current study, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with a sample consisting of secondary school administrators from the state of Alabama. These data will then be coded to determine if there are in fact, definitive career developmental stages for school administrators. Themes will then be analyzed by the researcher which will provide an insight into the inner workings of secondary school principals.

The fourth characteristic of qualitative research is extended firsthand engagement. The researcher must spend time in the culture of the participant to truly understand the experiences which are occurring. The qualitative researcher cannot expect to spend a brief amount of time in the field to understand these experiences. Hatch (2002) states that research indicates the need for extensive time in the field to be able to “capture what they claim”. It is important to listen and understand what people are doing (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) so that the experiences being examined aren’t the result of the researcher’s views of the scenario. In regard to this study, the researcher must devote specific time so that there is engagement regarding the culture of the secondary school administrator.

Hatch identifies a fifth characteristic of qualitative research as the centrality of meaning. This concept refers to how individuals construct meaning in their lives. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the developmental career stages of secondary school administrators. There must be a careful examination of the social construct formed by the individual in relation to how he views himself in the administrative position. This is an

important characteristic in this study in that many school leaders tend to be defined by their role as building principals. The researcher must examine this possibility in regard to the centrality of meaning characteristic of this qualitative study.

Wholeness and complexity are the next characteristics of a qualitative study as defined by Hatch. The concept of wholeness refers to viewing the entire social process as a whole, not as individual parts. In this particular study, the secondary school administrator does not perform certain tasks in isolation. This study will examine the totality of the position of secondary school principal. The complexity characteristic entails all of the variables that are associated within the social context of an individual. With a school administrator, the inner workings of all associations must be examined in their context. In the public school setting, the school administrator creates relationships with a variety of stakeholders. Each of these stakeholders has their own personal agendas and experiences. Each of these variables contributes to the complexity of the qualitative process.

Subjectivity in qualitative research presents a different perspective than that of the quantitative process. With qualitative research, inner states cannot be observed; therefore, the researcher must utilize their judgment to explain what is occurring (Hatch, 2002). In the school setting, the building administrator has multiple interactions which are occurring simultaneously. The application of subjectivity to this research will be that these multiple interactions create meaning which will be virtually impossible to identify in a true objective manner. The researcher has been involved in education for over two decades. This creates an issue in regard to subjectivity of the researcher. The researcher will use an introspective approach in an attempt to contain any personal bias which may create issues regarding subjectivity.

Emergent design implies that the process of the research itself will be disclosed as the research is being conducted (Creswell, 2007). As Hatch asserts, the design cannot take place *a priori*, but will emerge as the process runs its course. The themes and patterns will emerge from the process; therefore any attempt to create the exact design is futile. This research will attempt to observe and organize the data into themes which will eventually lead to conclusions regarding career developmental stages for administrators. During data analysis, the researcher will attempt to identify the themes which have been developed throughout the research process so that the research questions may be examined thoroughly. After the analysis, the emergent themes that occurred may be generalized.

As Creswell describes, inductive analysis is a “bottom up” approach. Themes will be developed as the data is being organized. These data will begin as a concrete source which will be extrapolated into more abstract ideas throughout the research process. For building principals, identifying themes will be based on the interview questions, as well as the follow-up questions from the researcher. These follow-up questions are critical, so it is imperative that the researcher use listening skills and attend to the answer provided by the participant. All responses are data that will be collected. Some of the data will not be utilized as part of the study; however, the researcher must be prepared to accept all responses from the participants and follow-up accordingly.

Lastly, Hatch discusses reflexivity. This is interpreted to mean how the researcher can manage himself within the study. As the study moves forward, the researcher must be aware of personal biases and reactions to events. Goodall (2000) defines reflexivity as “the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal deep connections between the writer and his or her subject”. As a longtime educator, the researcher cannot remove

personal feelings and experiences. The critical element with reflexivity will be that the researcher cannot allow any of these experiences to create issues with the interpretation of the data collected.

Phenomenology. This particular qualitative study will be designed from a phenomenological perspective. The purpose of a phenomenological study is an attempt to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007). To capture the essence of the career stages of secondary school administrators, this research will utilize semi-structured interviews with individuals who are currently serving as instructional leaders in secondary public schools. This study will attempt to address the issue of career developmental stages of secondary school administrators in an attempt to extrapolate a theme throughout the field.

Hatch (2002) asserts that phenomenology is “the belief that phenomena should be studied without preconceived notions”. The idea of preconceived notions is particularly relevant to those who are studying a certain phenomena of which they have a distinct frame of reference. In regard to career stages for secondary school administrators, the researcher brings many thoughts and feelings to this study. However, the researcher will attempt to limit the utilization of personal experiences which could skew the data in any way.

The phenomena being studied in this research is based on how secondary school administrators at various career stages make meaning of their careers as instructional leaders. The semi-structured interview protocol will allow the instructional leaders to reflect upon significant moments in their public school career. This will allow the researcher to identify themes among the participants in an effort to determine if there are developmental career stages for secondary school administrators.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this research study will be secondary school administrators in public schools in the state of Alabama. Instructional leaders come from a wide variety of backgrounds as they matriculate through public schools. The researcher will choose public school administrators who have a wide variety of experiences. These instructional leaders will be chosen on the basis of their length of time in the public school setting. Each secondary school leader has created his own personal experience through the inner workings of the setting. These experiences will provide the unit of analysis for this research. The secondary school principals interviewed will provide the unit of analysis for this research.

Data Collection Methods

To gather data for this study, the researcher utilized the interview process as the primary qualitative method (Creswell 2007; Hatch 2002). The interview process was chosen because it offers an opportunity to gain insight into the participant's perspective (Creswell, 2007). Creswell also identified a variety of challenges regarding the interview process. Unexpected behavior by the participant, the researcher's ability to create questions, formulate clear instructions, deal with sensitive issues, and conduct transcriptions, are all issues which are faced by the researcher. In addition, it is also time-consuming and "taxing", according to Creswell. The researcher must sort through a myriad of data for analysis so that a determination may be made regarding the specific questions surrounding this research. The research questions for this study are centered on the lived experiences of school administrators in the public school setting. These experiences will create a large amount of data to be analyzed. These challenges must be met by the researcher in order for a clear and concise data collection to take place. This is a critical element in order for the researcher to create a valid study.

The researcher must be reflexive during the interview process and have the ability to ask questions based on the responses given by the participants (Hatch, 2002). This occurs when the researcher is listening to what the participants say and observing their reactions to the interview questions (Corbin, et al 2008). The researcher will tape record the encounter so that data may be collected and transcribed at a later time. It is important to note that permission will be requested on behalf of the participant before any recording occurs. Additionally, it is imperative that the researcher take field notes during the interview process. This should not diminish the ability to listen reflexively on the part of the researcher, but should provide an opportunity to denote the tone of the interview, the body language of the respondent, any external factors which may influence the interview, as well as other data which may be recorded. These field notes should be examined soon after the interview takes place so that thoughts and feelings may be expressed by the researcher. These field notes will become a part of the data which is collected for this study.

The researcher will conduct interviews with participants in the study in the natural setting, with this research being located in public schools in Alabama. The interviews will last approximately one hour, with the researcher recording field notes based on the responses of the participant. Transcripts will be created based on the recordings of the interviews so that the data may be reviewed at a later date. This is a critical point of the process, but can also be very taxing as stated earlier. It has been noted that transcriptions typically takes about four hours per one hour of interview time (Patton, 1990). The researcher will compare field notes with the transcriptions in order to analyze the data into themes for this study.

Demographics. The interview will initially focus on basic demographic information from the participant. This information will include questions regarding race, gender, education

background, etc. Additionally, the researcher will include questions regarding length of service as a teacher before entering the field of education administration. This may be a key component when the researcher analyzes the data because it could provide an insight as to the linearity of stages. For example, if teachers enter the principalship after teaching for twenty-five years, do they progress more quickly because of their experiences in education? Conversely, does an instructional leader who has only taught for three years spend more time in the induction career development stage? These questions may provide a needed window during the data analysis period in that the fundamental theme of this research is an examination of developmental career stages. By examining basic demographic data, the researcher hopes to gain insight into their career progression.

The final component of the demographic section of the interview will center on the length of service as a building administrator. These data will provide the heart of this research study because it gets to the essence of career developmental stages. The researcher will want to identify how long a person has been a school administrator, in what capacities they have served, and the capacity in which they are currently serving. These questions will lead the researcher to identify the perspective of the respondents in relation to the career path which they have chosen. These data will be analyzed and categorized based on responses regarding length of service. The background data provided in this section will serve a dual purpose in that the participant will be provided an opportunity to answer basic demographic questions which are very familiar to them, as well as allow them to become more comfortable and increase their familiarity with the researcher (Hatch, 2002).

Interview. Each interview with the respondents should conclude in approximately one hour. After the demographics have been completed, the participant will then respond to a variety

of open-ended questions regarding their position as a secondary school principal. Open-ended questions are recommended by qualitative researchers because these types of questions lead the participant to discuss their experiences and how they understand them (Hatch, 2002). The theme for these interview questions will be developed by the researcher. The questions posed will attempt to gain a perspective into the lived experiences of the instructional leaders. As Hatch states, the interview process is an attempt by the researcher to find the structures which the participants are using, and how these structures are used to “organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds”. These lived experiences will lead the researcher in the attempt to identify distinct career development stages for school administrators. The questions will be formatted and asked of each instructional leader who participates in this research. The researcher will listen attentively to the respondent’s answers to the interview questions and answer appropriate follow-up questions. These follow-up questions will be intended to provide the most accurate glimpse of the lived experiences of the participants.

Hatch (2002) acknowledges that there are six generalizations which should be used as a guide when writing good interview questions. The first is the questions should be open-ended. As mentioned previously, open-ended questions allow the respondent to answer questions so that discussion of their experiences may take place. There is uniqueness to each participant’s experiences, and this format of questioning provides them the opportunity to share these experiences with the researcher.

The second generalization is that questions should be formatted so that the language used in the question provides the participant with some familiarity. As Hatch asserts, there is a great deal of significance to two-way communication in the interview process. The participant must be able to easily understand the question in order for accurate data to be recorded. Utilization of

specialized vocabulary is an issue that must be treated with care. In this study, the theme of instructional leadership exists. There is a distinct vocabulary for school leaders. However, the researcher must be aware that not all formal training for education leaders is the same. This will be taken into account during the process of formulating the questions so that the participant will be able to respond without ambiguity.

Clarity of the questions posed is the third component of the suggested generalizations proposed by Hatch. Obtaining accurate data is a priority in research. If there is ambiguity in the questions, the quality of the data is compromised. The researcher must format the questions in an overt fashion, with no hidden agenda in regard to the participant. Questions should not be so complex that they may create anxiety with the participant. This creates confusion, as well as leads to the possibility of the participant becoming uncomfortable, which could compromise the data.

The questions from the interview should also be neutral in nature. This refers to the researcher using leading questions to obtain desired results. Qualitative research, as stated earlier, has a characteristic of firsthand engagement on the part of the researcher. This engagement could lead to the researcher forming personal opinions and biases. These should be properly maintained within the researcher and not be imparted in any way from the researcher to the participant in the interview process. Hatch points out that any attempt to influence the interview from the researcher's perspective because of preconceived notions creates bad data for the study.

The fifth generalization proposed by Hatch involves asking questions which should respect the informants. This leads to the presumption that the participants have valuable knowledge. The attitude of the researcher can have an impact on the attitude of the participant.

Hatch points out the questions should not be too simplistic or complex as to insult the participant. The researcher must be able to establish a relationship with the participant in the respect that there is a specific knowledge base which the researcher is seeking to gain access. This should be imparted to the participant based on the attitude and questions which are posed by the researcher.

The sixth and final generalization proposed by Hatch is that questions should be relevant and directly related to the objectives of the research. All interviews conducted should have the objective of the specific research at the forefront. The purpose of this research study is to analyze careers of secondary school principals to determine if career developmental stages exist. To reach this end, it is imperative that the researcher ask questions in the interview to achieve this goal. There would be no benefit to this study to ask questions which are in the field of education, but not relevant to answering the questions posed. Again, accurate data is the goal in qualitative research. Asking questions which are relevant and directly related to the study will be the aim of this research.

Interview Setting. The interviews themselves will occur in the natural setting of the public school in which the administrator is employed. The researcher will attempt to schedule these interviews at convenient times for the instructional leaders, while at the same time utilizing a time frame which allows them to be fully engaged in the interview process. All effort will be made to schedule and conduct the interviews during the summer months when there are few (if any) students present on campus. By conducting the interviews in this manner, the researcher believes more accurate data will be garnered than if the school administrator were faced with dealing with the myriad of issues that occur during a normal school day. The researcher will attempt to conduct the interview outside of the school administrator's office suite if possible.

Creswell (2007) points out that the researcher should find the quietest place possible for the interview to gather the most efficient results. The total focus of the researcher and the instructional leader being interviewed should be on the questions so that the most accurate data can be retrieved.

Post-interview. After the interview has been conducted, the researcher will begin to analyze the field notes obtained from the participant. The researcher will also create a journal and describe the interview itself. This journal will be an attempt to capture the essence of the interview, as well as provide the researcher with an opportunity to view the data from an introspective viewpoint. Hatch (2002) asserts that this should occur as soon as possible after the interview. He states that this is important because it allows the researcher to ensure that more accurate data is recorded, as well as provide insights as to follow-up questions to utilize when interviewing the next participant in the study. Data analysis will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Interview protocol. The interview protocol will follow a similar protocol developed by Oplatka (2010). After the interview begins with basic demographic data, the researcher will begin with the “life story” portion of the interview. The participant will be prompted by being asked to describe his or her entry into the role of principal. The participant will be asked to discuss their induction process through questions regarding personal experiences, as well as what their job consisted of, types of leadership styles used, emotions, etc. (Oplatka, 2010).

The interview will then shift to questions regarding the managerial career cycle (Oplatka, 2010). Oplatka suggests asking the participant about their experiences in terms of “best of times” and “worst of times”. There will also be questions regarding the types of crises the school administrator may have faced during his or her tenure. The researcher will pay particular

attention to any noticeable transition points in the career of the school administrator. These “watershed” moments where an event occurred in which the instructional leader felt he or she may be developing professionally in a manner which may be considered a turning point in a career. The researcher will also pose questions regarding the types of professional development received during these crises. This line of questioning will directly relate to the research questions posed for this study.

Oplatka (2010) identifies an additional set of questions to pose at the end of the interview. These questions center on the instructional leader’s attitudes and experiences during the career in school administration. These questions will focus on behaviors and emotions which the administrator has experienced. The research indicates that many school administrators experience a sort of “reality shock” when transitioning into the role of building principal. This research will seek to identify in what manner the instructional leader coped with their experiences early in their careers, as well as how these experiences may have led to the participant becoming a better leader later in his or her career. These questions will again seek to determine if there are in fact transition points in the career of school administrators.

Sample

The sample for this study will be consistent with the research questions being posed. The researcher will utilize a purposeful sampling strategy in this study. Purposeful sampling will provide the researcher the opportunity to select participants who can directly inform the research problem (Creswell, 2007). Due to this study being an examination of career developmental stages of school administrators, the researcher will select sixteen participants who are currently serving as public secondary school principals in the state of Alabama. The reasoning behind the selection of sixteen participants for this study is based on Creswell’s observations from other

researchers that phenomenological studies typically consist of three to ten individuals, with ten being the highest number which has seen utilized.

Purposeful sampling. The general idea behind the use of purposeful sampling is that it provides the researcher with the opportunity to select participants who can provide insight into the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). This is considered a major strength of purposeful sampling. An additional strength is that purposeful sampling provides the researcher with a homogenous sample. This homogenous sample can be reduced to sub-groups so that the researcher may examine the sample characteristics in greater detail (Hatch, 2002). This research will consist of sub-groups of veteran secondary school administrators, novice administrators, and administrators who fall between these two categories. These sub-groups will allow the researcher to identify commonalities and themes which will speak to the research questions identified, so that career developmental stages can be examined fully.

While purposeful sampling has its strengths, there are also weaknesses. Some researchers choose to utilize purposeful sampling due to its convenience and the ease of obtaining participants (Hatch, 2002). As Hatch indicates, for a study to have integrity and to make a meaningful contribution, utilization of a “convenience sample” is not the path for these ideals. An additional weakness could be the relationship with the researcher. The researcher must be aware of the issues which may be caused by having a biased view of the participant. Participants also must feel free to discuss with the researcher without fear of information being used for unintended purposes.

The initial interviews with the participants will be veteran school administrators. This will be done so that the researcher may begin to identify commonalities and characteristics of the lived experiences of these seasoned instructional leaders. However, the researcher must use

caution so as to not use the data collected from the initial participants to skew additional data collection. The researcher will then select participants who have completed a minimum of one year as a school administrator, while not serving for more than five years in an administrative capacity. This should give the researcher a glimpse into the induction phase of career developmental stages for instructional leaders. The final group of participants will consist of those individuals who have served as building administrators for a length of time greater than five years, but would not be considered a veteran instructional leader. These participants will provide insight on the nature of experiencing the induction process, while reaching a level in which they begin to plan for their future growth. This sub-group will also provide valuable information for the research question regarding professional development. They have probably experienced initial professional development in the induction phase, while this stage may require a shift into the types of professional development needed.

The participants will be generated from a pool of school administrators who have been observed by the researcher over a period of years. These individuals are employed in school districts that are primarily located in the north Alabama, with some participants residing in the Birmingham metro area. These participants vary in age, ethnicity, gender, and their educational background. There is also a variance among participants in the length of service in a particular school. Some of the participants have been employed in a variety of schools. This is important to the researcher in that an examination can be made as to how the school administrator navigated the varied cultures of each of the schools served. This will speak to the question of linearity for career developmental stages. The researcher will examine if the school administrator experienced an induction phase when transitioning between schools, either within or outside their current district.

Data Analysis

This study will consist of interviews with participants who range in experience in the field of school administration. The data collected will be analyzed through qualitative research based on the phenomenological philosophy of career developmental stage research (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). During data collection for this study, the researcher will examine the responses provided in order to view the phenomenon being studied as the lived experiences of the participants (Hatch, 2002). Through the interview process, the school administrator will have an opportunity to freely comment on the realities of the instructional leader's career. These data will in turn provide the researcher with insight into the realities and experiences of the participants.

During the interview process, the researcher will listen reflexively as the participants respond to questions developed. These questions will be developed to provide the participant the opportunity to explore the experiences which they have had as school administrators. Creswell (2007) suggests developing five open ended questions for a qualitative research study. Follow-up questions will be posed based on the responses from each participant. As the interview concludes, the researcher will review the answers provided, begin transcription, and write down reactions to the responses. These actions will provide the researcher with the opportunity to reduce the information into categories for greater analysis (Creswell, 2007).

Utilization of categories is an integral part of a qualitative analysis. The analysis of categories is based on intuition of the researcher, and is composed of the background of the researcher, the purpose of the study, along with the experiences of the participant. Categorization allows the researcher to examine the data collected, as well as begin to develop a connection between participants (Creswell, 2007). This study will utilize a wide range of

experience levels of school administrators. Being able to identify connections is a critical component of this research. The research questions consist of studying the span of career development. The categorization of this data into convergent themes will allow the researcher to extrapolate these themes into generalities.

