

SELF-REPORTED PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT
STRUGGLING TEACHERS FOR IMPROVEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the practices school leaders report using to help teachers improve through a case study methodology. The literature on three current leadership models (Instructional Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Distributed Leadership) were identified and reviewed. The findings from the literature were significant and showed a plethora of models and components of school leadership; however, the implications are clear that there is a deficit in identifying the practices required of principals to carry out the daily tasks of implementing these components in the different models to support struggling teachers. This study utilized the lens of the situated learning perspective with its components of community of practice, apprenticeship, and the underlying premise of learning through personal connections to help discern how principals identify and facilitate the specific practices that lead to teacher improvement and increased student learning. Through the use of interviews and document analysis as qualitative research, practices and tools used by school principals to assist struggling teachers were analyzed.

The findings from this case study highlighted areas for future discussion including developing a set of best practices for responding to struggling teachers and providing specific training for school-level administrators. The results of this case study suggest that school principals believe building relationships, utilizing data, intervening early, employing reflective questioning, and providing coaching are key practices that can support struggling teachers for improvement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Principals are responsible for the instructional quality of their schools and ensuring that all students are learning at high levels. Accountability measures have impacted the focus of their work and changed how principals undertake their roles. The work of principals has shifted from the role of a manager to an instructional leader. This demands that principals have the knowledge and skills to coach struggling teachers.

The purpose of the schoolhouse is to educate students—to help students learn and grow. The role of accountability is to ensure that *every* student is learning and growing. Accountability measures have increased over the past several decades. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 identified key points for school improvement. It emphasized equal access to education, setting high standards for academic performance, demanding a rigorous level of accountability for schools and districts. ESEA was reauthorized in 2002 with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB increased accountability with required adequate yearly progress measurements. NCLB is the current version of ESEA, however in December 2015 the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law and will be fully operational in school year 2017-18. The impact of ESSA is unknown at this time; however, it continues to hold schools and districts accountable for student learning (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

School principals are responsible for all that occurs regarding classroom instruction and student learning. The principal must ensure that every classroom has a highly qualified teacher who is competent in both their content knowledge and pedagogy. This requires recruiting, hiring, and training teachers for every content and grade level in the building. It also demands monitoring every classroom and every teacher to ensure that the instruction and learning are at high levels. When there is a deficit or a gap, the principal is responsible for intervening and doing whatever it takes to make the instruction and learning high quality.

Accountability in a school falls on the principal to place teachers appropriately in their teaching assignments, monitor the quality of instruction, ensure alignment of instruction and assessment to the state content standards, monitor progress of student learning, intervene when there is a problem, and support the ongoing learning and professional development of the instructional staff.

Tennessee

In Tennessee, there are several measures of accountability. This includes a teacher evaluation system, student achievement scores, student growth scores, identified subgroup achievement scores, and a principal evaluation system.

According to the Tennessee Department of Education (2016), the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) is the system for teacher and administrator evaluation. The TEAM evaluation system for teachers outlines four domains: instruction, planning, environment, and professionalism. Each of these domains has an instructional

rubric with multiple indicators, levels of measurement between one and five for each indicator, and descriptors for levels one, three, and five of each indicator. Each classroom observation measures one or more domains.

Accountability and Teacher Evaluation

Under the TEAM model, teachers and administrators are evaluated each year using multiple data pieces. Teachers receive a score called an effectiveness level based on three data pieces--teacher observation scores, student achievement data, and student growth scores. Each of these three components have a designated percentage used for determining a teacher's overall effectiveness rating. For teachers in tested area subjects with prior data, 50% is comprised of their observation scores, 35% is comprised of their students' value-added growth scores, and 15% is comprised of a student achievement measure. This student achievement measure is selected by the teacher and administrator at the beginning of each school year. For teachers in tested area subjects with no prior data, 75% is comprised of their observation scores, 10% is comprised of their students' value-added growth scores, and 15% is comprised of a student achievement measure. For teachers in non-tested area contents, 70% is comprised of their observation scores, 10% is comprised of a school-wide growth measure, and 20% is comprised of a student achievement measure (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016).