After the initial categories are developed, the researcher will use axial coding in an attempt to create a “visual model” (Creswel, 2007). Creswel (2007) defines axial coding as identifying a specific phenomenon and then determining (a) the specific cause of the phenomenon, (b) what strategies were utilized to respond to the phenomenon, (c) what specific and broad context influenced these strategies, and (d) what were the consequences of these strategies. For the purpose of this research, the visual model indicated by Creswell will consist of the lived experiences of the school administrator. Evaluating these lived experiences of the participant, the researcher will try to determine if career developmental stages exist for school administrators.

Through the organization and categorization of data, the researcher will be able to generalize the results in an effort to answer the research questions. This will occur through an in-depth analysis of the data. The researcher will attempt to determine if career developmental stages do exist for school administrators. The data should also reveal the characteristics of each of these career development stages. Additional data analysis should examine the final question of this study regarding the types of professional development which should be provided by state and local school districts. These data will be utilized by the researcher to identify emerging themes in the research. These emerging themes will be used for interpretation and will be reported in Chapter IV.

Standards of Rigor for Study

Qualitative research studies must meet rigorous standards, just as their quantitative counterparts. The qualitative researcher must be willing to utilize the proper techniques to reach the stated objectives of the research (Ryan, 2010). The data analysis is proven to be rigorous when the techniques used produce the data necessary to answer the research questions in a reliable and valid method. In studying a phenomenon such as career developmental stages for school administrators, the interview process is the most efficient and reliable method to use to attain the amount of detail necessary to answer the research questions.

In order to meet the standards of rigor for this study, the researcher will develop interview questions which will describe in detail the lived experiences of the secondary school principals interviewed. These interviews will be conducted so that the participant is assured that the data provided will be used for the sole purpose of answering the clearly stated research questions. This will enable the participants to be freely engaged in the interview without fear of their responses being used in a negative way against them. The researcher will strive not to lead the interview in the direction to answer a specific research agenda. The questions will be formulated with an open dialogue for the participant to share their life experiences in the field of instructional leadership.

Standards of rigor are defined as by Creswell (2007) as the researcher validating the accuracy of the account from the participant. This is done through one or more of three procedures: Member checking, triangulation, or external audits of the account. For the purpose of this research, triangulation of data, member checking, and transcription of data will be the primary sources used for standards of rigor.

Triangulation. The researcher will utilize triangulation to determine if there are multiple data points across the span of the interviews. Data will be analyzed to determine if there are emergent themes. Triangulation will occur as the researcher identifies these multiple data points to attempt to create meaning of the career stages of the secondary school administrator. As the participant is involved in the interview, the researcher will listen reflexively in order to determine if there are similarities with the responses of other participants. The researcher may then move on to the next standard of rigor, which is member checking.

Member checking. The first of the standards of rigor this research will employ is member checking. Member checking is used to validate what the researcher hears to ensure the accuracy with the participant. The researcher will ask for clarification from the participant in a manner such as “Is this what you are intending to say?” The primary reason to utilize member checking in this study is that the researcher has a long history in secondary public education. Member checking will provide the researcher with a means to ensure that his own personal bias will be limited by asking the participant for further clarification of the responses.

Transcription of data. As the interview occurs, the researcher will take notes which will later be used as data. These notes will reflect the feelings of the researcher during the interview. The interview itself will be digitally recorded, so the researcher may feel free to denote the feelings and reactions to the answers of the participant. These data will be analyzed later in an attempt to determine if there are data points within this standard of rigor.

As stated, the interviews will be transcribed verbatim from a digital recorder. As the data is being transcribed, the researcher will seek to identify data points to establish triangulation. By using a semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher will be able to be reflexive with the questions posed. As the series of interviews are conducted, the participants will be asked to

participate in a follow-up interview if more information is needed. These second interviews will be transcribed as well.

Literature. The literature which was reviewed in chapter two created an opportunity for the researcher to examine career developmental stages of teachers and instructional leaders. These opportunities will allow the researcher to identify themes which will be developed based on the data points identified through the interviews. The researcher may then analyze the data points through triangulating the data between each interview participants, as well as the data reviewed in the literature. The literature will be an additional source of reflection for the researcher.

Situation of Self as Researcher. The researcher in this study has completed twenty years of service in public education, all of which has been in a secondary school setting. He has been a special education teacher, physical education teacher, high school coach, guidance counselor, and athletics director. Over the course of his career, the researcher has had the opportunity to work with school administrators who had a wide variety of years of service. The researcher became intrigued at the variance in the attitudes, confidence, and development of these administrators. This, along with discussions in courses at The University of Alabama, led the researcher to pursue this study on career developmental stage research.

The perspective of the researcher in this study is that of an observer. Through observations over the previous two decades, there have been some thoughts and feelings regarding career developmental stages which have evolved over the years. The researcher understands that these feelings can create a certain bias toward this research. The researcher acknowledges the possibility of these biases occurring. In light of this acknowledgement, the

researcher firmly believes that his biases will not be reflected in the data collection, data analysis, or have any bearing on this study.

The qualifications this researcher brings to the study hinge upon his formal training. The researcher has completed two masters' degree level programs, special education with an emphasis on students with mental retardation, and one in school counseling. Additionally, the researcher has had formal training at The University of Alabama in Education Leadership. He has completed the ILP program in Education Leadership, as well as an Education Specialist degree in the same field. Upon completing the Education Specialist degree, the researcher took a year off and then returned to the university with the intention of completing the doctoral program in Education Leadership. The researcher has completed all coursework at the university with a 4.0 grade point average. The coursework included five specific research courses during his tenure at Alabama. These included a basic statistics course (BER 540), ANOVA (BER 545), Regression (BER 546), Qualitative Methods I (BER 631) and Qualitative Methods II (BER 632). These research courses were completed with a 4.0 grade point average. The preparation afforded the researcher at The University of Alabama created the opportunity for this study to be conducted. The skill set developed in the qualitative research courses, along with the research conducted in the foundations and core courses, combined with the lived experiences of the researcher, provide the qualifications needed for this research endeavor.

Summary of Chapter III

The researcher will utilize a qualitative phenomenological study to examine the career developmental stages of public secondary school administrators. The study will also seek to determine the various types of professional development needed for instructional leaders at the different career developmental stages experienced. The results of this study will contribute to

the literature in that it will provide data which will speak to the nature of the career stage developmental cycle. This study will attempt to fill in the gap in the literature so that appropriate professional development can be examined and put into place by school districts.

Chapter III is organized so that two purposes could be achieved. The first purpose is to describe the research design and methods chosen to conduct this research. The research design of this study is a qualitative, phenomenological approach. The researcher has provided a description of the design, as well as the methods to be employed to answer the research questions provided. The second purpose is to examine how the design will address the research questions created in the study. The utilization of the interview process will address the research questions raised in the study. This study will specifically target school administrators who have served over a variety of years and experiences. These interviews will provide the necessary data for analysis to determine if career developmental stages exist. When they are proven to exist, the researcher will then be able to identify themes and categories which indicate the characteristics of each of the career developmental stages. The following chapter will discuss the results obtained from the interview process.

CHAPTER IV - RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of career developmental stages for secondary public school principals. Using and building on the career developmental-stages and socialization literatures for teachers and principals, this larger purpose has three sub-purposes: 1) to examine the role principals perform throughout their careers to determine if there is an identifiable set of developmental stages through which they progress; 2) to offer an incipient description of these stages, detailing questions and challenges which may exist at each stage; and 3) to identify and explicate implications these findings have for professional development decisions/strategies at the district and local levels. In order to develop an understanding of career stages and the effects of professional development, the researcher utilized a purposeful sample of sixteen secondary school administrators from various districts in North Alabama to participate in this study. This chapter will present the research data collected from the interviews with the participants.

Demographics

In order to gain a better understanding of career stages and the effects of professional development, the researcher sought to interview a purposeful sample for this study. The initial interview protocol included demographic questions to provide general information which will speak to this study. A summary of the demographic information is included in Table 1. There were sixteen participants in this study. There were eight males and eight females. Fourteen of

the participants were Caucasian, while two participants were Black. The age range for this study was twenty-two years. The youngest participant was thirty-six; while the oldest was fifty-eight. The average tenure as a classroom teacher was twelve years, with the range being three years to twenty years. The average tenure as a school administrator was ten years, with a range being between one year and nineteen years. Nine of the participants work in city school districts, while seven work in county school districts. Four of the participants held doctoral degrees.

In an effort to introduce the participants to the readers of this study, a brief profile of each of the participants will be included in this chapter. The profiles for the participants are derived from the interviews, observations, as well as other background knowledge the researcher possessed prior to the research process. The names used in this study are pseudonyms for the participants.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Years as Classroom Teacher	Years as School Administrator
Doug	45	M	C	3	18
Byron	41	M	B	10	8
Mickey	41	M	C	11	8
Jerome	40	M	C	9	9
Ken	53	M	C	15	13
Gary	53	M	C	18	12
Eric	58	M	C	6	19
Bob	53	M	B	20	9
Margaret	57	F	C	17	18
Julia	42	F	C	12	8
Amy	40	F	C	10	8
Renee	38	F	C	10	6
Jenny	40	F	C	15	3
Shirley	48	F	C	14	12
Hope	36	F	C	6	8
Tanya	43	F	C	20	1

Note. C (Caucasian); B (Black); M (Male); F (Female).

Participant Profiles

Doug. Doug is a forty-five year old high school principal in a city school system in North Alabama. After three years as a history teacher, he began his administrative career as an assistant principal at a middle school in the same district where he is currently serving as high school principal. Doug was an assistant principal for two years and then was transferred to the district office to manage attendance for the system. He stayed in that position for three years before moving to the high school to take over as building principal. He has been in that role for the past ten years. His school has a high free and reduced lunch rate; however, the test scores and graduation rates remain high. He is a very popular administrator in his district. Doug has completed his doctoral studies.

Our interview took place in his office at the high school. Doug was very cordial and open when answering the interview questions. During the interview, Doug's current superintendent came into his office. The researcher knows the superintendent well, so there was a brief period of time in which the interview was delayed. However, the interview resumed shortly after the superintendent exited the principal's office. There did not appear to be any effect on the responses by Doug after the interruption occurred.

Byron. Byron is a forty-one year old middle school principal in the Birmingham area. Byron taught career tech for ten years before becoming the assistant principal at his current school. He was an assistant principal for six years before taking over as principal two years ago. Byron is a black male in a school that has an eighty-five percent black population. Almost the entire student body is on the free and reduced lunch program. His school is in the inner city. Byron indicated when he moved to the district as an assistant principal, he was primarily in charge of discipline. There were fights between students almost on a daily basis. After he

became principal of the school, he asked law enforcement to attend an assembly. During the assembly he informed students that there would be three things happen when there was a fight: students would be arrested, charges would be filed, and students would be recommended for alternative school. He said fighting has reduced tremendously and the climate at his school is much improved.

The researcher met Byron at his school. Before the interview took place, Byron insisted on taking the researcher on a tour of his school. His interactions with students and teachers reflect an administrator who is attuned to the needs of his stakeholders. While on the tour, Byron took the opportunity to take the researcher to the classroom of one of the researcher's former students. After a short visit, we adjourned to Byron's office for our interview. The interview lasted approximately one hour. Byron was forthcoming with his answers to the questions provided.

Mickey. Mickey is a forty-one year old high school assistant principal. He began his teaching career as a middle school science teacher. He taught for eleven years before becoming an administrator. He is in his eighth year as a high school assistant principal. Mickey works at a small county school in rural North Alabama. The school is ninety-nine percent white and has a rather high free and reduced lunch rate.

Our interview took place in his office at the high school. After initial pleasantries, the researcher began the interview. Mickey indicated that he was becoming more frustrated by all of the discipline infractions he was receiving. He stated that the previous principal wanted to have control over all things that went on in the school. Since there has been a change in administration, he indicated that he has had a difficult time adjusting to the new principal. The

new principal has allowed him more flexibility, but he is still struggling with knowing what his expectations are with the new administration.

Jerome. Jerome is a forty year old high school principal. He was a career tech teacher for nine years at the middle school level before moving into administration. He began his administrative career as a K-8 principal at a rural county school. He indicated that this was not a difficult transition because he was promoted to principal within the same school. He knew the teachers and many of the students already. Four years ago he was promoted to the principal of the largest high school in the district. This transition was rather difficult because in his first year he had to relieve two coaches of their duties based on concerns from the community and central office staff. One of the two coaches was highly successful and well-connected in the community. Both were popular with the faculty and staff. This created some tension between himself and the staff. His current school is over ninety percent white, with a free and reduced lunch rate around forty percent. Jerome is currently working toward his doctorate degree in educational leadership.

Our interview was conducted in a restaurant a few miles south of the high school. The researcher arrived at the school to conduct the interview, but Jerome indicated that it would be better if we were off campus due to the probable interruptions which would occur on campus. There were several interruptions during the interview (ordering food, seeing stakeholders in his community). Jerome did speak rather candidly in regard to his experiences as a school administrator. Despite the distractions, Jerome was focused on the questions asked by the researcher and his responses were clear and concise.

Ken. Ken is a fifty-three year old assistant principal at a small rural county high school. He has spent his entire career (twenty-eight years) at the same school. He served as a special

education teacher for fifteen years. He left the classroom and became an assistant principal there. He has been in that role for the past thirteen years. Ken has worked for two administrators as an assistant principal. The current principal has “revitalized” him. He had plans to retire at the end of this year, but seems to want to stay in the same capacity for the time being.

The interview took place in his office on campus. He offered a brief tour of the facilities before the interview. Although the researcher believes there were good data retrieved from this interview, there appeared to be a lot of “advice giving” on the part of the participant. As this is someone the researcher has known for quite a few years, it was difficult to get him on point at times. However, having the perspective of an administrator who has been active and engaged for this length of time was worthwhile for this study.

Gary. Gary is a fifty-three year old principal at a small rural county high school. He spent eighteen years as a history teacher, PE teacher, and football coach. His experience in regard to his first administrative position was unique to this study. Gary had never worked anywhere but a high school setting until his first principalship. He was asked to go to an elementary school on the opposite end of the county. Not only was this troubling, school had already started. In his words, the board met on the third night after school started and he was given the keys at that time. He had never been on that campus until that night when he reported for duty as the principal.

The interview occurred in his office. It was a quiet interview with little to no distractions. Gary shared his experiences of moving from the elementary level back to the high school (he is at a different school than where he originally taught). At the conclusion of the interview, he shared some insight about things he wished he could go back and change.

Eric. Eric is a fifty-eight year old principal at a large city high school. He was a career tech teacher in the middle school of his current district for six years before he was promoted to half-time assistant principal at the middle school and half-time at the central office as the Title I coordinator. He was in that role for six years. He was then named as principal of one of the district's elementary schools. Eric held that position for seven years before moving on to his current position of high school principal. The high school where Eric is currently employed is in a very affluent district. Approximately eighty percent of their graduates attend college. As indicated in the interview and through prior knowledge of the researcher, there were numerous issues when Eric began his term as principal, some of which were a direct result of the previous administration. Eric has completed his doctoral studies.

The interview took place in a portable office set up for Eric due to new construction on his campus. Before the interview began, Eric showed blueprints to the researcher regarding the new construction. The interview flowed smoothly, with many follow up questions for clarification. The interview became more of a conversation and produced what appears to be good data. The conversation lasted almost three hours, by far the longest of the interviews in this study. Much of the conversation however, was not as relevant to the study as the researcher would have liked.

Bob. Bob is a fifty-three year old assistant principal in a large high school. He began his career as a social studies teacher and then moved on to teach Driver's Education. He was a teacher in his current school for eleven years. He was hired as an assistant principal nine years ago. He also served as the athletics director for his system for six years. His primary role is discipline, although he also manages the school facility.

The interview took place in his office after school hours. He indicated that it had been a long day, but wanted to proceed with the interview. Bob indicated he had worked for two separate administrators, his current one being an overwhelming favorite of his. There were some issues with the previous administrator, but he appears to be much more comfortable with the new principal. He indicated that his role has not changed much, but his outlook was better since he felt he was being supported.

Margaret. Margaret is a fifty-seven year old principal in a large high school in North Alabama. She began her career as a middle school English teacher. She became an assistant principal at the middle school after teaching for seventeen years. She was an assistant principal for two years before becoming the principal at a separate middle school in another area of the district. Four years ago, she accepted the position of the high school principal. She indicated that this was a difficult decision for her because she felt as if she were leaving her own personal child by taking a position away from the middle school. This created a good deal of anxiety in her transition to the high school. Margaret has completed her doctoral degree.

The interview took place in her office at the high school. Margaret discussed with candor how she has progressed over the years. As a person who has been in the field of education for thirty-five years, she brings a lot of insight into the profession. She has been named the Alabama Middle School Principal of the Year in the past, and has served on many national and state boards. The interview flowed smoothly with the interview being conversational. The researcher felt as the interview ended that the data collected would be relevant and speak to the research questions.

Julia. Julia is a forty-two year old assistant principal at a large high school in Birmingham. She began her career as a middle school special education teacher. After twelve

years, she became an assistant principal at a high school. She was later promoted to principal of the school. She left after three years and went back into the classroom. She taught for one year, and then accepted the assistant principal position at her current school.

The interview was conducted in her office. She asked the receptionist to hold all calls, so there were no interruptions during the interview. Julia spoke in detail of her reasons for leaving the principalship of her previous high school and returning to the classroom. There were issues of trust between her and the central office staff. These trust issues led Julia to feel she needed to move back into the classroom. When the opportunity arose for her to move into a new administrative position in an adjoining district, Julia took advantage and moved into the position. Julia has created an education chat program with one of her current colleagues via Twitter which has become popular across the country.

Amy. Amy is a forty year old principal at a small, rural county school in North Alabama. The school has a high free and reduced lunch rate. April was a language arts teacher for ten years before becoming an assistant principal at the school she currently serves. She moved into the principalship two years ago. She feels she has reached the threshold at her current school and would like to explore moving into a position at a central office. Amy states that she “likes change” and is anxious for a new challenge.

The interview was conducted in her office. Since she is the only administrator on site, there were a few interruptions during the interview. Amy discussed the difficulties she faced moving from a teacher in the school to the instructional leader in the building. She indicated that she had to change from being “friend” to being the leader. Amy stated this was difficult for her because of her personality. Over time, this has improved in her opinion. She stated the relationships are still there, but there are times she has to be “in charge”.

Renee. Renee is a thirty-eight year old high school assistant principal at a large city high school in North Alabama. Renee taught U.S. History for ten years before becoming an assistant principal. Her experience was a bit unique in that she was a substitute for any administrator who had to be out. The office arranged for a substitute to cover her classes so that she could gain experience as an administrator before she had the opportunity to be hired.