The observation cycle varies depending on a teacher's type of license and their previous year's level of effectiveness. The evaluation process begins with an initial coaching conversation at the beginning of the school year for those teachers who received

an overall effectiveness rating or individual growth score of one in the previous year.

This coaching conversation is a targeted conversation between the administrator and the teacher about the areas in need of improvement, the supports the teacher will receive in order to improve student achievement, and the number of observations that will be completed during the year. Professionally licensed teachers with an effectiveness rating of two, three, or four have fewer observations than teachers with an apprentice license or those with a level one for effectiveness rating or individual growth score. Any teacher with an effectiveness level of 5 on overall evaluation or individual student growth will have only one formal observation followed by two informal walkthrough observations. Half of all observations must be unannounced, and all observations require a post-conference within five school days of the observation. Announced observations also require a pre-conference under the TEAM evaluation model (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016).

The school administrative team completes the multiple observations for every teacher in a building as well as the calculations of the other components of the effectiveness level scoring system. The accountability system, therefore, rests on the administrators. Observations, coaching conversations, scoring, identifying areas of reinforcement and refinement, and identifying steps for support are all responsibilities of the principal.

Low Scores

Teachers scoring at level one on their overall effectiveness level or their individual student growth received additional measures. Principals must hold an initial coaching conversation at the beginning of the school year to outline the areas in need of improvement and the supports the teacher will receive in order to improve student achievement. The teacher must have at least four observations for the school year along with a plan of supports that is directly tied to their need for improvement. This plan for support must be executed, monitored, and evaluated throughout the school year. The principal determines what will be provided as supports.

The Principal's Role

Working with a teacher who has low scores requires the principal to design a development plan that can help a teacher improve. The development plan outlines the supports a teacher will receive to support his or her own professional growth with the ultimate goal as the improvement of student learning. Creating a plan of supports requires the principal to identify and fully understand the factors that led to the teacher's low level of effectiveness. Once the factors are identified the principal must identify how the teacher can improve. That understanding would drive the types of supports provided to the teacher. This requires a deep understanding of curriculum, instruction, and assessment as well as the nature of adult learning.

Principals must not only fully discern the key factors that led to a teacher's low score, but also how to help the teacher fix it. Making decisions about whether the teacher has a content knowledge deficit, poor classroom management skills, a shallow repertoire of effective instructional practices, ineffective assessment methods, or misalignment of the content standards are just some of the many decisions involved in a principal identifying the factors contributing to low effectiveness ratings or student growth scores. Once these factors are identified, it is the principal's responsibility to map out a plan of supports that is individualized for that teacher. This highlights the incredible responsibility of the principal for teacher improvement and the massive shift in the role of principal over the past decades.

Leadership as Principal

Principals hold the highest leadership role inside schools. They make decisions about the organization's future and goals, impact the work of others, and carry out the needs of the organization. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) noted, "At the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: 'providing direction' and 'exercising influence.' Each of these functions can be carried out in different ways, and such differences distinguish many models of leadership from one another" (p. 20). School leadership must embody these functions in order to guide the school as an organization.

Leithwood et al. (2004) elaborated, "Evidence from district, school and non-education organizations points to three broad categories of successful leadership

practices which are largely independent of such context. Such practices are “the basics” of good leadership and are necessary but not sufficient in almost all situations” (p. 23). They identify the categories as setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization. This is the work of school leadership. These three categories also highlight the shift from the historical role of the principal.

From Manager to Instructional Coach

Historically the principal’s focus and responsibilities have been around management of the school building. Maintaining the building, managing both instructional and support staff, working with community and parent stakeholders, managing the budget, ensuring a safe environment, managing student discipline, and developing a sound instructional program have been cornerstones in the role and responsibilities of the school principal. Rousmaniere described the changing role of a principal in this way, “As school districts became more bureaucratized, so did the principalship. Over time, the role evolved into one of a middle manager, primarily responsible for enforcing district, state, and federal policies while simultaneously supporting the instructional practices of teachers” (as cited in Cosner, Kimball, Barkowski, Carl, & Jones, 2015, p. 79).

Peterson’s 2001 study documented the changing roles of a principal which involved the completion of literally hundreds of tasks each day, with as many as 50 or 60 occurring in a single hour. These can involve everything from classroom coverage to dealing with student and parent conflicts. “The principal must analyze, assess, and develop

solutions or strategies quickly with little time to consider alternatives. Rapid problem identification and solving is the norm” (p. 18). These are all management roles and tasks, however as accountability for schools and student learning has increased it has shifted the focus of the principal’s work to center around instruction and the work, focus, and tasks of principals have shifted dramatically. The principal is still responsible for all of the managing responsibilities, however, the central focus has shifted to improving student learning through teacher improvement. The quality of teachers’ instruction has been clearly linked to student learning. Thoonen, Slegers, Oort, Peetsma, and Geijsel (2011) summarized by stating, “School effectiveness research has clearly shown that student outcomes depend highly on the quality of instruction” (p. 497). This demands that the central work of school leaders be focused on the classroom instruction.

This shift in focus has dramatically impacted the daily work of principals. The work is now out of the office and into the classroom. The reality, however, is that the principal’s intentions of spending time in classrooms is frequently impacted by the demands of the many other non-instructional tasks of the role of principal. May and Supovitz (2011) researched the amount of time principals reported spending on improving instruction. “Analyses of data from the principal daily logs revealed that principals in this study spent an average of 8% of their time on instructional leadership activities. Across the sample of principals, the percentage of time spent on instructional leadership ranged from 0% to 25%. This reveals that the principals in this study spent, on average, about 3 to 5 hours per week on instructional leadership activities during the 2-plus years of the study” (p. 344).

The demands of instructional leadership challenge school leaders to increase their involvement in the classroom instructional tasks and decision-making. “The purpose of supervision should be the enhancement of teachers’ pedagogical skills, with the ultimate goal of enhancing student achievement” (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011, p. 2). Principals are now embedding themselves into all parts of teachers’ activities. They are involved in the planning of instruction, collaboration among content colleagues, assessment design, instructional practices, and analysis of student learning as well as observing classroom instruction, providing rubric-aligned feedback, and coaching teachers for improvement.

Principals receive training on the evaluation system and how to recognize and score planning, instruction, and learning environment practices. There is no training provided on how to identify and provide the supports teachers need to improve. The improvement of teacher effectiveness demands instruction coaching. This instructional coaching role requires content knowledge, deep pedagogical skills, and an understanding of how to coach adult learners. Although most principals were teachers at some point, there is a wide chasm between knowing how to do something and coaching another based on their individual weaknesses.

Instructional coaching takes extensive time and individualized, ongoing support. Neumerski (2012) noted, “Although we know some of the conditions leaders create for teachers and students to learn, we know much less about what happens inside these moments of learning or what type of interactions facilitate them” (p. 336). Principals have little training in this area, and the number of faculty members who may need instructional coaching increases the gravity of the need for

training in this area. The wide span of other managing responsibilities that are still in place makes it critical for principals to fully understand and be able to execute instructional coaching at a high and efficient level. The accountability on schools for student learning forces the principal into the role of instructional leader and coach, able to diagnose, prescribe, and provide supports for every teacher in the building. The specific tasks and behaviors of leaders in undertaking this responsibility is still unclear. Spillane, Diamond, and Jita (2003) summarized, “While there is an extensive literature about *what* school structures, programmes, and processes are necessary for instructional change, researchers know much less about *how* school leaders enact these changes” (p. 534). The gap exists in identifying the practices and tools school leaders use to improve instructional effectiveness.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the self-reported practices school leaders use to help teachers improve. Using a case study methodology, the study identified specific participants in order to learn the practices and tools they use in their work with struggling teachers. Sources of data included principal interviews and documents used by principals to support teachers’ improvement. The analysis and findings from this qualitative research study describe how school leaders respond in supporting teachers and ensuring all students have access to highly effective teachers.

Research Questions

In order to examine, describe, and understand how principals respond to struggling teachers, I engaged the principals in discussing how they respond to the teachers and examined the tools they used in their responses. To understand and describe principals' practices the following research questions were asked:

1. How do principals perceive their role as instructional leader for struggling teachers?
2. What leadership practices do principals report using to assist teachers for improvement?
3. How do principals develop and justify a plan for teacher improvement?
4. In what ways do principals monitor and adapt teacher support?
5. In what ways do principals' reported leadership practices manifest examples of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to identify the self-reported practices of principals that impact struggling teachers and lead to improved teacher performance and student learning. This chapter reviews the literature on leadership models of the principalship. Research studies have been identified and synthesized to explore three different models of leadership--instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership.