The interview took place in her office. Renee's office is located in the guidance suite at her school. There was quite a bit of activity outside her office, but she handled the distractions well. She expressed frustration at her inability to get "everything done" during the course of the day. Renee points to the mentors in her building as those who have inspired her to develop successful student relationships.

Jenny. Jenny is a forty year old assistant principal at a large rural high school in North Alabama. She was an elementary teacher for fifteen years before being named principal for the district's alternative school. She stayed in that position for one year before transitioning to the assistant principalship at the high school. Jenny indicated this was a great situation for her professionally, because the alternative school prepared her for what was expected at the high school.

The interview took place in her office in the Ninth Grade Academy wing of her school. Jenny's office was spacious and inviting. She had a student working on an assignment as I arrived. She asked the student to leave so that we could have our conversation. Jenny stated that since she has been an assistant principal at the high school (and director of the Ninth Grade Academy), her relationship with the school's guidance department has evolved. She indicated one of her great regrets was not getting to know the counselors in her previous positions in order to gain a better understanding of the day to day activities involved with that position.

Shirley. Shirley is a forty-eight year old assistant principal at a large high school in the Birmingham area. She was a special education teacher for fourteen years. She was an assistant principal at a large school in North Alabama after teaching, and within three years was serving as principal of that high school. She left the principalship at this school to take her current assistant principal position three years ago.

The interview took place in her office on campus. She instructed others that she would be involved in a meeting and please take any messages for her. During her early career as a special education teacher, Shirley had an opportunity to serve as the director of the school district's Head Start program. She taught in the afternoons and performed these duties in the mornings. Shirley cites this opportunity as the "launching" of her career. The researcher questioned her leaving a principalship to accept the role of an assistant principal. Her answer was rather intriguing in that it involved a catastrophic event which occurred in her community. When the tornados of April 2012 occurred, one particular storm landed within a mile of her school. While all of her students at the high school were safe, she indicated how horrified she was that she was not with her own daughter (who was safe at an elementary school). She stated it was at that moment that she realized that she was neglecting her own children for the sake of others. She decided it was time to move in a different direction professionally. Her new role includes a focus as an assistant principal on curriculum.

Hope. Hope is a thirty-six year old assistant principal at a large high school in the Birmingham area. She taught in an elementary school for six years before becoming an assistant principal in another elementary school. She was in that role for six years and transitioned to high school assistant principal.

The interview took place in her office at the high school. There were no interruptions during the interview. Hope seemed excited to share her experiences in school administration. She discussed the importance of being involved in developing relationships with stakeholders and talked at length about how this must be a purposeful campaign. A relationship “doesn’t happen by accident” was a statement made during the interview. If relationships are developed, it leads to having more credibility with the stakeholders. The researcher noted one of the interesting points made by Hope was when she was discussing relationships with students. She indicated that administrators should not think of students “globally”. She believes that administrators need to make a connection with students so that the leadership can garner a better understanding of what a student is experiencing.

Tanya. Tanya is a forty-three year old assistant principal at a large middle school in the Birmingham area. She taught English for twenty years at a local high school. She has been hired this year as an assistant middle school principal in an adjoining district. This is her first year in school administration. Her focus at the middle school is on seventh grade. She is also in charge of curriculum and professional development for her school.

The interview took place in her office in the middle school. Tanya’s office is located in the seventh grade wing of the school. During the interview, we were only interrupted one time. Her secretary indicated that she was concerned that others could hear the conversation, so she asked if she could use a noise machine outside the door of Tanya’s office. This did not appear to distract Tanya at all, as she openly and candidly answered the questions. Many of the questions were difficult for her, since she was a new administrator. However, she was quite competent and the researcher believes quality data was received.

Many of the questions were difficult for Tanya. She is a new administrator who has been an instructional leader in an official capacity for less than one year. However, she was quite competent and the researcher believes quality data was received. The data from Tanya speaks specifically to the induction career stage identified in this research. This is due to Tanya's lack of an experiential background as an instructional leader, and not an indictment on her skill level or knowledge of the position. The data from this interview did add relevance to the study in that it reflected the past experiences in the initial induction stages which many of the instructional leaders described.

Emerging Themes Derived from the Qualitative Data

The researcher interviewed the participants in this study in an effort to determine if career stages exist for secondary school administrators. These interviews occurred during the fall semester of 2013. The researcher identified a purposeful sample and scheduled the interviews. The researcher conducted the interviews and collected data, reviewed and analyzed the data, coded the personal interview transcriptions, as well as field notes taken during the interviews. The researcher utilized the study's theoretical framework for the organization and coding of the data. Through this process, the researcher was able to establish connections between the research questions and the data collected. From the analysis of the data obtained by the researcher, six major themes emerged: (a) Induction, (b) Stabilization or Establishment, (c) Professional, (d) Distinguished, (e) Frustration, and (f) Professional Development. There were several sub-themes which the researcher will discuss within the context of the major themes.

Theme One: Induction.

In order for the reader to understand how the researcher arrived at the themes in this study, a description will be provided as to how the raw data was converted to the inferential theme identified. The researcher will utilize the induction career development stage in an attempt to provide an example of how this raw data was converted. The same process applies to each of the additional themes, but the researcher will only describe this process for the initial stage. The researcher asserts the remaining inferential themes were discovered through the utilization of the same procedure.

At the conclusion of the interview process, the researcher transcribed the interviews. The field notes from each interview were attached to their corresponding transcription. The researcher then read the transcripts while listening to recordings of the interviews. Notes were made to produce data which may have not been identified during the interview process (voice inflections, possible transition periods, etc.). The researcher then took each transcription, along with the corresponding field notes, and began to read each entry and write a brief description of what was being discussed. This entry was written in the margin alongside the statement which generated the description. The researcher utilized this process throughout each of the sixteen interview transcriptions.

After this process of identifying basic characteristics of each statement, the researcher created a spreadsheet and created the following columns: the research question the statement specifically speaks to, the statement from the interview, the name of the participant, the general description (code) provided by the researcher upon initial review of the transcription, a sub-theme to use after the coding was reduced, and a final column was generated to narrow the general description into a specific theme. After this initial description, there were sixty eight

descriptors identified. These descriptors were the initial thoughts of the researcher as the coding process was beginning. The researcher then created an additional spreadsheet which indicated each of these descriptors. The researcher at this point began the process of organizing these descriptors into more manageable themes for the purposes of this research study.

The term “induction” was garnered based on the responses of the participants and the literature reviewed for this research project. Additionally, the other themes for this study were derived in this manner as well. For the induction career development stage, there were thirteen codes (descriptors) identified through the method described earlier. They were discipline, supervision, routines, expectations, feelings of being overwhelmed, manager, curriculum, lack of experience, communication problems, and lack of comfort in the role of instructional leader, difficulty in changing adults, survival, and induction as a seasoned educator. The researcher analyzed these codes and determined that each of the codes could be further reduced into sub-themes. The sub-themes for the induction career development stage were a period of pre-induction, manager (discipline and supervision), curriculum, difficulty changing adults, and survival. The researcher then added the codes and the sub-themes to the spreadsheet created earlier. At this point in the study, the researcher reviewed the literature from Chapter II in this study to determine if the sub-themes indicated an overarching theme to organize the data. It was determined by the researcher that these sub-themes proves the induction career development stage exists, as well as provides an incipient description of this stage.

The participants in this study agreed that they participate in a certain induction as they begin their respective administrative careers. While these inductions created different experiences for each participant, there were some similarities discovered throughout the interview process. Since the purposeful sample created the opportunity to identify secondary

school administrators with varying levels of experience, the interview questions related to the onset of the participants careers brought about much reflection. Many of the induction experiences were noted as positive, while others indicated struggles during this period of their career. There were five sub-themes identified under the major theme of induction: Pre-Induction, manager (discipline and supervision), curriculum, difficulty changing adults, and survival.

Pre-Induction. Many of the participants discussed the opportunities provided by their school districts to give them leadership responsibilities during their teaching career. Shirley, an administrator for twelve years, was pulled aside after her third year as a classroom teacher and instructed that she would have “some AP responsibilities without the title”. She agreed to participate because it was indicated to her that a position would be coming open soon. Shirley’s primary roles were “anything student service oriented: 504, ADA, all those kinds of things. Special education or anything at risk was my primary duty”. Shirley attested her transition after she was hired was much smoother than others she had witnessed because of her “familiarity” with the system.

Renee, a six year assistant principal, had a similar experience as a classroom teacher. She had been a classroom teacher for eight years when she was approached about being a “substitute” when an administrator was out of the office. “I do feel like what really helped me be ready for this is that the assistant principals became my mentors” Shirley stated. She felt the learning curve was reduced for her current job because of her work with the other administrators. She indicated that she “would sit here and watch them (other administrators); she how they related to kids, parents in every circumstance. That helped me more than anything”. In regard to her university training, Renee said “there are just some things principal school does not prepare

you for”. She cites the experience she had before she became an administrator as a contributing factor to her success.

Other participants indicated their pre-induction began with their portfolios at the university level. These participants cited the opportunity to participate in leadership responsibilities in other schools. Bob, an assistant principal of nine years, stated “I had never worked in an elementary or middle school until I had to do an internship for my master’s degree”. Bob stated that this process helped him to understand students better when they arrived at the high school where he currently serves. Bob added “Other than when I was there with my own children, I had not been in elementary and middle schools, especially at an administrative level”. The experience there was “eye opening to say the least”. Bob went on to say that this experience helped him in his role as a high school principal because “I saw what it took from the administrators I trained under how to handle parents and students”.

Manager (Discipline and Supervision). The majority of participants indicated their initiation into secondary school administration involved a manager type role. This role included discipline, supervision of activities, and general managerial type tasks. The supervisory activities included after school events such as athletics, school programs, school board meetings, etc.

Regarding discipline, Doug, a veteran high school principal with eighteen years of experience, states “ball games and school discipline, occasionally you get to sit in on a committee that would have something to do with curriculum” were the primary roles that he filled in his first few years as an administrator. Mickey, an eight year administrative veteran, echoed Doug’s statement by adding “I had no clue what I was doing, so I had to take a lead from the previous administrator. But it was mainly you are going to handle the discipline, you are

going to handle attendance, you are going to handle the tardies. I handled all of the confrontational aspects.” Hope, an eight year assistant principal, stated that her roles ranged from “curriculum and instruction to working with students, discipline, textbooks, custodians, etc.” Amy, a middle school principal with eight years of experience, indicated she had “all discipline at my school”. Her principal was nearing retirement and gave her additional roles to fill. Byron, an eight year veteran middle school principal, stated that “it was his role to handle all the discipline as an assistant principal. I felt like my main job was to make sure that my principal wasn’t disturbed so that she had the opportunity to handle the curriculum and not have any interruptions”. By taking the load of discipline from the principal, Byron felt the previous principal had the opportunity to be the “instructional leader, and not the school building manager.

As time passed during this induction cycle, some administrators became more comfortable in their role in discipline. Ken, a thirteen year career assistant principal, stated that “you have people come into your office. And lots of times, when I’m dealing with discipline, I try not to just really, you know, just jump all over them. I try to find out what’s causing the problem. I think that’s an area where I’ve grown a little bit. Instead of just calling them in and saying ‘this is your punishment’, I try to find out why they did what they did”. Ken indicated discipline was quite a challenge as he exited the classroom, but over a couple of years, he felt he had a better handle on it.

Early career school administrators also had supervisory responsibilities. Amy discussed having “all duties; morning duty, lunchroom duty, after school duty. I did it all because he (the previous administrator) was ready to retire. So I pretty much had to supervise everything”. Hope indicated her supervisory responsibilities were similar. “I supervised custodians, did

teacher observations, supervised bus arrivals and departures, you name it.” Mickey added “when you dealt with athletics and after school activities, this was also handed to me. I did the supervisory principal’s job, and he handled all the money aspects”. Eric, a veteran administrator with nineteen years of experience, had slightly more responsibilities at the onset of his career. He was a part time assistant principal and part time federal programs coordinator. “I handled supervision at school, but then transitioned into handling Title I and the other federal programs of safe and drug-free schools, section 504 compliance, and....migrant and ELL compliance. I did the budgets with that, budget and planning for federal programs.” Eric stated this process helped him as he became a high school principal. “I understood better how to manage the financial side of running a school since I had experience with making budgetary decisions.”

From a managerial perspective of secondary school administration, Jenny, a third year high school assistant principal indicates she is still in this early stage. Jenny states that “my first few years, I have been more like a manager. I just put out fires wherever they may be”. She indicated that during her first year, the school itself was in a bit of a transition. They were beginning a ninth grade academy at the school, so there was a bit of unrest about the direction the school was heading. Amy added regarding managerial duties “I felt that all I was doing was trying to keep things under control until the next day. I was not in the position long before I began to wonder if things would change. I am a person who likes change, but I didn’t see any hope for change in this position”. Hope added “I did a lot of management my first year, because of the way we were established at that point. My primary responsibilities were for one grade level. So I did a lot of management just getting my feet wet and getting comfortable”. Ken added that his first few years, he was “just learning the ropes of being a principal”. A few participants indicated they enjoyed the management side of school administration. Julia, an eight

year assistant principal, stated “I liked the variety of the first few years. I would come to school and I just didn’t know what it was going to be like. I really liked that part of it”. Bob stated “there was something new every day. It seemed there would be some routine to my job, but then the next day there was something different. I miss those days sometimes”.

An additional component of the managerial aspect of induction was understanding the expectations associated with being a new secondary school administrator. Shirley discussed this aspect during her interview. “My greatest learning experience was learning the importance of following guidelines, knowing your stuff, knowing what regulations, requirements, these kinds of things.” She indicated the only way to know these things is through the experiences you have as a beginning administrator. If teachers sense you are not aware of these types of things, “they will not respect you and you will have a very difficult time leading”. Jenny expressed that after working with teachers for a few years, “I got a little better feel for what I was supposed to do and what was expected. Not just expected by the teachers, but by the students and the community”.

Jerome, a current high school principal with nine years of experience, began his career as an elementary principal. “I didn’t know anything about elementary. I think a big turning point for me was when I realized what the expectations for me were from the faculty. It happened when a counselor asked me about a schedule for a student. I asked her how it had been handled in the past. She said she did those before, but didn’t know if that is how I wanted to do it. I told her to handle it because she was the expert in that regard. They (teachers) didn’t need me to handle everything. I could just let them do their job.” Jerome indicated that this has helped him in his role as a high school principal. “I let teachers teach. I give them what they need and get out of the way. I try to encourage them with walk-throughs and different strategies, but I believe they were hired to do a job and I am going to let them do it.”

Margaret, the most veteran of the female participants interviewed with eighteen years of administrative experience, stated that “everybody’s leadership style is different. I mean, being a female and having a large staff, I have to approach things differently. It took me a bit longer than I would have liked to find what was expected of me as an administrator”. Hope’s approach was to “stand back and take it all in and observe the culture for a while. By doing it that way, I was able to observe and decide what the expectations were for me”. Eric expresses caution with this type of approach. He states that “you cannot lose your faculty. You have to be proactive. I decided it was very important to develop a strong relationship with my faculty.” By establishing his own priorities and expectations, Eric states that he was able to accomplish his agenda early on in his career.

Curriculum. Many of the participants indicated during the induction process they felt the desire to be more involved in curriculum. Some had the unique opportunity to begin with curriculum and not some of the other tasks which were asked of other participants. Julia indicated her first few years she was “strictly curriculum and instruction. Meeting with classroom teachers, professional development, RTI. At that time, it was called Building Based Student Support Team.” Julia had been promoted from within her district, so she believed her transition was much easier. “I had been in the classroom there, so I was very familiar with the faculty, the school, the culture, and the community. My position was called the assistant principal of curriculum and instruction. So that was my initial role.” Doug’s role was similar. “I was very involved in the curriculum and on the building leadership team and all aspects of the curriculum and the school. There wasn’t a chance to burnout, because every day was different than the day before.” Gary, a twelve year administrator who is currently serving as a high school principal, recalls his first days as an elementary principal. “I was in charge of everything from

buses to curriculum to cafeteria workers. I didn't have an assistant principal, so I had it all.” Others had limited involvement in the curriculum aspects as incoming school administrators. Bob indicated that his role was made very clear to him early on in his career. “The principal told me that my job was to handle all things that weren't involved in curriculum. I handled textbooks, discipline, janitors, etc. I was included in observations with teachers, but that was about the extent of my curriculum involvement.”

Difficulty changing adults. While many of the participants enjoyed their induction experience, there were some issues which gave them more anxiety than others. One of the primary difficulties was the challenge of changing adults to see a different perspective. Julia states “I think a lot about how to lead adults because it's a balance between pushing and pulling. I feel like you want to push their thinking and challenge them to move forward, but you have to know when too much is too much because they (teachers) can get overwhelmed and shut down because they are very busy.” Julia states that this can create a rift between teachers and inexperienced administrators because teachers see their job as “this is who I am, not just what I do. It's not just a job for me. So you feel like you are being critical of them personally, when you are only trying to help them to improve”.

Hope had concerns because so many members of her faculty were older and had much more experience teaching than she had. “Coming to a high school that was very established and you know, very established in their ways. Some of them had been department heads for longer than I had been in education total.” This was intimidating for Hope when she had to ask teachers to change something as simple as their delivery in a class. “Teachers began to question my background. They would make comments like ‘you do have an elementary background, right?’ It was at that point that I felt I had to build my reputation even more. It's like when you don't

come from the same background of the position you are going to.” Hope responded to those who questioned her ability by pointing out that “I know what good teaching looks like no matter what age you are. I am not telling you how to teach the content of Physics. I’m telling you that your presentation is not reaching half of your class, so how can we work on that?” Through using verbiage to illustrate collaboration, Hope was able to achieve more and gain more acceptance with the faculty. “It took them understanding that I was trying to help them. Once they realized what my goals and my vision were, my credibility with the faculty increased dramatically.” Teachers became more accepting of Hope as she entered the classroom and offered advice on strategies, not subject matter.

Survival. The participants indicated several differing opinions regarding the beginning years of an administrative career, but there appeared to be one constant. The first few years can be a bit overwhelming. Bob states that “sometimes it is just about survival. Getting from one day to the next”. Margaret recalls her experience being named middle school principal ten days before school started and then losing the assistant principal and counselor to another school. “I was in survival mode there for a while. Had it not been for a wonderful, wonderful secretary, I may have left with them (laughter).” Gary had a similar overwhelming experience. He was hired to be an elementary principal three days after school had already started. “The superintendent gave me the keys and said you have traffic problems, go fix it. I had never even been inside the school. So that night, when I got the keys, I went out and toured the school for the first time.” He added “I walked in there and I was in charge of everything. PTO, who was going to use the facilities, buses, you name it.... School had already been going on. I mean, I walked in there and school was going.” There was still a bit of fear in Gary’s voice as he recalled this event which occurred over twelve years ago. “I ran through the gamut of emotions.

I had that anticipation, that excitement of being a new principal, of starting a new chapter in my life. But then, by the same token, I was scared to death. I had no idea what I was supposed to be doing.” These fears were relieved by a great faculty and a wife that was very helpful. “You know my wife is an elementary teacher. She was able to help me with the language and responsibilities of an elementary school principal”. Gary indicated taking over as a high school principal was much smoother. “When I was asked to take over here as principal of the high school, I still had a little fear, but I was not as overwhelmed as I was at that elementary school. I at least understood what I was supposed to do at a high school.”