Improving instruction in order to increase student learning demands effective school leadership. Leithwood et al. (2004) found from their research that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5).

As accountability measures have increased school leaders must become highly effective at identifying the factors creating low student achievement scores, and the factors creating low teacher effectiveness ratings. Understanding data, disaggregating it in multiple ways, and identifying trends over time are required in order to successfully and accurately identify the factors. These actions establish the deficits, and the next step in changing the trajectory of student achievement is developing a plan for improvement. This plan must be designed, implemented, monitored, and evaluated by the principal as the school leader. Various school leadership models describe different theories on how to accomplish this.

Leadership theories have evolved in the educational domain. The goal of leadership in the school setting is to provide the environment, resources, and instruction necessary for student achievement. School leadership is a form of leadership with specific demands for the schoolhouse, however it is a form of leadership and thus has some commonalities with leadership in general. Leithwood et al. (2004) found, “There is compelling evidence of a common core of practices that any successful leader calls on, as needed. Many of these practices are common to different models of leadership, as well” (p. 8). In their research, they identified three sets of practices that make up this basic core of leadership practices: setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization.

Robinson (2010) examined leadership capabilities for effective instructional leadership through review of empirical research and associated theory. She proposed three capabilities that are directly or indirectly linked to student outcomes. “Effective instructional leadership probably requires leaders to be knowledgeable about how to align administrative procedures and processes to important learning outcomes, to be highly skilled in using their knowledge to solve the myriad of problems that arise in the course of improving learning and teaching in their own contexts, and to use their knowledge, their problem solving ability, and their interpersonal skills in ways that build relational trust in their school community” (p. 21).

As the accountability measures have changed so have the models of effective school leadership. Educational leadership theories and styles vary in their approach to these components, however three models have emerged as strong frameworks in recent years. Current research and school leader evaluation systems focus largely on three

models of school leadership: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership.

Instructional Leadership

The focus on effective schools and accountability measures of the reform movements in the 1980s led to defining school leaders as instructional leaders. This concept focused on ensuring the effectiveness of school principals through a very directive style of leadership. “This model shaped much of the thinking about effective principal leadership disseminated in the 1980s and early 1990s internationally” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330).

Phillip Hallinger has been the foremost researcher on the concept on instructional leadership, including developing the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale. Instructional leadership is student outcome focused. It has three components, or dimensions, as outlined by Hallinger (2003). These include: “defining the school’s mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate” (p. 332).

Defining the school’s mission involves building consensus with the school staff and stakeholders on the clear and measurable goals for the school with a focus on academic achievement and growth. Instructional program management encompasses all things related to instruction. This requires a deep involvement in the curriculum, progression and alignment of programs, observing classroom instruction and providing feedback and intervention, and monitoring the progress of student learning. Promoting a

positive school-learning climate includes allocation of time and resources, ensuring a safe and orderly environment, management of behavior, providing incentives for teachers and for learning, communicating high expectations, and being present and visible in the school (Hallinger, 2008). The central key is the focus on curriculum and instruction rather than the many managerial tasks of a principal. This is echoed by Leithwood et al. (2004) who reported “instructional leadership encourages a focus on improving the classroom practices of teachers as the direction for the school” (p. 6).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a multi-component framework for educational leadership (Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998). The seven components include individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modeling. This leadership framework includes a shared leadership condition, in which others are a part of the leadership and direction of the school. The focus is on developing the individual or staff relationship and capabilities.

Hallinger (2003) describes transformational by its emphasis on behavioral components. “Behavioural components such as individualised support, intellectual stimulation, and personal vision suggest that the model is grounded in understanding the needs of individual staff rather than ‘coordinating and controlling’ them towards the organisation’s desired ends. In this sense the model seeks to influence people by building from the bottom-up rather than from the top down” (p. 337). Transformational leadership utilizes shared leadership to foster the direction and action for improvement. However,

Hallinger (2003) reported, “the available evidence suggests that transformational leadership is no easier to exercise than instructional leadership” (p. 341).