Tanya, a middle school assistant principal in her first year, said “with everything that comes across this desk. There is no way they can prepare you in school for certain discipline issues, certain faculty issues. It just never seems to be the same”. She states that she has things each day she would like to accomplish, but “sometimes the job gets in the way of the job, if that makes sense”. Tanya keeps a notepad on her desk for tasks she feels she must perform each day. She placed the pad in front of the researcher during the interview and it was quite daunting. “I try to get to everything before I leave. But I have to remember that I have a family to go home to as well. As overwhelmed as I get, I am very thankful for this opportunity. I just have to do the best I can each day.”

Theme Two: Stabilization and Establishment.

The second major theme gathered through the data collected is that of stabilization and establishment of the administrator’s career. There were several instances wherein a participant would refer to feeling established in what they were doing. The term stabilized was also mentioned by several participants. There are three sub-themes related to stabilization and

establishment: trusting in self, building relationships and collaboration, and comfortable transition to new roles and responsibilities.

Trusting in self. There appears to be a certain level of confidence which must be gained if administrators feel they are moving forward in their careers. This confidence appears to arise from trusting that they are making the right decisions. Doug states that “I think we are doing now the things I have always had in the back of my mind that we would do. It’s just that you kind of have to get your staff to trust you enough and, where it’s not just ‘pie in the sky’ and they’ll follow you. I had to believe in my ability to lead and trust my instincts to get them to follow what I believed was the right course for our school”. He states that he believes now that his initiatives that he has put into place have led to the overall success of the school. In the researcher’s field notes, it was noted how much pride and confidence Doug appears to have when talking about a new program he developed called Connect. “You know I inherited all the staff when I got here. I just felt like after about four years here, I could put my thumbprint on everything. That is when I started initiating some of my own ideas and programs. I felt like I had been here long enough and everybody knew how I operate.”

Shirley had this approach. “I have never really felt ridiculously comfortable in the roles that I have played as a principal. I think that is what has made me successful thus far. I believe in myself and what I do. But I don’t ever want to feel comfortable. I think you become stale that way.” Shirley doesn’t believe there is a time frame on feeling stabilized as an administrator. “I have heard people say after four years is when you should start feeling comfortable. I have not been in one particular position for much longer than that, so I don’t put much stock in that theory. As a high school principal, that has been my most enjoyable role. I had a lot to prove to myself. I finally felt like I understood athletics. I can do it. I can do it well.” This level of

confidence helped Shirley to become more innovative in her role. Her opinion of transitioning from being in an induction phase and becoming established is “the biggest transition from being a novice administrator to an established administrator is that the tasks change and the decisions you have to make change, but the thought processes have to evolve. You finally gain a confidence I guess of ‘I can think this through’ in my opinion”. Shirley adds “at this level, you have to be able to make decisions with integrity and understand that the decisions you make have to be in the best interests of all stakeholders involved”. Jenny states that “I am confident now that I can make a mistake. If I make a mistake, I think our faculty knows that I will fix it and make it right. We don’t want to admit we make mistakes as administrators, but I am here to tell you that I mess up (laughter). But I think it has taken me these three years to be willing to admit it to our faculty”.

Hope felt she began to transition into an established stage during her second year. “The first part of my second year, I felt like I understood the school, I understood the students. I got some of those first observations under my belt that are always intimidating and that type of thing. I feel like what I do matters now and what I am doing is impacting the kids.” Byron struggled with this until after his third year. “I was dealing with angry parents, discipline issues with students. I went from being the favorite teacher to being the most hated man in the building. I was being called a racist as a black man in an almost all black school. And that was hard, but after the third year, I stopped taking things so personal. I knew if I have my evidence and my evidence was correct and I’m doing things by the book, it didn’t matter what the parents thought when I disciplined their child. I then had the confidence I needed to be successful from that point forward.” Gary echoed the sentiment shared by Byron. “I believe that I make decisions based on what is best for students. I think the confidence I have in making those every day

decisions is what has separated me from being a manager to being more of an instructional leader.”

Renee felt her transition to a more confident level as an administrator came from the confidence her principal showed in her. “I don’t think it was a particular thing. It was just that he would trust me to do more stuff. I think by him giving me more responsibility or to trust me with more things, or by asking my opinion on more things. I now feel like I don’t have to ask him if I need to make a decision. By him trusting me to do so, I have more confidence and trust in myself.”

Amy’s approach was a bit different than Renee’s. Amy felt early in her career she was asking too many questions. After the first year and a half or so, she stated that “I got this. It’s like, I don’t need to ask permission from the principal anymore. I’m actually kind of in charge here, so whatever I say is going to be what happens anyway. It took me a while to gain the confidence in myself, but now I can do this.” To reiterate, Amy’s principal at the time was nearing retirement and did not want to be bothered anyway. As an assistant principal, she stated that she was having to make decisions anyway, so she may as well “ask for forgiveness instead of permission”.

Building relationships and collaboration. The second sub-theme according to the data analysis is that of building relationships and collaboration. As many of the participants stated, developing confidence to make decisions led to their gaining a personal trust. The next area of feeling established was developing relationships with all stakeholders: faculty, students, parents, and the greater community.

As Doug sits in his office during our interview, the conversation turns to how he feels he has built relationships with his faculty over the years. Recently, Doug was a finalist for a

superintendency in a neighboring district. He did not receive the position. “That black box you see over there. That is a box of cards that on our first faculty meeting this year that, you know, I had no idea they were doing this but – you know for a fact it means our relationships are strong. I mean, we were trying to cover everything for the new year when I was interrupted by the faculty to present that box to me. That box has about eighty cards in in it. It’s where each faculty member sat down and wrote a card to me that said they were proud that I didn’t leave and so forth. That really meant a lot to me.” It was apparent to the researcher how much this meant to Doug. He was choked up as he was sharing this story. “Developing relationships don’t happen overnight. They have to be cultivated by being genuine, honest, and sincere. These teachers know that I can be very direct, but they also know I care about each and every one of them.”

Ken makes a point to share with his faculty a story every year about their students. He had to take a form home to a student’s parents to be signed and was “blown away” at the conditions the student was living in at his house. “I make it a point every year at our first faculty meeting. I tell our teachers, be a little bit more patient, be a little bit more lenient. Because if you don’t know where these kids come from, you need to get in your car one afternoon and ride around for about an hour. You’ll change your mind about these kids. It really enlightened me when I did that.” This was another instance where the researcher could tell the participant was having difficulty telling this story. It was an emotional moment for Ken. “From that day forward, I decided to invest my life into the lives of these kids. It is not about me anymore, but about them.” He said that he believes this has helped him to develop his relationship with the faculty as well. “Since I started this with the faculty, they seem to respect me a little bit more. They can really see that I have no agenda. I am in this business strictly for the students. I

believe my relationship with them has improved from this as much as anything has in my career here.”

Ken also discusses collaborating with other district principals and assistant principals to utilize their expertise in developing relationships. “We (principals, directors) meet about once a month. We do a lot of planning, a lot of professional development, and a lot of collaboration. It’s good to find out what is working in the other schools. It’s been a real blessing just knowing that we are not the only ones that are having certain problems. The assistant principals at the other high schools deal with the same types of problems that I deal with. So I think developing relationships with the other staff has been an important part in my feeling more secure and established in my role.”

As Renee puts it “It’s not just about curriculum. It’s not just about lesson plans and what is on STI. It’s about relationships with other people”. She states that her primary concern is to be there for her faculty and staff. “If we collaborate and take care of our teachers, they will take care of their classrooms. This will lead to students being taken care of and having success. We are not ‘Big Brother’. We are not watching everything you (teachers) do. We have to develop trust and the teachers have to see that trust in us.”

Jerome talks about the relationship he has developed with his staff with excitement. “I have established myself with my staff so that now – there’s not a thousand questions if something comes up. They know that I make decisions that I have thought through. They also know that by supporting me that I will reciprocate and respect them in the decisions they make. This has led to a sense of community on our staff.” Eric states it this way. “I learned as an assistant principal the importance of relationships with students, parents, and faculty. And the Stephen F. Covey concept of relationship deposit and withdrawals is such a powerful influence

on how successful you will be as an administrator.” Eric shared with me a dilemma he believes all administrators share. “Are you going to be student centered, teacher centered, parent centered, superintendent centered? I went through the process of developing relationships with all the families, the kids, then, over time, it transitioned more to the people you want to persuade. I’m a big proponent of not coercing, but trying to persuade people to do this and that. Initially, I wanted it to be for the students and the parents.” He does admit that “there is a delicate balance here. You can’t lose your faculty in terms of developing a relationship with them”.

Margaret discusses the importance of allowing your faculty to perform their duties as assigned. “I’ve learned to delegate a little more. I can’t be great at everything and when I’ve got good people around me, then that’s going to be beneficial for the school. Margaret states that when people are given responsibilities, that helps in developing relationships with your staff. “I sincerely believe teachers want responsibility. When I give them a task, whether it be as a committee chair or whatever, they get the sense that I have confidence in them and I trust them. This has gone a long way for me in developing relationships with my faculty at all the schools I have been.”

Gary states that his relationships with students have allowed him to build relationships with all stakeholders as an administrator. “When I say I make decisions based on the best interest of the students, then it boils down to all faculty members should buy into that because that is what we are supposed to be there for. You have got to love kids, and you have got to care about them. If you do that, then you are doing what your job calls for you to do.” Gary believes this philosophy has helped him develop his relationships with his faculty. “They (teachers) see how I interact with kids. You can’t fake caring about kids. Many of our faculty members have had students here since I have been the principal. They are less likely now to question my

decisions because they know that I try to do what I can and make decisions on the best interest of students.”

Comfortable transition to new roles and responsibilities. The third and final component of the Stabilization and Establishment theme is that of having a comfortable transition to new roles and responsibilities. Doug described arriving at work and knowing “there is a lot more to this place than knowing the finances and understanding the routines involved with running this school”. He stated that being successful and established as an administrator requires feeling “confident and showing that confidence so that the faculty and students understand that you know what you are doing”. Ken echoed this by stating that “after about five years, I felt pretty comfortable with just about anything that may come my way. Teachers believe I know what I am doing and that seems to make things better for me personally. It just adds to my confidence”.

Ken also worked as an assistant for a second principal after the first year. “It was her first position as a high school principal, so I felt at the time that I basically knew more about running the school than she did.” He stated that he knew the culture and the faculty as well as anyone. “The new principal, well, she was a little overwhelmed. I was able to show her the ropes, so to speak. I was confident in what I knew how to do and we eventually made a good team. I think she would have struggled had I not been here to help. I have a pretty good idea of what I want to see happen and now it’s more of a collaboration really.”

Jerome stated that his was a comfortable transition because he didn’t have to learn the faculty. “Since I was a co-worker to the faculty before I took my first job, after learning how to manage the school, I was pretty comfortable after three years. I knew the faculty well, so that wasn’t an issue. They knew how hard I was willing to work for students to be successful, so that

made the transition smooth.” He said this helped him as he transitioned to his new position as a high school principal. “Moving here (to the high school), there was a bit of a transition, but I had already worked in a middle school and was friends with the person who retired from here. This was smooth with the exception of having to relieve some staff members of their coaching duties.”

Julia compared her establishment as an administrator to that of a teacher. “It’s kind of like a first year teacher, nothing compares to your first year of teaching. But after that, you can anticipate situations that may come up. You can be more proactive in situations. I feel after this first year as an assistant principal, I had my feet under me and I felt established.” She also felt after each job she has held, she has gone through that same transition again, stating “It just don’t take as long to get acclimated as it did the first time”.

Theme Three: Professional.

The third major theme identified through data analysis was that of a professional stage. After the initial induction and feeling established phase, many participants responded they felt they were transitioning to a new level. Several of these indicated they were established, but believed there was more to their career. There are three sub-themes associated with the professional theme: intrinsic rewards and passion for the job, reflections of past mistakes and the use of data to improve as an administrator.

Intrinsic rewards and passion for the job. Many of the participants indicated that intrinsic rewards are a common characteristic of those who appear to be transitioning past the establishment stage. Bob stated that “I felt comfortable in what I was doing. I could have had the same role and completed my career. But I felt there was more for me as an administrator. That is when I became more involved in what was happening with the students. Their learning.”

This was not an uncommon feeling. Shirley indicated that her greatest joy was watching students succeed. “But when you can really impact the learning that’s going on in the classroom, the satisfaction of students and the teachers and the parents for what’s going on, there’s nothing more rewarding than that to me.” Mickey echoed the sentiments of Shirley. “When I can go to work and I see that what I am doing matters by the end of the day, I feel like I have had a good day.”

One characteristic the participants displayed during the interview process was their passion for what they do. While some are still early in their careers, their drive to see students succeed was obvious. Byron had this approach. “If you love what you are doing and you enjoy what you are doing, then the kids are going to feed off that. So my job is to try to make their (teachers) job as pleasant as possible.” Bob added “When teachers are taken care of, then they take care of students. They (students and teachers) have to see that I care about what I do. If we (administrative staff) are not motivated and fired up every day, then how can we expect them to be?”

Byron also discussed how important character is for a professional administrator. “I didn’t go out and party with the faculty. They called me an anti-social. I just knew I wasn’t going to be a teacher forever.....So when you are at a bar downtown and drunk, you never know when a parent or a student will walk in and see you there. I believe to be a professional you have to show that you respect yourself.” Byron went on to add that he didn’t treat the faculty members differently because they went out for drinks, but “it just wasn’t for me”. Jeremy added “I am, in a lot of ways, the only role model for many of these kids. If I want them to see an example of professionalism, I have to be careful about what I do. This is not always easy. I

want to scream at referees at basketball games, but I have to know that my students will model my behavior.”

Margaret discussed how her longevity in a particular position allowed her to transition from a “comfortable” state. “I learned a lot about myself in my first five years; what I will do, what I will stand for, what I won’t stand for. That is helpful to me. I had been there a long time and I knew what was expected of the principal position.” Ken, who has been in the same school for twenty eight years, stated “there is just something about being here for as long as I have. Since working with a new principal a few years ago, he has allowed me to do some things I had wanted to try for a while, with discipline and teacher observations. Even though I am an assistant principal, I believe I am making a difference by trying.” Jeremy, a former middle school principal who has transferred to a high school position in recent years indicated “I could have stayed at that middle school and been very innovative I believe. But, that just wasn’t what was best for me at the time. I felt this opportunity presented a chance for me to be challenged on a lot of different levels.”

Reflections of past mistakes. Julia, a former high school principal who decided to go back into the classroom because of issues between herself and the superintendent, spoke of stepping back and looking at past successes and failures as a measure of how one has grown and transitioned as an administrator. “I was too worried (when leaving the principalship) about what people were going to think of me. Did she get fired? Am I no good as a leader? Those types of things. I just feel like those are things you have to learn from and deal with from time to time.” When asked what she would have done differently if the same situation occurred today, Julia stated “I would have stood my ground more. I deferred to her (superintendent) authority more

than I should have. I wish my state of mind had been ‘fire me if that’s what you want to do, but I am going to do what I believe is best for my students’.”

Margaret discussed how in retrospect she respected the principal she worked for during her early career. “I called him recently and told him I was sorry if I had ever said anything critical of him for the job he did. You don’t realize how difficult this job is until you sit in this chair. There is so much more to this job than even I could ever dream. You just don’t see that as an assistant.” Gary agreed. “The previous administrators that I had worked for, they showed me a path of how to do things. I didn’t always agree with what they did, but now I appreciate they had the courage to do what they did.”

Eric talked about the mistakes he made previously. “I made mistakes as an assistant principal that I said I would not make as a principal. And I haven’t. And if I would have moved into a principal position too quickly, before I was ready, those mistakes would have been difficult to overcome from as a principal with faculty, students, and families.” April added, “Looking back at when I first started and seeing where I am now, I can’t help but think that I have grown because of the mistakes I have made. But, I will say, the mistakes that were made were not intentional to hurt anyone. It was what I thought was best at the time. I am now much more measured when I make a decision.”

Use of data. The third and final sub-theme associated with the professional theme is that of the use of data to improve student achievement. Gary recommended “As an elementary school principal, I probably learned more from data meetings than in anything I did. I got to the high school, and data meetings were non-existent. We have started, my assistant and I, administering Global Scholars to all of our students. He and I do it together. We administer the

test and gather the data. We use this data to help ensure our students are getting what they need.”

There was no participant who spoke regarding data more than Eric. Eric’s experience as an elementary principal also helped in with his views of utilizing data. “Anything that is important should be measured. But it is very important to be measured, but it has to be reported.” Eric compared test scores to basketball games. “Why do we keep score in basketball? To measure the outcome. Our coaches are compared after each game. You either win or lose. I want the same concept with test scores. We are comparing our school and reporting to the board how we are doing against Hoover, Homewood, Mountain Brook, Hartselle, Athens, whoever. But it has to be on something that is measured.” Eric added “It is important that we own the school. If we take ownership in the data that is developed, then we can improve the areas that need to be improved. It’s really simple, but it takes time and energy to follow where the data leads.”

Eric reports this information various ways. “I email results to parents all the time. I have a newsletter. I sing from the rooftops all of the good things we are doing at our school. If I don’t do it, who will?” Eric also has a program that he likes to call Shark. “I kind of stole Shark from a previous administrator. I like to say it’s either eat or be eaten. I am proactive in all that I do. Shark is a means of reporting data and letting the data speak for itself. I use my Shark reports for board meetings. If a board member calls and says people are complaining that we have too many fights on campus, I pull out my Shark report and say ‘I only see that we have had four fights all year. That’s down from six the year before.’ You see, I let the data answer the questions for me.”

Eric not only evaluates student data, he surveys the faculty, students, and parents annually. “I want to know what people think about our school. Do our students feel safe? Do parents think we teach with rigor?” He adds that not only does he survey the stakeholders, he evaluates the data and uses it to write improvement plans for his school. “We have to write a CIP (Continuous Improvement Plan) every year anyway. Why would I just put something on paper that isn’t relevant to what we are trying to accomplish? I want it to be something useful that we can help our students with.” Eric operates with a basic tenet in mind. “I want to focus on the important and not the immediate. Let me put it this way. I have on my calendar that I am going to work with teachers today on a reading initiative. I believe this is an area we can improve and I think it is important. A parent calls and demands a conference with me today. I don’t drop the reading initiative that I had planned on doing and meet with the parent. I have my secretary schedule a meeting for later. That serves two purposes. I can focus on the important. Plus, if the parent was angry, it gives them another day to calm down.”

Eric asserts that it is important to develop a purpose, and this purpose is dictated by the data collected. “What is true and important about our school? What is it that we need to be doing well? And if you don’t have a purpose, then everyone on your team can do their own thing and be a star. If that happens, you get infighting. You get disruptions. Those are the things that are damaging to student achievement.” Jerome agrees. “We have a purpose statement that we model everything we do after. It is derived from feedback we have received from the Southern Association (accreditation) process. We want all that we do to reflect our purpose statement.”

Theme Four: Distinguished

The fourth theme identified from the data analysis is that of distinguished. Being a distinguished secondary school administrator, according to the participants, indicates the administrator is leaving behind a legacy not just at the school, but at the district as a whole. Eric stated that “I want my school to carry on and be even greater after I leave”. The distinguished theme has four sub-themes: vision, empowering and building capacity, state and national recognitions, and self-directed initiatives.

Vision. The sub-theme of vision was a topic many of the veteran participants reflected upon. There was a range of ideas with vision, from handling discipline to theories as to how to run schools. Byron talked about the problems his school was experiencing when he took over as principal. “We had fights among students daily. I had watched this occur as an assistant principal and I wanted it to stop. So, about the third week of school, I had an assembly and brought in the police department. I told all of our students. If you fight, three things are going to happen: you will be arrested, charges will be filed, and you will be placed in an alternative school. After the assembly, within the hour, we had a fight. I did the exact three things I mentioned. Our fights are now almost nonexistent and we are an inner city school.” Byron’s vision for how he wanted to shape his school did not just entail this assembly and these rules. “I made a decision that I was going to be visible in the school. I am seen almost every period in the hallways. My staff is in the hallways as well. We wanted to create a culture that fighting, drugs, and all that culture would not be tolerated.” As the researcher toured the campus with Byron, it was noted how respectful and kind the students were to Byron. His interactions with the students indicate a person who has a firm grip on the pulse of his school. Another aspect of Byron’s vision is that of all staff are in charge. “When I was an assistant, I wanted my principal to be

able to focus on curriculum. Unfortunately, when I had to be out, the students knew it and acted up. What we are doing now is, I am involved in discipline as much as my assistant. When either one of us is not on campus, our school climate doesn't change. We had to create it though. It didn't just happen that way."

Eric's vision, as stated earlier, involves what he calls the "Fog of Education". He asserts that administrators get too caught up in the immediate, and not the important. "When you walk on campus in the morning, there are going to be so many interruptions. So if you are not educated and organized, then how can I get to the important and get past the immediate? Then you get bogged down, and you can't get your school and your people where you need them to go." This is even reflected in the faculty and staff Eric hires. "I want people I have to stop, not start. I want people who do too much too soon, not the other way around. I would rather slow you down than try to get you to go." He states that he believes this helps his school avoid the "fog".

An additional management philosophy Eric has is that of responding too soon to issues. "I believe that you should never put off 'til tomorrow what you can put off the day after tomorrow. Most of the mistakes I have made in my career have been from responding to a crisis too soon. So when something happens, something's going on, it's never wrong to say, I need more time and to wait. And then, if it's still a problem in two or three days – and a lot of times, things just seem to work out." Don echoes this point by adding, "You have to determine if certain things are worth the battle. Taking a day or two to digest it is not a bad thing. Sometimes it goes away, but at worst, you have time to make a smart decision." Bob noted, "You have to be careful when making quick decisions. My philosophy is that friends come and

go, but enemies accumulate. So, when you make an enemy in making your decisions and in operating the school, you need to question yourself, 'is it worth it'?

Another example of vision is being able to approach the district leadership with a philosophy and garner support. Shirley stated "I was hired to do a job. We had ARI come in and make suggestions based on their philosophy. I told our superintendent to look at our results. We were successful and our faculty did not want to change what we were doing. Our superintendent shared with the ARI folks, 'You know, Shirley is doing a great job. She is getting good results. We are going to continue doing what we are doing.' That meant a lot to me. I was supported because I had gained a certain degree of credibility among the stakeholders. Then I had to back it up, but that was okay too." Eric adds, "I tell my superintendents all the time. If you are going to tell me to do something and it's your idea, then you own it. Don't hold me accountable for what you are telling me to do. Otherwise, let me do it my way and then you can hold me accountable." As stated earlier, Eric is a strong believer in the utilization of data. He also added that he shares with his superintendents, "Make sure the loud doesn't outnumber the majority. That is why I do surveys and use Shark. I want to make sure the superintendent has the right information. That is another reason why I am so data driven. I don't own the data, I just manage it."

Another aspect which displays vision is the leadership of the participants. Byron recalled when he felt he was reaching the point of being at the top of the administration ladder. "(As an assistant principal) we were having a CIP (Continuous Improvement Plan) meeting and I had no idea what we were talking about. Now, I lead the CIP meetings. I am able to decipher the CIP information and actually take the lead in what we are trying to accomplish." Jerome agreed. "When we do our walk-throughs with faculty members, I conduct the follow up meetings. I now

understand what I am looking for, and I believe the faculty has picked up on that as well. We are leading and trying to improve achievement, not trying to catch someone doing something wrong and embarrass them.” Amy adds, “What’s rewarding is where you can see a major impact that we as a school or a principal have on a child’s life”.

Empowering and building capacity. A second sub-set of the distinguished theme is that of empowering teachers and building capacity. Empowering teachers to assume leadership roles is not easy. Shirley states “The main focus and what I have found to be the most challenging is building capacity, empowering, and instilling ownership on the teacher’s behalf”. It is a challenge that, according to Hope, can only be attained after an administrator has made it to a certain level. “I think probably in the last two years, I have felt like I really have been given more of the green light to explore my passions for building capacity and to really put in some of the things that I want to do. I felt like I had enough local capital and enough success that I could get this done.” Eric adds, “You have to weigh the balance between empowering teachers to lead and letting go of personal power. It’s a difficult balancing act.” Eric shares with his teachers “You were hired to do a job. I am not going to micromanage what you do. The only thing I ask is that you understand our organization and the role that you play in it. We all need to own the organization.”

State and national recognition. An additional sub-theme of the distinguished theme is the recognition that administrators, schools, and districts receive. The participants who have received these awards speak to these awards and honors with great pride. They did not hesitate in passing the credit on to others, but nonetheless, were humbled and honored by the recognition. Margaret was named Alabama Middle School Principal of the Year before she transitioned to being a high school principal. “This was a great honor for our community. It was a very

humbling experience. I was so fortunate that I was able to be on some national and state boards. I was able to receive some personal professional development by serving on some of the boards.” She added, “That was one of the highlights of my career because it was more about the success of my school, not me. It brought some recognition to our middle school that would not have happened otherwise.”

The researcher noted that school-wide recognitions were what brought out the biggest smiles from the participants. Margaret spoke about being recognized by the governor’s office. “A lot of principals did good jobs, or great jobs. But for your school itself to be recognized, that meant a lot.” Eric’s school was named as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. “Our test scores were out of sight. It was nice that this was noticed and to be recognized as a Blue Ribbon School was special for our community.” Doug’s school has been recognized as a banner school on multiple occasions. “This is a really neat thing because it allows other school systems, principals, teachers, board members, to come in and see how we are doing things in our school. It reinforces that sense of pride in that maybe we are doing something right here.”

Self-directed initiatives. The final sub-theme of the distinguished category is self-directed initiatives. This is defined as when administrators create and implement their own program at their school. Doug asserts one of his best initiatives was what he refers to as Connect. “I sincerely believe that one of the most important ways to reach students is to have a faculty that is on the same page. Each year, I organize a retreat for our faculty. It is a three day event that is paid for by our Partners in Education. We divide up into groups and have lots of fun, team building type activities. It is hard during the year to get everyone on the same page. This is a means we use to help us to come together as a faculty.”

Hope has taken to utilizing the World Wide Web and social media as a means of reaching others. “I, and two of my colleagues, have created and started moderating Twitter chats. These are used to communicate with administrators all over the world. We share and exchange ideas of things that have worked, as well as things that have not worked so well. Although we moderate the chats, we have learned as much or more than the people posting. It has been a great source for us as administrators to share ideas.” Hope has also been involved in leading the Engaged Learning Initiative at her school.

Byron, the inner city middle school principal, started an initiative to involve all stakeholders at his school. “We started a fall festival for our kids. We had booths set up and even a booth set up for students to hit me or my assistant principal with a pie. This was outside the box for me. I don’t like students to put their hands on me. This gave them an opportunity to see me in a different light.” This festival led Byron to another initiative. “I noticed that our festival was only our black and white students. Our Hispanic students did not attend. So, I decided to have a district wide, with the approval of the superintendent of course, an open house for our Hispanic population. We had interpreters there who assisted in answering questions about our schools. This began to break down some of the barriers for the parents of these students. I explained to our staff that if this works, it can change the culture of how we are viewed in their community. It was a huge success and we are planning this year’s event now. It didn’t take much, but a committee of people who cared.”

Theme Five: Frustration

The fourth theme identified in the data analysis was that of frustration. All of the participants in this study indicated they have had some level of frustration during their careers.

There are three sub-themes in the frustration category: isolation, physical and mental exhaustion, and lack of trust within the district.

Isolation. The sense of isolation was a pervasive topic with the participants. It didn't seem to matter what level of experience, there were distinct periods of isolation at some point in the participant's career. Shirley acknowledged "It's a lonely place because trying to do what you need to do, but you can't share the woes of what you are doing with other people". One of the most difficult periods in Shirley's career came one Sunday morning in church. "I walked into church and so many people, for their own reasons, were upset with a decision I had made. I felt as I were on an island with no hope of survival." Jerome adds "One of the most difficult times was on my first day, everyone gets ready to go to lunch and I am still standing there. The group I had eaten lunch with for years has now left me behind. That took some getting used to."

Doug discussed how difficult it was when he first became the high school principal. "People would say things like 'you're new, you've never experienced what we have to go through here'. Those were trying times. I was a well-established educator, but then I felt like I had to prove myself all over again." Doug also felt isolated because some felt he got the position in an unfair manner. "I used to fish with one of the central office people. I didn't fish with him because I wanted a job. I fished with him because I love to fish. We had been fishing together for years. I knew that I didn't do anything wrong, but that didn't stop the talking."

Physical and mental exhaustion. The second sub-theme is that of physical and mental exhaustion. Again, almost all of the respondents experienced issues in this area. For Shirley, the exhaustion had an effect on her family. "You know, I put myself out there for nine hundred other families while mine is at home alone. I was working fifteen to eighteen hour days for other people's children and ignoring my own. I knew I had to get a handle on that or I was not going

to make it.” Bob had a similar sentiment. “My wife developed cancer a few years back. I tried to focus on helping her to get better, but my responsibilities at work seem to always be on my mind. I don’t think it is necessarily a bad thing, because I believe if you do put forth the effort to do a good job and are passionate about what you do, then you are going to be invested in the job. It can be exhausting though.”

Ken’s experience was the amount of the workload. “I often feel like I am drowning. There is so much to get done. So many students and teachers that need something. I often go home with a major list of things to do the next day. Sometimes I can, but more often than not, I can’t.” Tanya has felt the same way. “There have been days when I have gotten in my car and said, you know, that is not been one of my better days.” When asked by the researcher if there was any training she had experienced to help her through those times, Tanya said “I mean, it sounds silly, but there are things that you encounter on a daily basis that I think just having a level head prepares you for it. I’m not sure if there is any professional development can help out there.” Renee indicates her stress levels indicate “when you can’t seem to get it all done in a single day. I come to school with a list and I go home a lot of days with that very same list. It can be very frustrating.”

Some stress can be the result of others not performing their tasks in a reasonable amount of time. Byron asserts “I shouldn’t have to ask a person two or three times to do what needs to be done. Be a professional. Do it the first time I ask you to do it.” These types of interactions with faculty members who do not share the load appear to be common. Jenny responds “I expect people to do their job like I did mine when I was teaching. It is extremely frustrating to have to go back and ask the teacher over and over to do what they shouldn’t have had to be told to do in the first place.” Ken has experienced frustration with teachers as well. “You know you’re doing

what you think is best for the school and for the kids, but you got to have the faculty buy in and some of them would not. Some days you just can't seem to get them to believe in what you are trying to accomplish.”

Additionally, as Byron points out, parents can be the root of a lot of stress on the school administrator. “The biggest stress I have is dealing with unruly parents. No matter what evidence I have, no matter what I have to go on, they are going to fight you tooth and nail. You don't get the support from the parents that you should be getting, and that's the frustrating part. They are just hurting their child. It's just sad when the one person who is supposed to be helping the child the most is actually hurting them the most.” Gary echoes that sentiment as well. “We seem to have a generation of people who are raising children to be their friends. They need to be parents. It makes it difficult for us. We become the bad guy when we try to discipline their children.”

Margaret indicates she doesn't get to do as much as an instructional leader as she would like. “I don't get to wear that (instructional leader) hat as much as I would like to. Too many other distractions.” She adds “I don't feel like I am in the classroom enough. That is where I can make the greatest impact, but ‘stuff’ gets in the way.” Mickey agrees. “I feel like I spend all of my time doing things that I don't feel are productive. I have to supervise the cafeteria. I would like for the principal to have the teachers supervise the cafeteria while I am working on something curriculum related. I just feel I am wasting time.”

Lack of trust within the district. The final sub-theme associated with frustration is that of a lack of trust within the district. The worst experience with this lack of trust came from a former employer of Julia. “My superintendent wanted me to report everything that happened back to her. Everything in the community, in the classroom, it didn't matter. She wanted to

know. Early on, I had some minor things that I did not share with her. This created a firestorm from the district office. It was obvious that I was ‘the enemy’, when in fact, I was working hard to build trust back from my end to the superintendent.” Her level of frustration began to spread throughout the district. “There was an assistant superintendent who I thought I had a good relationship with. He began interviewing candidates for teaching positions at my school without my knowledge. He was offering positions to teachers without my knowledge. These were decisions being made that should have been in the building, not at the district office. I decided it was best for me to step aside and move to a different district even if it meant going back into the classroom.” Julia eventually did go back to teach in a neighboring district. She is now at a neighboring high school as an assistant principal.

Other participants had similar experiences. Jerome discusses feeling undermined. “Our superintendent is elected. He got upset with me about a sign that I let a politician pay for that just said ‘Thanks for coming by’. It was a state representative, not a candidate for superintendent. He didn’t directly come to me, but had word sent that he was not happy. I picked up the phone and asked his secretary for a meeting. She said he was busy for several days and she would get back to me. He never did. That was frustrating. But I’ll tell you this. The sign is still up to this day.” Bob’s experience was with an opportunity for a promotion within the district. “A central office employee who did not care for me or my family told the assistant superintendent that I didn’t really want the job. She said that I had told her privately that I just wanted it for the pay raise to help my retirement. None of that was true. She had a friend who had also applied. That person got the position and I didn’t. There is no way to describe how mad I was about that. I almost left education altogether because of such political nonsense at the district office.”

Theme Six: Professional Development

The third research question associated with this study states that the researcher is seeking to identify and explicate implications these findings have for professional development decisions/strategies at the district and local levels. By the nature of the question, there was a theme that developed for professional development as a result of this study. There are three sub-themes associated with professional development: CLAS (Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools), university studies, and mentoring.

CLAS. The most discussed professional development among the participants was CLAS. Shirley has had great experiences with CLAS. “I’ve been really active in CLAS. I think they do a great job of offering professional development to administrators at all levels. I think for principals to be successful at the secondary level they need a tremendous amount of support. I believe CLAS provides that support.” Jerome echoed Shirley’s statements. “I think the CLAS conference is the best professional development that I have throughout the year. They do a lot of professional development for principals.” Jerome likes CLAS meetings because they are strictly about professional development. “Too often, our meetings with central office are informational. We need to be meeting to grow as professionals. If you have information, email it to me and I will get it to the people that need it.” Margaret likes the CLAS meetings because they are cost effective. “I get a lot of professional development from CLAS that I would otherwise not have had the ability to pay for.”

Julia states that the CLAS professional development have helped her mature as a leader. “Through their professional development offerings and experience, I have gotten better at questioning and better at the coaching part of administration. Where you can help lead people to the answer rather than telling them the answer. Working with people that way is how I have

improved as an instructional leader. Offerings by CLAS have helped in this area.” Byron agreed. “You can sit in a classroom all day long. However, when you do that, you are not at your school where you are needed. CLAS offers ‘Lunch and Learn’ where administrators can experience professional development through a webinar. This has helped me because if I don’t like the topic, I do something else instead of watching. But if it is relevant, I don’t have to leave my office to get it. I am going to eat anyway (laughter), so why not learn something while I am eating.”

University studies. Many of the participants interviewed cited their professional growth came primarily from their studies in educational leadership at the university level. All of the participants in this study had a minimum of a master’s degree in education leadership. Some had achieved doctoral status. Eric states that he had a distinct advantage after completing his doctoral studies. “It made a huge difference having completed my doctoral degree, because there you are taught the processes and procedures. A lot of my courses were theoretical, but being in class with others who were experiencing similar situations and circumstances made for great professional growth.” His graduate work also helped Eric gain trust with his faculty. “They would ask ‘how do you know all this?’ I would tell them that ‘I have a degree in that. I know how to do it because I was trained in that.’ What I was doing as an administrator was not an experiment. It had been tried and proven over the years by many people.” Bob echoed this as well. “I can’t imagine going to a CLAS conference without having the background that I have from the university level. I don’t think number one that I would understand what they were talking about, and number two, I wouldn’t know where to begin regarding implementation of any initiative.”

There were some who had differing opinions regarding university training. Gary stated “universities do a good job of teaching you tactical things. But when you walk through that door, you don’t realize all the little pieces that have to fit together to make this thing work. I guess for me, that was the biggest shock. The biggest challenge is to make things run smoothly at your school.” Renee echoed and said some of her experiences no one could have seen or prepared her for. “There are just some things principal school doesn’t prepare you for. We had a teacher have an aneurysm on the day of graduation. She was at school and was fine and the next minute she was in the hospital. She died that afternoon before graduation. There is no professional development that can prepare you for that experience. For trying to congratulate the graduates while hurting so much for losing a friend and colleague.”

Mentoring. The final sub-theme for professional development is that of mentoring. Shirley discussed mentoring by stating “We were very fortunate to have a very strong mentoring program for not only our teachers, but also our assistant principals and principals. The mentoring program allows you to have support from within. I love the whole concept, that’s why we’re so involved with the new mentors, a new principal mentor program. Because if this is used properly, it can be an invaluable tool for new staff.” One area mentoring has helped in Julia’s district is by giving her someone to role play with. “I will ask ‘can we role play this tough situation? Can we role play calling a parent about what their child has done? Can we role play these critical conversations that I need to have with these teachers?’ This is just a form of modeling behaviors. I want to see it and learn from it in this way.”

While these are formal mentoring programs, some participants feel that informal mentoring programs are just as effective. Doug cites several people who were in his life that served as informal mentors. “These people were transformational leaders when that concept was

not even being discussed.” Ken adds “The principal I work for now has helped me in a lot of ways. He has offered to let me lead and make decisions, while offering advice when there are things that have not gone well for him in the past. That is the kind of mentoring I need at this stage in my career.”

Sub-Group Comparisons

There are two sub-groups the researcher will discuss in this section in an attempt to determine if there are differences between them. The sub-groups identified are male and female, as well as Title I schools and non-Title One schools from which the participants are currently working.