Thoonen et al. (2011) studied the impact of transformational leadership practices on teacher learning and teaching practices. Their findings support professional development for teacher learning activities with a focus on experimenting and reflection as well as motivation. “Teachers’ sense of self-efficacy appeared to be the most important motivational factor for explaining teacher learning and teaching practices” (p. 497).

Leithwood et al. (2004) support this thought on how to improve learning.

“Transformational leadership draws attention to a broader array of school and classroom conditions that may need to be changed if learning is to improve” (p. 6). Both studies support professional development for teacher learning, however the leadership practices leading to direct effects on student achievement were not identified.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is founded on the contributions of many persons within the organization. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) outline leadership with a focus on leaders’ thinking and action *in situ*. “We argue that leadership activity is constituted—defined or constructed—in the interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation in the execution of particular leadership tasks” (p. 10). Spillane et al. (2004) describe the facets of distributed leadership by examining the identification, analysis and enactment of tasks as well as the social distribution in the enactment of the tasks. This includes the interdependencies of the leaders, followers, and situation. “Acknowledging the mutuality

of the individual and the environment, the distributed view underscores that activity is distributed in the interactive web of actors, artifacts, and situation” (p. 20). The distributed leadership model shifts the leadership responsibility from the single principal role to the members of the school community, as they are involved in the performing of school tasks. The work of leading instruction and learning is distributed among multiple leaders. Leithwood et al. (2004) paralleled this by noting in distributed leadership “successful leaders develop and count on contributions from many others in their organizations” (p. 6).

The table 2.1 below provides a summary of key descriptors of each of the leadership models presented.

Table 2.1*Leadership Model Descriptors*

Model	Summary of Model
Instructional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key components: define the school’s mission, manage the instructional program, promote a positive school-learning climate ▪ Focus is on curriculum and instruction rather than managerial tasks of a principal ▪ Encourages a focus on improving classroom practices of teachers as the direction for the school
Transformational Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key components: individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modeling ▪ Focus is on developing the individual or staff relationship and capabilities ▪ Involves shared leadership condition, in which others are a part of the leadership and direction of the school
Distributed Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key components: examining the identification, analysis and enactment of tasks as well as the social distribution in the enactment of the tasks ▪ Focus is on the interdependencies of the leaders, followers, and situation ▪ The work of leading instruction and learning is distributed among multiple leaders

The three model of leadership have unique components, focus areas, and descriptive traits. None of the models, however, outlines the specific practices and tasks that principals who utilize each model of leadership might carry out in order to improve classroom instruction. The broader mechanisms and vision areas are outlined without daily actions to meet the focus of the leadership model.

Empirical Data Showing Impact

Much of the research on instructional leadership has been led by Philip Hallinger. In his 2003 article, Hallinger reported, “It is interesting to note that relatively few studies find a relationship between the principal’s hands-on supervision of classroom instruction, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement” (p. 333). Hallinger developed the most common conceptualization of instructional leadership during the early 1980s. The Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, used in over 110 empirical studies, was designed by Hallinger in 2001. Limited research exists that does not include him in the research of literature, or as a researcher in the study. The findings cited by Hallinger (2003) show the impact of a school leader on the school’s effectiveness comes indirectly through influencing school and classroom actions. Hallinger’s findings highlight the gap in what leadership practices impact classroom instruction and how principals can improve effectiveness.

Hattie (2015) describes how instructional leaders focus less on teachers, and more on student learning. “They’re concerned with the teachers’ and the school’s impact on student learning and instructional issues, conducting classroom observations, ensuring professional development that enhances student learning, communicating high academic standards, and ensuring that all school environment are conducive to learning” (p. 37).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) used data from a four-year evaluation of strategies to study the effects of transformational leadership. The study tested the effects of transformational leadership on teachers, instructional practices, and student learning. They found transformational leadership had significant direct effects in areas of school

environment and teachers' motivation, but did not find direct effects on students' achievement gains. Ross and Gray (2006) tested a hypothesized model of principals' effects on student achievement. They found effects of transformational leadership to be strong on teacher commitment and teacher self-efficacy but limited with indirect effects on student achievement.