Male and Female Comparison. As stated, the participants in this research study included eight males and eight females. Each of the participants in both of these gender sub-groups are operating across the span of the career developmental stages. There were two areas which the researcher postulates as identifiable differences. They are relationships and self-directed initiatives.

Relationships. As the researcher has analyzed the data from this study, there appeared to be a difference in the responses from the participants by gender in regard to interpersonal relationships, particularly in the stabilization and establishment career development stage. The researcher noted that of the participants who discussed the importance of relationships, there were twice as many references from the male participants as from the female participants in this area. Jerome discussed the importance of knowing teachers on a “personal level”. Eric added that he learned early in his career the importance of having a relationship with all stakeholders. That sentiment was echoed by Doug. “You have to build a relationship with the stakeholders to develop trust.” The female participants in this study, particularly in the stabilization and

establishment stage, discussed trusting in themselves and decision making in more detail than the importance of relationship building. For clarification, the researcher does not mean to imply the female participants do not believe building relationships is not important. It was not discussed as often by females during the interview process.

Self-directed initiatives. One area in which female instructional leaders appeared to be different than their male counterparts was in the area of self-directed initiatives. While there were some programs discussed by the male participants, the Connect program discussed by Don and the data driven Shark program by Eric, these were programs which were established after the instructional leader had been in place for a number of years. The self-directed initiatives established by the female participants were implemented much earlier in their careers. Additionally, the initiatives discussed by the female participants were more global in scope than that of their male counterparts. There was a greater opportunity for outside participation. As Margaret discussed her recognition as Middle School Principal of the Year, there were opportunities for her to share as a presenter at many conferences during that time period. Those opportunities have afforded her many more chances to speak at professional development conferences throughout her career. The social media platform which Hope has established is another medium in which instructional leaders can share ideas and create a global professional learning community. The researcher contends this was not a great difference, but it was noticeable in the data analysis process.

Title I and non-Title I Schools. There also appeared to be a difference between those instructional leaders who worked at Title I schools as opposed to non-Title I schools. Of the sixteen participants in the study, there were seven who worked at Title I schools. Some of these were rural schools, while some were urban schools. The primary difference noted by the

researcher with these schools was the experiences of the instructional leaders during the induction career development stage. Many of the title school instructional leaders experienced management and discipline problems early in their respective careers. Byron described the law enforcement assembly he had after becoming the principal of the inner city school as something that represented a turning point for the future of his school. Doug discussed how difficult being a new instructional leader was at his inner city school with the discipline issues associated there. “The first few years, it was about maintaining order.” This was not just the case with inner city schools. Amy, who teaches in a rural county school with a high free and reduced lunch rate, described discipline and survival much more so than did her suburban counterparts. These experiential differences led the researcher to conclude the transition from induction to the stabilization stage may have been delayed in schools with high poverty rates.

The researcher would like to add that these schools, although with high poverty rates, had instructional leaders who worked diligently to create an environment which was conducive to student achievement. Doug’s school is familiar to the researcher due to its location. During Doug’s tenure, there has been a noticeable change in the way that school is viewed in his area. Student achievement is trending upward and there are significant developments in the relationship aspects of his school. The same can be said of Bobby and Amy’s school. While this researcher does note there are possible limited experiences in these higher poverty schools, their instructional leaders have dedicated their careers to making a difference for their students and staff.

Summary of Chapter IV

The instructional leaders interviewed for this research study displayed a tremendous commitment to their profession and the dedication to improving student achievement that should be the goal of any school administrator. These participants explained in great detail various aspects of their careers and how they have arrived at the point where they are currently operating as instructional leaders. The participants discussed what they believe are the key elements to being a successful instructional leader. Each of the sixteen participants was open and willing to share their personal experiences in how their careers have been shaped throughout the years. The participants reflected on their lived experiences as instructional leaders, as well as the impact that professional development has had on their individual careers. The interviews provided rich and robust data that has enabled the researcher to gain an opportunity to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this study.

The researcher was able to identify six themes from the participant's responses and the data analysis. The six themes found in this study were: Induction, stabilization and establishment, professional, distinguished, frustration, and professional development. The themes and analysis will provide a basis for the conclusions and recommendations which will follow in Chapter V.

In Chapter V, the researcher will include the answers to the research questions posed, conclusions drawn from the research, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. The researcher will also be including closing remarks at the conclusion of Chapter V.

CHAPTER V - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

As the field of education is evolving, there has become additional scrutiny on instructional leaders. Many instructional leaders choose to leave the field after a brief career because of various reasons: greater accountability with greater responsibility, pressure from governmental entities, etc. These mounting pressures create situations where administrators are in transition in their respective careers. Turnover in administration can be difficult for students and can lead to a decrease in student achievement. The stressors of instructional leadership lead to the importance of high quality and specifically targeted professional development. The purpose of Chapter V of this study is to identify the purpose of the study, discuss the significance of the study, review the research questions, present and discuss the research findings, present recommendations for professional development, researcher reflections, recommendations for future research, and closing remarks from the researcher..

Purpose of the Study

This study was designed in an attempt to discover if instructional leaders in schools matriculate through various stages in their careers. If these stages do exist, then to identify characteristics and traits which are associated with these particular stages. Finally, there is an attempt to identify the types of professional development which state and local school districts

may offer in an attempt to alleviate some of the external pressures which instructional leaders face.

Significance of the Problem

While there has been significant research done related to career stages in other disciplines, there appears to be a gap in the literature in regard to career stages for instructional leaders. It is important for school districts to understand career developmental stages so that they may identify and understand an individual's attitudes and behaviors within the organization. Career developmental stage research provides school districts with information regarding characteristics of individuals at each stage, so that districts may be better able to identify instructional leaders who may fit an opening which needs to be filled.

Additionally, according to the research, there appears to be a shrinking number of qualified instructional leaders in the market for positions. This situation requires school districts to be very selective in their hiring practices. If school districts are provided with information which offers specific characteristics of instructional leaders and where they may be operating in their respective career stages, then the districts are more likely to identify the most appropriate candidate. Since there are fewer qualified instructional leaders in the pool, it is imperative for school districts to be diligent in their research regarding hiring practices. Matching a person of a particular career stage with the needs of the school should be a priority for superintendents and school boards.

A third reason this is a significant research problem lies with school district accountability. Local stakeholders continue to be concerned with the level of accountability at the state and federal levels. The research regarding career developmental stages provides local school districts with a model to determine if a potential candidate for a position would have the

characteristics necessary to meet their particular needs. Additionally, this specific career developmental stage research may provide districts with ideas for appropriate professional development for their current staff. Participants in this study identified areas in which they felt professional development needs were lacking. This research provides strategies for local school districts to utilize when planning the professional development needs of their instructional leadership staff.

Research Questions

The research questions which guided this study are as follows:

- 1) to examine the role principals perform throughout their careers to determine if there is an identifiable set of developmental stages through which they progress;
- 2) to offer an incipient description of these stages, detailing questions and challenges which may exist at each stage;
- 3) to identify and explicate implications these findings have for professional development decisions/strategies at the district and local levels.

These research questions were answered through a series of sixteen interviews with current instructional leaders in a variety of school districts in north Alabama. The participants were chosen from a purposeful sample to include individuals from a variety of experiential backgrounds. Eight of the participants chosen were male and eight were female. They were chosen based on their number of years of experience, as well as whether they were hired within their district or were an outside hire.

The interviews were conducted in the fall of 2013. Each of the participants was asked a series of questions prepared by the researcher. The researcher asked follow-up questions based

on the responses of the participants. Each of the participants was secondary school instructional leaders. Their experience varied from a participant completing the first year on the job, to an administrator who was completing the nineteenth year as an instructional leader.

Discussion of Findings

This research study asked three research questions. The discussion of findings will present each of the research questions with the responses identified as themes from Chapter IV of this study.

Research Question One. To examine the role principals perform throughout their careers to determine if there is an identifiable set of developmental stages through which they progress.

Through the process of the interviews with the participants, there were five themes which were developed based on the career stages of secondary school administrators. The themes were induction, stabilization (establishment), professional, distinguished, and frustration. The other theme developed will be a response to research question number three. The five themes indicate similarities with some of the previous career developmental stage research which were cited in Chapter II. The researcher contends that each of these themes indicate a distinct career developmental stage for the purpose of this study. Each of these career developmental themes will be discussed in this section with their relevance to research question one. Question two will address the particular characteristics of each of the career developmental stages proposed in this study.

Theme One: Induction The first career developmental stage identified in this study was that of induction. Each of the sixteen participants discussed the period of time in which they entered the field as an instructional leader. Some of the participant's experiences were positive.

Others had experiences which created more anxiety. Building on the work of Donald Super's theory of career stages (1951), this initial stage has been described with various names. Super's initial stage in his career developmental stage model was referred to as the trial stage. Earley and Weindling (2007) referred to this initial developmental stage as entry and encounter. They placed a time frame of the first few months on the job. The participants in this study indicated a much longer time frame than this. Many indicated it was more than a year before they felt they were matriculating to a different career developmental stage. However, there were some instructional leaders who indicated they experienced a period of pre-induction.

Many of these participants were given opportunities to perform administrative type roles before they were officially hired as secondary school administrators. Oplatka (2010) used the term induction to describe the first career developmental stage for administrators. He describes the induction stage as a period of socialization into the culture of the school, as well as into the role of being the instructional leader for the school.

Theme Two: Stabilization or Establishment. The second career developmental stage identified through the themes during the analysis of the data is that of a stabilization or establishment stage. The stabilization stage indicates a period of time in which the secondary school instructional leader begins to feel comfortable in the role in which they are now serving. As with the induction stage, there were various lengths of time the participants felt they were operating in this particular stage. The research does not indicate there is a particular time line in which this career developmental stage (or others) begins and ends. Each participant indicated there were different factors which led to their development as instructional leaders.

The literature review for this study yielded similar descriptions for the stabilization (establishment) career developmental stage. Parkay, et al. (1992) used the term stability in their

five stage career development model. Oplatka (2010) referred to this stage as the maintenance stage. They describe the stabilization stage as developing a routine. Ken, one of the veteran participants involved in this study indicated that “I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to see happen” during this point rather early in his career. Earley and Weindling (2007) also discuss this career developmental stage. It is referred to in their theory as the “taking hold” career development stage.

Theme Three: Professional. The third career developmental stage identified in this study during data analysis is that of the professional stage. The professional career developmental stage occurs after an instructional leader has matriculated through an induction period and became established in the role itself. Earley and Weindling (2007) discuss this period as a time of refinement. They also describe the period as a time of professional growth. Parkay, et al. (1992) defines this career developmental stage as a time of leadership. The instructional leader is now in a role in which there is a degree of comfort. This comfort level provides the opportunity to display the instructional leader’s passion for the job. Additionally, this career development stage grants the instructional leader more credibility.

Theme Four: Distinguished. The fourth career developmental stage as identified in this study through data analysis is that of the distinguished stage. Instructional leaders reported viewing this stage as a time of reflection, of looking back over their career in education, not just as an administrator, but as an educator in general. The participants also indicated they wanted to leave a legacy within their school and district upon their retirement. Eric discussed that it was important to him for the school to “carry on and be even greater after I leave”.

This latter career developmental distinguished stage was described by Parkay et al. (1992) as two stages: the educational leadership and professional actualization stage. The

participant's responses in the data analysis regarding their experiences during this latter stage were similar to those posited in the Parkay study. Earley and Weindling (2007) referred to this latter stage as the plateau developmental stage. However, their work is primarily based on the assumption that there is a time frame on the instructional leader's matriculation through their career. The data analysis in this study did not indicate this was accurate. There were some characteristics from the Earley and Weindling (2007) study that did indicate instructional leaders were in a distinguished stage. These characteristics will be discussed later in this chapter in the response to research question number two.

Theme Five: Frustration. The fifth theme identified in this research study was that of frustration. There did not appear to be a distinct career developmental stage for frustration, but the theme did recur throughout the interviews with the participants. Frustration appeared to occur throughout the four career developmental stages identified through this study. Participants indicated during the induction stage, there were periods of isolation and loneliness. Jerome referred to the first day of school after he became the instructional leader after being a teacher in the school, the faculty left for lunch and he was left alone because he was not "one of them anymore".

The participants also indicated during the latter stages identified in this study that isolation was a problem. An additional area in which the participants discussed frustration was in the area of physical and mental exhaustion. During the induction career development stage, participants indicated the tremendous amount of work that was associated with beginning as an instructional leader. Many of the participants indicated their primary responsibilities in their early career involved taking care of all things related to discipline. This can be a stressor in and of itself. Other duties in the first few years of instructional leadership included supervision of

athletic and other school events, morning and afternoon supervisory duties, etc. These stressors led to the physical and mental exhaustion because they take up time that the participants were away from their families. Shirley noted spending time with her family was one of the reasons she wanted to no longer work as a high school principal. These time-related issues led the participants to discuss the difficulties each of them faced in getting the work done. As Ken explained “I often feel like I am drowning”.

These stressors tend to become even more magnified as the burden of accountability is added to the role of the instructional leader. Many of the participants indicated dealing with various stakeholders create frustration which spans across the career developmental stages. Byron discussed unruly parents being his biggest stressor, as did Gary. Other participants had issues with central office staff. Julia and Jerome discussed the lack of trust they had with members of the central office staff. They discussed individual experiences which created an environment where trust was lacking. Each specifically mentioned being frustrated with the politics of education. It was discussed that it wasn't necessarily the work load as they had been in positions of leadership for a long period of time, but the feeling that the central office staff were not as supportive of them as they would have liked. Again, this led to a greater level of frustration which they felt affected their ability to grow as instructional leaders.

As indicated earlier, the researcher doesn't believe this study lends itself to asserting frustration as a stand-alone career development stage. Earley and Weindling (2007), in the final career development stage of their model, discuss frustration as being a component of the plateau stage. They cite that instructional leaders who have stayed in a particular school for a long time experience frustration because they have oftentimes been overlooked for promotions to

different positions within the system. They also point to motivation becoming a factor in these individuals.

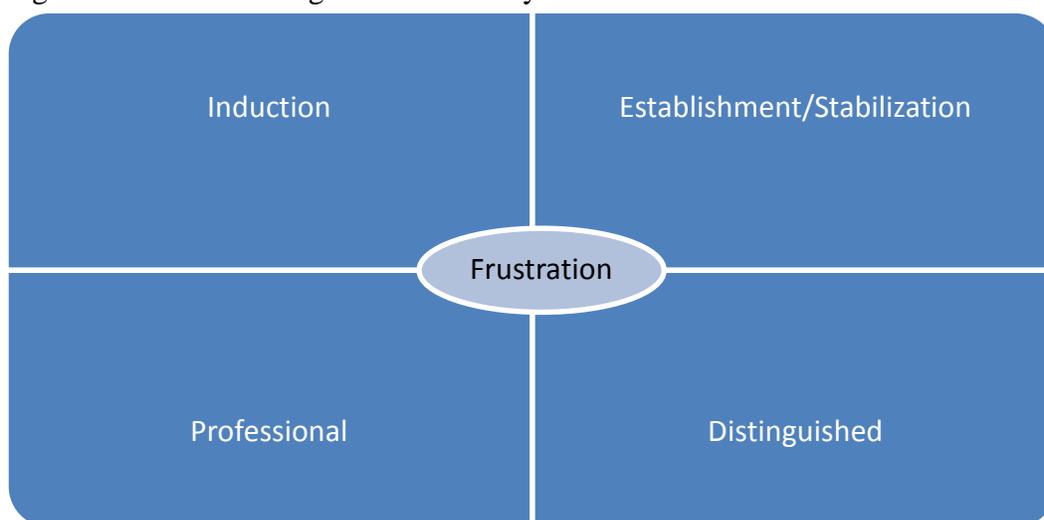
With the seven year mark being about the ideal time for instructional leaders to remain in the position (Earley and Weindling, 2007; Mortimore, P., Sammons, P., Stoll, L., Lewis, D., and Ecob, R., 1988), the plateau theory for some administrators may be accurate. However, the participants in this study did not indicate this was an issue for them. Ken, the longtime assistant principal who experienced working for a principal who knew little about the daily operations of a high school, still described how he was still driven by student achievement. In fact, Ken indicated the new principal “was overwhelmed. I was confident in what I knew and we eventually made a good team.” He indicated the new principal would have struggled without him. With his new principal currently in place, Ken has decided that he has received new life and has decided that he would like to continue working at least one more year instead of retiring in May.

Summary of Research Question One. The researcher’s quest during this study was to determine if career stages exist for secondary school instructional leaders. Through the data analysis in this study, the researcher asserts that career developmental stages do exist. The data indicate these career stages are induction, a period of stabilization or establishment, a professional stage, and finally, a distinguished stage. The researcher further contends that frustration is not a career developmental in itself due to the presence of frustration which occurred across the various career developmental stages.

Research Question Two. Question two of this research is an attempt to offer an incipient description of these career development stages, detailing questions and challenges which may exist at each stage. As stated in question one, there were four career development

stages identified in this research study: induction, stabilization and establishment, professional, and establishment. Each of these career development stages will be discussed based on the responses from the participants, as well as through the identification of correlations which may exist with the literature review in Chapter II. A visual representation of this narrative can be found in Figure One:

Figure One: Career Stages for Secondary School Instructional Leaders



Induction. The career developmental stage of induction was the first stage identified through data analysis in this research study. The literature review in this study documented early career stage models for general careers, as well as for teachers and instructional leaders. Each of these models indicated a transition period for a new person accepting a position. Super's Career Stage Development Theory (1957) first recognized this period. It was labeled as a trial stage. This stage was characterized by a person trying to identify their interests and capabilities within the workforce. These characteristics are similar to those identified in the relevant literature regarding career developmental stages for secondary school instructional leaders, as well as the responses from the participants in this study.

There were several sub-themes associated with the data analysis for the induction stage. The first was a pre-induction. Some participants responded that they were provided with opportunities to perform administrative type duties as substitutes prior to accepting full time positions. This is in line with the theory posited by Earley and Weindling (2007). They propose instructional leaders begin with a stage zero. This stage zero is considered the preparation time before one becomes an instructional leader. This could be considered time in training at the university level, internships and even substitute administrator opportunities as indicated by the participants in this study. Early and Weindling (2007) note that not all an instructional leader is going to need to know can be taught or gained through a pre-induction program.

The pre-induction experience discussed by the participants in this study indicated they felt more prepared by being given these opportunities. Shirley discussed the familiarity she had with the system before she became an instructional leader. The socialization aspect of the induction process was accelerated as a result of her opportunities before she was officially hired to the position by the school district. Renee pointed to the opportunity she had to serve as a substitute administrator provided her with mentors (the current administrative staff). She reported it was not just the opportunity to understand the administrative side of the job, but “how they related to kids, parents” was really helpful to her. The pre-induction process allowed those who participated the chance to become acquainted with the process, while also allowing them to develop a skill set which would benefit them after they were hired for an instructional leader position.