A meta-analysis conducted by Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found the overall effect size for instructional leaders was .42, whereas the overall effect from transformational leaders was .11. The average effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times as great as transformational leadership. Robinson et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. They found the mean effect sizes for instructional leadership to be nearly four times the mean effect size of transformational leadership. "The authors' reasoning behind the impact of instructional leadership on student outcomes being greater than that of transformational leadership suggests that general and abstract leadership theories do not prescribe specific leadership practices that can have an impact on student outcomes" (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2013, p. 449). Shatzer et al. (2013) conducted a study in 37 schools and found similar results indicating a stronger effect on student achievement from instructional leadership than transformational leadership.

Marks and Printy (2003) studied how the relationships and collaboration between teachers and principals impacts quality of teaching and student outcomes. Their analysis found that "transformational leadership is a necessary but insufficient condition for instructional leadership. When transformational and shared instructional leadership

coexist in an integrated form of leadership, the influence on school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, is substantial” (p. 370). This shows “transformational leadership lacks an educational emphasis and does not specifically spell out the practices of a successful principal” (Shatzer et al., 2013, p. 449).

Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) examined the relative effect of different leadership models on student learning outcomes both academic and nonacademic. Their findings in comparing the different types of leadership found “the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes” (p. 636).

The models of instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership identify core components, focus areas, and responsibilities of school leaders with unique characteristics to each model. The findings from research indicate each of the leadership models effects components of the schools and with varying degrees of impact, however, none of the models identify, describe, or outline specific practices principals use under the leadership models that directly impacts and improves instruction. *How* they do their work and in what manner is not identified.

Gaps from Theory to Practice

Literature is plentiful in theorizing and examining the many components of leadership, such as vision building, trust, and support; however, the direct connection from leadership theories to improved teaching practices is not as evident, nor as concrete.

The practices, professional development programs, and interventions for struggling or marginal teachers are abstract and undefined. For example, Thoonen et al. (2011) proposed that collaboration is a key practice for teacher experimentation, reflection, and improvement but their research does not outline the leadership practices and processes that develop and support collaboration.

Shatzer et al. (2013) examined leadership practices and the impact on student achievement. They found more research is necessary on the specific leadership practices. “Leadership development programs can specifically target the most effective leadership practices rather than all the practices of instructional leadership—the specific practices that were associated with student achievement” (p. 456). Ross and Gray (2006) further support that research is heavy on some of the effects of leadership on teacher and school factors, but limited in direct effects on teacher self-efficacy and student achievement. Robinson et al (2008) further elucidate this need, “because the practice of leadership is task embedded, leadership theory and research will not deliver increased payoff for student outcomes unless they become more tightly integrated with research on the particular leadership tasks” (p. 669).

Analysis by Thoonen et al. (2011) supports further research in the area of specific practices and their impact on teaching and learning in noting, “We therefore agree that researchers should focus more on the impact particular leadership practices, including transformational ones, have on teaching and learning than on the effects of instructional, transformational, and other types of leadership” (p. 521). This research clearly confirms there is a gap in research and a need for further examination on the specific practices of leadership that lead to sustained school improvement.

Spillane et al. (2004) clearly outline the missing findings for what specific leadership practices lead to improved student achievement. “While there is an expansive literature about what school structures, programmes, roles, and processes are necessary for instructional change, we know less about how these changes are undertaken or enacted by school leaders” (p. 4). Given that the responsibility of ensuring that the quality of instruction is high and effective and leads to student achievement belongs to the principal or the school leader, identifying the practices for this capacity is an essential area of focus for this study.

The literature on three current leadership models has been identified and reviewed. The findings from the literature are significant because they show there is a plethora of models and components of school leadership, however the implications are clear that there is a deficit in identifying the practices required of principals to carry out the daily tasks of implementing these components in the different models. Researchers have successfully defined several perspectives and outlined practices of the different models, however they do not describe how principals can support struggling teachers. We need to know more about the daily practices of principals that impact teacher performance and student learning.