A second sub-theme developed from the data analysis in regard to induction was the duty or roles of the instructional leader. Oplatka (2010) described the induction stage as not just a period of socialization, but a period when new instructional leaders are faced with the challenge

of insecurity of certain administrator tasks and duties. The overwhelming majority of the participants in this study indicated their primary roles as beginning instructional leaders included discipline and supervision. Parkay, et al (1992) described this as a managerial role in the administrative process. They also refer to the “shock” factor a new instructional leader faces in not understanding the tasks involved in being a building principal. Eric described administrators in the induction stage as having a difficult time distinguishing between the immediate and the important. This appears to be in line with the assertion from the Parkay theory regarding the “shock” factor. Many beginning administrators struggle with the day to day tasks, which creates additional stress in an already high stressful position. Understanding how to manage this role appears to lead instructional leaders to progress on to the next stage. They become able to manage the tasks associated with the position, while gaining more confidence in their abilities as instructional leaders.

The third sub-theme identified through data analysis in this study was the desire to have greater experiences with curriculum. A small number of the participants indicated this was provided for them, but more reported their duties being primarily discipline and supervision. As discussed by Oplatka (2010), the induction process primarily focuses on acclimation to the faculty and staff, learning the roles and responsibilities of the position, and developing an understanding of the culture of the school.

An additional recurrent sub-theme in induction was the problem new instructional leaders have in changing adult’s behavior. As Oplatka (2010) cites as one of the pitfalls of induction, becoming acclimated to the faculty is a difficult task. Attempting to influence a teacher who has many years of experience can be a daunting task, especially for an instructional leader in the induction career development stage. Hope was apprehensive at first with her faculty as she

attempted to help teachers who had been teaching longer than she had been alive, “some of them had been department heads longer than I had been in education total”. Since Hope had a background in elementary education, the high school teachers began to “question my background”. Hope became more comfortable in time with pushing the adults when they realized that she explained to the teachers that “I am not here to teach the content of Physics.” Hope’s input as the instructional leader was solely based on reaching teachers so that they could best serve the needs of their students.

The final sub-theme associated with the induction stage in this study is that of survival. Parkay et al. (1992) identified survival as the induction stage. The survival discussed in their theory includes the uncertainty and insecurity many beginning administrators face. It was certainly a concern to the participants in this research study. Gary had an extreme situation in regard to survival when he was asked to become principal at an elementary school just days after school had started. He had not been inside the building before the night he was approved as the building principal. Another participant, Tanya, talked about the daunting task associated with being the instructional leader by adding “sometimes the job just gets in the way of the job” and indicated she just didn’t feel prepared for the “overwhelming” responsibilities which she faced as she became a school administrator.

Stabilization and Establishment. The career developmental stage of stabilization and establishment was identified as the second stage in this research study. The participants in this study indicated there was a time period in which they felt as if they had established who they were and what they wished to accomplish. Oplatka (2010) has defined this stage as the establishment stage as well, as did Donald Super in his original career stage developmental model. The term control was used by Oplatka (2010) to indicate the instructional leader is in

charge of what is happening in the school building. The confidence level of the instructional leader is also greater at this stage, according to his developmental model. There is less insecurity in this stage, which lends itself to the instructional leader beginning to form a vision for the direction of the school. Oplatka (2010) contends that this school vision becomes more realistic as well.

Parkay et al. (1992) denoted this as the stability stage. The stability stage was discussed as the period of time when the instructional leader had “settled into” the position. The instructional leader begins to identify priorities as to the direction the school is going, as opposed to just the daily management of the school. Earley and Weindling (2007) describe two stages which appear to be correlated with the characteristics and traits from other research and this particular study. One stage identified is the taking hold stage. The second stage is the reshaping stage. Both of these career developmental stages helps the instructional leader to develop a greater understanding of what the key issues are for the school and allows them to begin to establish priorities for their school.

There are three sub-themes based on the data analysis associated with the stabilization and establishment career developmental stage: trusting in self, building relationships, and being comfortable in transition to new roles and responsibilities. The characteristics of each of these sub-themes are discussed in greater detail as to how they relate to the literature reviewed in Chapter II of this study.

As Oplatka points out in his four stage career developmental model, the instructional leader at the establishment stage demonstrates less uncertainty and insecurity. The participants in this research study indicated that trust in self was a significant transition point from the induction career development stage to the establishment stage. As Doug indicated “we are doing

the things now I have always had in the back of my mind that we would do”. Doug lacked the confidence to attempt to implement his ideas during the first few years of his administrative career. Doug also identified his staff as a reason he had some security and confidence issues. He noted that he had inherited the staff when he arrived at the school. After a couple of years, he was able to hire some staff members who demonstrated similar goals and ambitions as he had for the school.

Parkay et al. asserts that the instructional leader at this school knows what to do and how to do it. It is at this career developmental stage that instructional leaders take ownership of the school and how it operates. Shirley described how she believed in herself and the things she had done. She indicated how she felt when she began to understand aspects of the position. “I can do it. I can do it well.” This was Shirley’s response when asked about how she felt she transitioned from an induction stage to that of feeling established. All of the participants who matriculated to the establishment stage (Note: Tanya is a first year assistant principal. She indicated she was still operating in the induction stage and did not feel as if she had transitioned past that point) shared a common characteristic. Each participant felt as if gaining the confidence to make decisions without asking was a primary trait associated with the comfort of moving from the induction career development stage.

Shirley asserted that it was important for her to feel she was making decisions with integrity. As she became more confident, she expressed that this was much easier than she had anticipated. Additionally, it was noted that many of the participants expressed that it was not that they didn’t make some mistakes. It was the mistakes made were not as magnified as they were during the induction stage. As Jenny said “our faculty knows I will fix it and make it

right”. Gaining the support of the faculty also gave the participants more confidence to do their job as the instructional leader.

The second sub-theme associated with the stabilization and establishment career development stage was building relationships and collaboration. Oplatka (2010) discusses that in the establishment phase, instructional leaders understand what is happening more with the faculty and staff. Earley and Weindling (2007) assert that the instructional leader at this career development stage has a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the faculty and staff. By understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the faculty, the instructional leader has a better opportunity to improve student achievement through matching student needs with the strengths of the staff. Earley and Weindling (2007) also state this concept creates a greater awareness on the part of the faculty and staff of the goals and objectives of the school. This in turn creates an opportunity for the instructional leaders to cultivate the relationships with their staff.

The participants in this study echoed these findings in their responses during the interviews. Doug indicated “relationships don’t happen overnight”. He discussed how important it is for faculty members to understand that the instructional leader in the school genuinely cared about them as people. Doug’s personality is very direct, but he has been able to establish relationships with his faculty and staff because he is honest and sincere with them. Ken talked about how his faculty had to develop a respect for him. This took a few years before he felt the faculty really respected him. It was important for him to show them he did not have an “agenda”. He didn’t want anything from them except he wanted them to be great at what they did in the classroom. Gary talks about developing relationships with students allowing him to cultivate relationships with other stakeholders. He stated that when faculty members recognize

how important students are to the instructional leader, then they are more likely to be on board with him and the goals which he sets forth for the school. Having the support of the faculty has been created by his ability to develop these relationships as he says “they are more likely now to not question the decisions because they know I try to do what I can and make decisions on the best interests of students”.

The third and final sub-theme of the stabilization and establishment career development stage builds on the previous two sub-themes. The third sub-theme occurs when instructional leaders begin to feel comfortable in their roles and responsibilities. Parkay et al. (1992) describes this stage as developing a routine. Once the instructional leader has developed the routines necessary for the daily operation of the school, the additional stress of the unknown is diminished. The induction career development stage indicated (in the study as well as in the literature review) that instructional leaders struggle with the day to day activities of the school. Instructional leaders at the establishment stage are much more attuned to their daily activities, many times because they have developed a routine.

Earley and Weindling (2007) indicate change most often begins to occur during this stage. Teachers have become more comfortable with the instructional leader and vice versa. The instructional leader now displays the confidence necessary for the faculty to become comfortable in adapting to change. As Oplatka (2010) adds, the instructional leader has a more realistic vision for the school and what can be accomplished. There is less insecurity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the instructional leader, and the core task of teaching and learning become the focus.

The participants in this study acknowledged these characteristics of the establishment stage as well. Doug described arriving at work and knowing how much work there was to

learning the routines associated with being a successful instructional leader. Almost to a person, the participants mentioned the level of confidence they had after a few years on the job. It was noted in this study that instructional leaders who were hired within their school building did experience a less stressful transition. They explained their knowledge of the culture, the mores of the school, and the personalities of the faculty members were possible reasons for the smoothness of their transition. Julia noted the experience was similar to a first year teacher. It is less difficult to anticipate possible pitfalls after an instructional leader has a few years of experience to draw upon.

Professional. The third career development theme identified through the data analysis for this study is the professional stage. The participants indicated there became a time in their career when they felt as if they were comfortable and had become established, but they felt as if there were something more to the profession. They wanted to give something back. This leads to the professional career development stage. There were sub-themes associated with this stage as well. They are intrinsic rewards and passion for the job, reflections of past mistakes, and the use of data as an instructional leader.

The first sub-theme under the professional career development stage is the intrinsic rewards and passion for the job. The description from Parkay et al. (1992) career development model describes a similar stage called educational leadership. This career development stage occurs after the instructional leader has become comfortable and established in the school. This career stage development model indicates the instructional leader is continuing to develop the vision of the school, while at the same time, initiating change with this vision. The long range vision becomes the passion of the instructional leader and leads to effective change. Earley and Weindling (2007) use the term refinement to describe this stage. They assert this is the

professional growth of the instructional leader. They refer to this as the transition point between being a building principal and an instructional leader. Oplatka's (2010) model did not identify this as a career developmental stage. His model indicates an instructional leader is in the establishment stage until the maintenance versus renewal stage. He contends there is little room for professional growth after the establishment stage.

The participants in this research study echo the characteristics of the earlier models (with the exception of Oplatka, 2010). Many participants indicated they felt there was more to give after the feeling of transition to the establishment career development stage. The routines of the job became less of the focus, with more emphasis on the development of the vision to improve student achievement in the school. It was indicated by Shirley that the having the opportunity to impact what was happening in the classroom by directly affecting student achievement, was by far her greatest reward. These sentiments were echoed by many of the participants in this study. Byron posited that the enthusiasm the instructional leader displays is picked up on by the students. He said that he believes this passion from the instructional leader has a direct impact on student achievement. Bob added that he believes it is important for the teachers to see how important it is for students to achieve at a high level. He said he believes his teachers work harder when they see how hard he works.

The second sub-theme in the professional career developmental stage is that of instructional leaders and how they have learned from their past mistakes. Oplatka (2010) did indicate in his career developmental stage model that in the maintenance versus renewal stage that because of the lack of professional growth, as mentioned earlier, there is a stronger possibility for stagnation. There may be a period of self-renewal associated with this stage. It was also noted how instructional leaders react to change which may determine the direction in

which they may begin to operate. If their past mistakes lead to an awareness of the need for change, then self-renewal could occur in their professional career. Parkay et al. (1992) discussed change for the instructional leader at this stage as being constant. This study revealed how difficult change is for instructional leaders. The participants discussed how early in their careers they struggled with change because of the fears they had with alienating the faculty. As the participants progressed to the professional stage, they indicated they felt their reluctance may have hampered their growth.

The final aspect of the professional stage identified in this research study is that of the utilization of data by instructional leaders. As has been discussed in this section, the literature revealed this stage as being a level in which the instructional leader is working toward establishing a vision for the school. Parkay et al. (1992) described the instructional leader as having reached some personal actualization in regard to establishing the vision for the school. It was also noted in this developmental model that instructional leaders typically seek additional professional development during this stage. Instructional leaders are more likely to be involved in graduate school, professional development workshops, etc. This professional movement allows evolving instructional leaders the opportunity to gain the necessary skills to analyze data. Once the data is analyzed, there is the additional skills of finding the proper utilization of the data to improve student achievement to coincide with the goals and vision presented by the instructional leader. The utilization of data was discussed by many of the participants. Eric indicated many of the decisions he makes is data related. His comment that “if it is important, it should be measured” was a common theme among the participants in this study. Part of the professional stage is not just the obtaining aspect of the data. As Eric emphasized, it is more important that the data be reported, and reported accurately.

Distinguished. The final career development stage identified in this study is the distinguished stage. This stage is characterized by school administrators who have had numerous experiences as instructional leaders, and who are the leaders in their respective fields. The participants in this study would not all be considered to have reached this stage due to the nature of the purposeful sample. In an attempt to include participants with varying lengths of service, there were some who are in the beginning stages of their careers. However, there were participants who would be considered to be operating at this stage based on a variety of factors. The characteristics identified in the study for the distinguished career stage are vision, the ability to empower and build capacity, as well as self-directed initiatives. Of note, this research study identified a fourth sub-theme from the participants in the distinguished stage, state and local recognition. Of the literature reviewed for this study, these state and national recognitions were not discussed in great detail. The recognitions will be discussed in this section in conjunction with the other characteristics.

Of note, of the primary career development stage literature used for this study, Oplatka's (2007) theory has a stage four of disenchantment. In this research study, none of the participants displayed any of the characteristics which were observed in the Oplatka model. However, it is worth noting that disenchantment could be a result of the years of frustration which, based on the research from this study as well as from the review of the literature, permeates throughout each career developmental stage.

As was discussed in the professional career development stage, vision is a major part of the instructional leader's growth and development. In the professional stage, the instructional leader begins to develop the vision for the school. There may even be some implementation of this vision. The primary difference with the distinguished stage is the vision becomes fully

implemented. The school “belongs” to the instructional leader. Parkay et al. (1992) describes this stage as professional actualization. Their theory describes this stage as when the instructional leader has developed the vision, and the faculty and staff share the vision. Part of the vision for the instructional leader in this model would entail helping the faculty and staff to realize actualization as teachers. They also assert that instructional leaders understand the importance of establishing a vision for their school. Earley and Weindling (2007) assert the instructional leader at this stage is someone who is forward thinking, who can anticipate when there may be issues that arise. Instructional leaders at the distinguished career stage can not only articulate their vision to stakeholders, but also have the ability to draw others to their vision in a transformational manner (Gordon, 2007).

The participants in this study demonstrated in their interviews that vision was a critical element in the growth of an instructional leader. Eric’s discussion of the utilization of data to develop a vision for his school was one of the more interesting in this study. He utilized data to develop how he wanted to affect change in his school. He cited a plan which each school has to have in place. It is called the Continuous Improvement Plan, or CIP. The CIP is, in theory, to be used to develop goals and objectives for improvement. Part of the CIP process is a survey to stakeholders, but only has to be completed every five years. The CIP is a document which many principals indicate they complete just to “get something on paper”. The researcher had one instructional leader indicate that since the state doesn’t read it anyway, he just has his assistant principal write something down.

Eric’s thoughts regarding the CIP were different. He envisions using the CIP as a means of identifying where stakeholders see there are gaps in the education process. These gaps could be in instruction, safety, etc. Eric decided to survey the stakeholders each year to obtain data

from year to year that could be tracked. This data is kept in a file that he calls “Shark”. By comparing the data from year to year, he is able to identify what is needed in his school. He then creates a committee to analyze the data which leads to working toward the common vision of the school. This is an example of what Parkay et al. (1992) discusses in his model regarding the instructional leader and the faculty sharing the vision. This shared vision is an important characteristic of the growth of the instructional leader, as well as the leadership which is demonstrated to the staff.

The second characteristic identified in this study is that of the instructional leader empowering and building capacity in the faculty and staff. Distinguished instructional leaders also demonstrate a more participative and decentralized leadership style (Oplatka, 2010). This leadership style lends itself to faculty and staff being comfortable because they have ownership in the educational process. Parkay et al. (1992) asserts in their career stage developmental model that because the faculty is encouraged to join in and follow the instructional leader’s vision for the school, then they are more empowered to follow their own personal goals and objectives without fear of interference from the building principal. This leads to faculty and staff having more opportunities for creativity in improving their educational practices. Oplatka (2010) describes instructional leaders at this stage who not only want to empower current teachers and build capacity, they also want to help in the identification and development of future instructional leaders.

Many distinguished instructional leaders have served as mentors for beginning administrators. During the interviews, the researcher noted several of the participants have served as mentors. There was one instance where one of the participants was mentored by one of the other participants. As the instructional leaders who participated in this study indicate, it can

be a challenge to motivate teachers to work toward actualization. However, it was noted that instilling ownership with the teachers and empowering them to teach at a higher level and develop personal leadership skills has been effective for the participants in this research study. Another dilemma indicated by some of the participants in this study was letting go of their own personal power as the instructional leader of a school. In order to empower and build capacity, some participants asserted that the instructional leader has to be willing to give up some of their own personal power. This can be difficult for some instructional leaders. However, one participant stated that when the instructional leader has built enough local capital and success, it becomes easier to release some of the personal power because it is less likely that problems will occur.

The final characteristic associated with the distinguished career developmental stage in this study is that of instructional leaders creating and implementing their own initiatives at the local school. The distinguished instructional leader demonstrates an immersion in the field of education. Instructional leaders at this stage are attempting to mentor others to extend their legacy at their respective schools (Oplatka, 2010). Instructional leaders who are in the distinguished career development stage are seeking to implement new programs and seek new challenges that will have an impact on the culture of the school. These could be after school programs, tutoring, etc. They also could be curriculum initiatives which target student achievement (Oplatka, 2012).

The participants in this research study indicated similar characteristics based on their interview responses. The participants who were identified as operating in the distinguished career development stage each had their own initiatives which they had started in their schools. Some of their initiatives were the implementation of programs from other school districts.

However, many of the initiatives were developed and implemented based on the vision of the instructional leaders in this study. All of the initiatives did not occur within the walls of the buildings the instructional leaders are housed. Of the more intriguing, two instructional leaders in this study have created and moderate “chats” on social media. Educators can sit at home and be a part of the chat without having to do anything other than read what is posted. This method has reached more people because of two reasons: no cost and the number of educators who are utilizing social media. During the interviews with these participants (who work for two different school districts), each of them shared with me how the process works and how it came about. Discussions of the expenses associated with professional development led one of the participants to research how this professional development may work for instructional leaders across the country. The participant indicated this has had a great impact on her personally, but she feels satisfied that she possibly has had an effect on the student achievement of thousands of students through working with other educators.

An additional program implemented by one of the participants was a retreat for his faculty. Throughout his tenure, Doug had gained the confidence he needed as an instructional leader to affect change in his school. He indicated he felt something was missing. It was later identified after the death of a teacher at his school on the day of graduation. He knew his faculty cared about one another, but he really did not experience the extent until this tragedy occurred. After it occurred, he tried to discern what he could do as the instructional leader to take advantage of his close knit faculty and improve student achievement.

Doug began to work with his corporate partners to develop a retreat for his faculty for three days at a local resort. He asked his faculty not to bring cell phones or computers on this retreat. A special contact number was created for family members of the faculty in case of an

emergency. This was going to be three days in which they experienced each other and prepared for the next school year. He had inspirational speakers, team building exercises, and other activities to motivate his faculty.

It was out of this vision in which arose another program that has gained local attention. Doug and his faculty developed a program called “Connect”. This program is a means for all students on campus to identify with an adult on site. Of note, Doug is the instructional leader at an inner city school with a very high poverty rate. This program has given his faculty a chance to be involved in the lives of their students more than at any other time before. They meet each day for approximately twenty minutes. It was a difficult decision to give up instructional time, but the relationships formed have been well worth the lost time. Doug indicated that he has seen faculty members attend church with some of the students in their connect group. He has been in local restaurants and seen families of students having dinner with the faculty member and their family.

What Doug has done is what the researcher believes is a great example of what a distinguished instructional leader looks like. He had a vision of what he wanted to occur at his school. He developed that vision and utilized outside resources to secure the funding. Doug then organized the faculty to evaluate his vision for the school, as well as for them to ascertain whether it would work with their stakeholders. Through transformational leadership, he was able to plant a seed in the faculty and provide ownership in the vision for the school. The faculty in turn took the vision and working together they found a program to implement. This program was implemented and has been an asset to the participant’s school. As Doug has only in recent years started his program, he doesn’t have hard data as yet to determine the impact the program has had on student achievement. However, he cites the climate of the school has evolved into a

place where students and faculty interact cordially. He did indicate there have been fewer fights and confrontations between students and teachers since the Connect program has been implemented.

Summary of Research Question Two. After the determination from research question one which demonstrated career developmental stages do exist for secondary school administrators, the researcher was charged with providing an incipient description of these stages, with a focus on detailing questions and challenges at each stage. Through the data analysis in this study, the researcher evaluated each of the four career development stages and provided the incipient description in this chapter. The career developmental stages each have distinct characteristics and are consistent with previous research in the field.

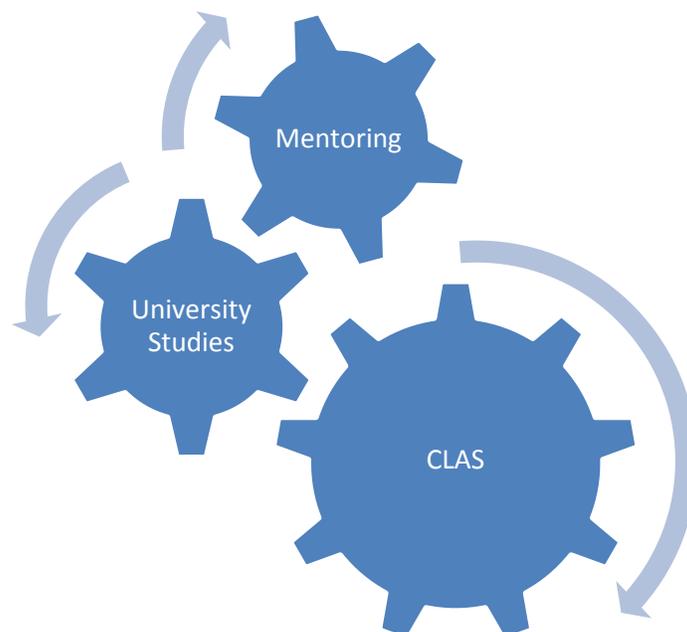
Research Question Three. Having identified the career developmental stages for secondary school instructional leaders and offering a description of the characteristics of each stage, the researcher focused attention to the third question posited in this study. The third research question asks to identify and explicate implications that these findings have for professional development decisions/strategies at the district and local levels.

During this study, the participants were asked a series of questions during the interview which related to the professional development as secondary school instructional leaders. The participant's responses to the interview questions prompted the researcher to ask follow-up questions to gain additional data. The data collected and analyzed provided the researcher an opportunity to identify and explicate the implications regarding professional development.

There were three themes which were developed by the researcher through data analysis in this study in regard to professional development. The three themes developed in this study are professional development offered by the Council for Leadership in Schools (CLAS), university

preparatory programs, and mentoring. Each of these themes directly impacts the answer to the third research question regarding career developmental stages of secondary school instructional leaders. Each of these professional development opportunities work together much like a set of gears to provide growth to the secondary school instructional leader. A visual representation of this narrative can be found in Figure Two.

Figure Two: Professional Development for Secondary School Instructional Leaders



Theme One: CLAS. The participants in this study, almost to a person, identified CLAS as having a great impact on their professional growth as secondary school instructional leaders. The participants indicated that CLAS is not only an organization which provides training and professional development, it also provides support for aspiring instructional leaders, as well as those who have been working for a long period of time. The participants also indicated CLAS offers monthly “Lunch and Learn” opportunities that are free to CLAS members. This program

offers the instructional leader a chance to gain some valuable professional development while working in the school.

There are a variety of opportunities to travel to conferences as well. CLAS offers a summer conference, but several of the participants in this research study indicated the CLAS Law Conference as being one of the best professional development opportunities of the year. The law conference provides valuable information on a variety of legal topics. One of the participants in this study was discussing how exciting the conference would be this year. Examples of topics covered are liability, bullying and harassment, FERPA, tenure laws, etc. Ken discussed how the legal issues facing administrators can be quite daunting. He expressed the information dispensed through the law conference has been helpful in keeping him abreast of what he needs to do to stay out of the courtroom as a result of a lawsuit. Many participants echoed those sentiments.

Theme Two: University studies. The second theme identified in regard to professional development in the study was that of the instructional leader's training through their individual program at the university level. All of the participants had a minimum of a master's degree in education leadership. Eric indicated that completing his doctorate gave him an edge when it came to understanding the direction his school needed to go. He and others believed that the training they received made a tremendous difference in how they approached being an instructional leader. The daily decisions that had to be made were somewhat easier due to what was learned in graduate school. Many of the participants in this study pointed to being in classes and learning from their classmates allowed them to reflect upon situations which they were also facing. One participant stated that the coursework was effective and relevant, but the opportunities to listen to others probably allowed more professional growth.

There were some participants who felt there were gaps in the instructional leadership preparatory programs. Gary indicated that education leadership programs helped with “tactical” issues, but did not prepare one for the day to day operations of the school. A few participants responded by saying there were things principal school just doesn’t prepare you for. This echoes Gary’s sentiments about daily operations. It was noted by Bob however, that it could depend on where you went to graduate school. He stated that he felt unprepared as he entered the instructional leadership field, but he had only taken six courses and received an educational leadership certification. He indicated after he completed his masters, he felt much more comfortable with his academic preparation.

Theme Three: Mentoring. Mentoring was the third theme identified during the data analysis regarding professional development. Several participants cited having a good mentor as being an important part of their professional growth as instructional leaders. Some of this mentoring was in a formal program, while some mentoring took place informally. Julia indicated her mentoring experience helped in her growth because it gave her someone to role play scenarios with to determine potential outcomes. Several participants in this study have been mentors as well as being former protégés. This created a unique perspective. Doug discussed how he was mentored as he began as an instructional leader and how that helped shape his early career. He is now mentoring new instructional leaders in hopes that his legacy will continue at his school. Ken discussed how mentoring helped in because he became involved in the decision making process. Utilizing subordinates to participate in the decision making process is a key component of effective decision making (Hoy and Miskel, 2008).

Recommendations for Professional Development

Institute pre-induction programs. Through the data analysis, there was an identification of some areas which some participants felt there was a gap in regard to professional development. One area that was discussed was the lack of pre-induction programs across the board with the participants. The researcher acknowledges that all of the participants went through a university program in which they were a part of a practicum to gain specific experience as an instructional leader. The pre-induction referred to in this section takes place after the participant has completed the university program for educational leadership and is still on the job as a teacher. School administrators would utilize the participants as a substitute while they were out of the office. The participants in this study who participated in pre-induction programs such as these reported much higher confidence levels after they received their first position as an instructional leader. By having the opportunity to participate in decision making while still a classroom teacher is an effective means of developing a new generation of instructional leaders.

The pre-induction program will also provide new instructional leaders an opportunity to learn the roles and responsibilities of their administrative roles in their schools. It was noted in the induction career stage that many of the research participants experienced high levels of stress because of a lack of clarity regarding their roles as instructional leaders. Many of the participants indicated their primary responsibilities as being student discipline and supervision. The participants in this study who experienced the pre-induction programs found this process to be much easier to manage once they were hired from the classroom to the position of instructional leader.

Formal mentoring programs. As stated earlier, formal mentoring programs have proven to be effective in the professional development of instructional leaders in secondary schools. The mentor/protégé relationship has been identified and developed throughout many years in education. Mentoring programs for instructional leaders in the induction career development stage has only recently started to develop in education research (Alsbury and Blackmann, 2006). Not only is mentoring a key professional development tool at the novice career development stage, it can be utilized across the spectrum of developmental stages. Mentoring has proven to be effective for latter career developmental stage instructional leaders as well (Crow and Matthews, 1998). Many of the participants in this research study have reported the influence being a mentor has had in their professional development. One participant indicated how she didn't realize how much she really knew about instructional leadership until she became a mentor to a teacher who was completing the certification process. Adding formal programs at all school districts would be an effective means of ensuring that professional development opportunities are afforded to all instructional leaders.

Focus on changing adult's behavior. Another recommendation for professional development is to offer programs to assist young instructional leaders in how to influence others to change. While some of the ability to discern how to accomplish this task comes with experience, professional development in this area could help affect change in a much earlier point in an instructional leader's career. Some of the participants indicated they had some experience with CLAS workshops in this regard, others indicated this was not something they received at the university level in the degree programs. One research participant in this study felt as if this training occurred in his university program, but as he indicated, he did not accept a position of instructional leadership until after his doctoral studies were complete.

Relationship building. Building relationships with stakeholders was also an area in which professional development appeared to be lacking with the participants in this research study. The participants discussed the lack of formal programs to help assist them in developing relationships. Many identified the difference in how relationships are formed after a person moves into a position of instructional leadership. The relationships which were created from the classroom teacher are now different as an instructional leader. Several participants noted this as a weakness in their professional training, both from a university program level, as well as through professional development. This research study recommends that local districts collaborate with universities and CLAS to create professional development programs which will assist instructional leaders (particularly those who are at the induction stage) to develop and cultivate appropriate relationships with all stakeholders. This professional development should aid in the instructional leader having the opportunity to matriculate from the induction stage to the stabilization/establishment stage in a timely manner.

Curriculum. While some of the participants cited they were relatively comfortable in regard to curriculum matters, others were not as confident. This research study recommends that additional professional development which focuses on curriculum matters would be beneficial to secondary school instructional leaders. Many of the participants in this study cited the need for additional training in curriculum. The researcher found it interesting that it was not only the instructional leaders who were operating in the induction stage felt this need for greater curriculum training. Some of the veteran instructional leaders discussed this as well. Several participants expressed frustration due to initiatives being put into place by the state department before the local school leadership had been trained. One participant in this study described it as “flying the plane before you know where you are going”. Additional professional development

across all career developmental stages would be considered a wise investment of time and resources.

Summary of Research Question Three. Question three of this study asked the researcher to identify and explicate implications the research had for professional development and research strategies at the local/district level. The researcher noted gaps which were identified through the data analysis reported by the participants. These gaps led to the recommendation of four professional development targets for local school districts to implement. The first is to implement a pre-induction program in which potential instructional leaders can gain valuable experience working alongside current instructional leaders. The second recommendation is that schools begin offering formal mentoring programs for instructional leaders in the induction stage of the career development model. The third recommendation is for local school districts to provide professional development for its instructional leaders in the area of changing adult's behavior and building relationships with stakeholders. The fourth and final recommendation from this study is for school districts to provide additional training for their instructional leadership staff in terms of curriculum. All of these recommendations will have a direct impact on student achievement because these professional development opportunities will enable the instructional leader to gain more confidence in their roles and responsibilities. By gaining this confidence through these programs, instructional leaders across all career development stages may focus on the core task of teaching and learning.

Researcher Reflections

Unexpected findings. This research study did allow the researcher to discover some issues which were unexpected. Much of the research indicated a separate career development stage of frustration. While many of the participants reported experiencing frustration, it did not

appear to be a separate career development stage in this research study. The frustration which was experienced by the participants in this study occurred in various career development stages, from induction to the distinguished stage. This could have been the result of the purposeful sample. The participants in this research study were secondary school instructional leaders in north Alabama. Most were in stable school districts. This could have led to the lack of a frustration stage in this study.

Another issue not anticipated by the researcher was the lack of a formal professional development plan by many of the instructional leaders. The researcher assumed the instructional leaders would have a formal plan which documented their areas of professional need. This did not appear to be the case. Many of the participants indicated their professional development was done for the sole purpose of gaining Professional Learning Units (PLU's), not targeting specific needs. One participant stated his district did not care where what his professional development was, it just had to be done to maintain his certification. This is troubling in that there did not appear to be any onus on the districts to ensure their instructional leaders were progressing professionally.

Finally, there didn't appear to be any difference in the progression through the career development stages identified in the research in regard to whether an instructional leader was hired within the district or from outside. The data did not indicate any significant differences during the analysis phase.

Lessons Learned. At the conclusion of this research study, the researcher has reflected on possible changes if this study were to be re-done. One area which would be analyzed would be selecting participants who began their careers as secondary school instructional leaders. This study included some of the research participants who began their careers as elementary school

principals. The researcher believes this may have influenced their views on the induction process in a different way than that of a participant who began their career at the secondary school level.

A second possible change if this study were to be re-done would be to add a category of participants who were now involved at the district office level. This would provide the researcher with a perspective from outside the current school environment. Some participants of a new study might be more insightful in retrospect, as opposed to their current position within the walls of a school. The day to day stressors may be more magnified in the participants in the current study because they are so fresh. Having a perspective which is from a participant who has matriculated into a different point in their career may be interesting and create additional data.

Limitations of Study

There were several advantages in the utilization of a purposeful sample. One of which was that it provided the researcher with the opportunity to identify participants who have been instructional leaders for a variety of years. However, a possible limitation of the study may be the use of the purposeful sample. Because of the history in the state of Alabama in regard to promotional practices, there could be an issue with replicating this study in another region of the country. In Alabama, many districts tend to hire school administrators who are currently serving in some capacity in the district. This may not be the case in other states, which could create a discrepancy in the results if this study were to be conducted elsewhere.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this research study in career developmental stage research yielded rich data, the researcher would like to recommend some suggestions for future research. These recommendations would further enhance career developmental research for the secondary school instructional leader. Based on the findings of this research study, the researcher would like to offer the following recommendations for future research:

1. Due to the nature of this study, the researcher attempted to interview participants who were at varying lengths of service in their careers. The researcher recommends a study be conducted with a primary focus on those individuals who appear to be operating in distinct career stages. For example, a research study which focuses its attention on the needs of those individuals who have just started their careers as instructional leaders and are operating in the induction career development stage.
2. The researcher recommends that additional research be conducted to focus on gender differences in regard to career stage development. This research study included a mixture of men and women in the field, but the researcher recommends a separate study which would focus on female instructional leaders and an additional study on male instructional leaders. Then, a follow up study to discuss the differences found in these separate studies.
3. The researcher recommends additional research is conducted on professional development needs for males and females. This research study did not address the distinct needs of males or females. A study which reflected individual needs from each of the sexes may yield rich data and generate interesting results.

4. Finally, the researcher recommends additional research be conducted which focuses on either rural versus urban career developmental stages. The researcher utilized participants in this study who were chosen from a purposeful sample. The sample included some participants who were in rural areas, while some were serving in urban areas. There did appear to be different needs in these areas, so further research may yield a quality study.

Closing Remarks

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine whether there were distinct career stages for secondary school administrators. If these stages were found to exist, to describe their characteristics and identify professional development needs for participants in each of the stages. Utilizing a purposeful sample, the researcher interviewed sixteen participants, eight males and eight females, from various school districts across North Alabama. The researcher utilized basic qualitative methods to analyze and organize the totality of the large amount of qualitative data. This data was then organized thematically into smaller and more manageable strands. The study's theoretical framework provided a basis for the coding and organization of the data. The themes developed during the data analysis were induction, stabilization and establishment, professional, distinguished, frustration, and professional development. It is the sincerest hope of this researcher that the results gleaned from this qualitative study will contribute to the knowledge base in the field of educational leadership and fill the gap in the literature in regard to career developmental stages of secondary school instructional leaders.

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APPENDIX

Career Developmental Stages of Secondary School Administrators: Questions, Challenges, and Implications for Professional Development

Interview Questions

- I. Demographics
 - a. Name
 - b. Age
 - c. Sex
 - d. Number of years in public education
 - e. Number of years as a classroom teacher
- II. Life Story
 - a. Beginning with your induction, tell me about your personal experiences as an instructional leader
 - i. What did your job consist of (responsibilities, roles, etc.)?
 - ii. At what point in your career did you feel like you were no longer a rookie?
 - iii. What led you to the realization that you were no longer a rookie? Was there an incident, event, or occasion that led to this?
 - iv. At what point in your career did you feel that you had a firm grip on your role as an instructional leader?
 - v. Were you promoted from within your district? If so, describe the reactions you had from your former colleagues upon your promotion.
- III. Managerial Career Cycle (Oplatka, 2010)
 - a. Describe the “best of times” you have experienced as a school administrator
 - i. Describe the feelings of the faculty and staff during these “best of times”.
 1. Who were the negative influences during these times? (not looking for names, but roles)
 2. Who were the positive influences during these times? (not looking for names, but roles)
 3. What professional development opportunities were offered to you during these points from the district and state level?

- a. Discuss the effectiveness of this professional development (if applicable)
 - b. What professional opportunities do feel were missed during these times?
 - b. Describe the “worst of times” you have experienced as a school administrator
 - i. Describe the feelings of the faculty and staff during these “worst of times”.
 - 1. Who were the negative influences during these times? (not looking for names, but roles)
 - 2. Who were the positive influences during these times? (not looking for names, but roles?)
 - 3. What professional development opportunities were offered to you during these points from the district and state level?
 - a. Discuss the effectiveness of this professional development (if applicable)
 - b. What professional opportunities do you feel were missed during these times?
 - c. Describe the transition points in your administrative career.
 - i. Discuss the significant events in which you felt that you were growing as an instructional leader and making a transition into another career phase.
 - 1. Describe your emotions during these transition periods.
 - 2. Describe the events which occurred during these transition periods.
 - 3. What professional development opportunities were offered to you during these points from the district and state level?
 - a. Discuss the effectiveness of this professional development (if applicable)
 - b. What professional opportunities do you feel were missed during these times?
 - d. Describe any crises which you encountered during your tenure as a secondary school instructional leader.
 - i. Describe your formal training in regard to handling these events.
 - ii. Discuss how these crisis events may have changed your view of the instructional leader position.
- IV. Emotions and Attitudes
- a. Discuss your emotions when you first became an instructional leader.
 - b. How have these emotions changed over the course of your instructional leadership career?

- c. Discuss your relationship with your faculty immediately after you became an instructional leader.
 - d. How have these relationships evolved over the course of your career as an instructional leader?
 - e. What professional development opportunities did you participate in provided you with the skill set necessary to develop these relationships with your faculty and staff?
- V. In looking back on your career, are there recognizable periods or events in which you realized your skills/competence as an instructional leader were moving to a new/higher level?