Facilitating Teacher Development Through Situated Perspective

Current leadership models do not identify the specific daily practices of principals, however situated cognition theory, or situated learning, can provide a lens to explore how principals interact with and support teachers for improvement. The situated

learning perspective posits learning occurs within communities of practice; as the learner increases participation in the community the learner changes and transforms. Schools and their faculties are certainly communities of practice as they continually add new members, impact each other, improve their practices, and evolve their mission.

Wenger (as cited in Driscoll, 2005) summarized the basic premises of situated learning as:

1. We are social beings.
2. Knowledge is a matter of competence.
3. Knowing is a matter of participating and active engagement.
4. Meaning is ultimately what learning is to produce.

As principals work with struggling teachers for improvement, we need to understand *how* they support teachers. Situated learning allows us to explore how principals facilitate teachers' learning in context as their learning is mediated through the community. For example, if a teacher is limited in content knowledge, how do principals respond to increase this content? If a teacher has difficulty managing the classroom, how do principals respond to improve the learning environment? If a teacher has inadequate or ineffective instructional strategies, how do principals locate and provide the information that leads to new teacher learning and application? Greeno, Collins, and Resnick (1997) reflect this in their description of the situated learning perspective, "Analyses of activities in this perspective focus on processes of interaction of individuals with other people and with physical and technological systems" (p. 17). Using the lens of situated learning we can move through the leadership models and theories to identify the specific practices principals use that lead to improvement for struggling teachers.

Lave and Wenger (as cited in Driscoll, 2005) describe a community of practice as having three interacting dimensions: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. Utilizing this lens, mutual engagement toward a common goal will examine the engagement of the principal and the teacher toward meeting the common goal of the school, department, or grade level as the joint enterprise. The shared repertoire will develop and expand with the specific practices and artifacts that are shared in the community.

The concept of apprenticeship is highlighted in the situated learning perspective as one way an individual belongs in a community of practice. Lave and Wenger found “As apprentices, learners have strong goals and motivation, and through engagement in practice, they develop a view of what the enterprise is all about” (as cited in Driscoll, 2005, p. 168). As learning increases, so does the responsibility in the community. In the sphere of helping teachers improve, the apprenticeship component can be a facet of the community of practice in which a principal facilitates the apprentice-master relationship. The principal provides the structure, the personnel, and the expectations for supporting the relationships between a struggling or new teacher (apprentice) with an experienced or veteran (master) teacher. The principal may also specifically serve in the role of the veteran, or master teacher, in the relationship. Examining the other forms of apprenticeship in teacher learning, and the communities in which it occurs, is critical for understanding the practices principals can use to support struggling teachers and their learning and development.

Borko (2004) explained, “To understand teacher learning, we must study it within these multiple contexts, taking into account both the individual teacher-learners and the

social systems in which they are participants” (p. 4). Utilizing the lens of the situated learning perspective with its community of practice, apprenticeship component, and the underlying premise of learning through personal connections will help outline *how* principals identify and facilitate the specific practices that will lead to teacher improvement and increased student learning.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

How school principals respond to teachers and support them to improve cannot be easily measured using quantifiable measures. Examining their decisions, interactions with teachers, and the impact of their support methods must be considered within the context of the setting and relationship with the teachers. Leadership is a relational role, and the intent of the study was to understand principals' practices; therefore, these could be examined through qualitative methods. In order to examine, describe, and understand how principals go about their daily work to support struggling teachers, I engaged the principals in discussing how they respond and examined the tools they use as part of their practice. This chapter will describe the research methodology and analysis that was used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do principals perceive their role as instructional leader for struggling teachers?
2. What leadership practices do principals report using to assist teachers for improvement?
3. How do principals develop and justify a plan for teacher improvement?
4. In what ways do principals monitor and adapt teacher support?
5. In what ways do principals' reported leadership practices manifest examples of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models?

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the self-reported practices school leaders use to help teachers improve through a case study methodology. The data sources included interviews and documents principals developed to outline the supports they provide. The practices and tools leading to improvement and sustainability were explored. The analysis and findings from this qualitative research study will support today's school leaders in their responsibilities for supporting teachers and ensuring all students have access to highly effective teachers.

Qualitative Research.

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p.15). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described it similarly in defining qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). In the context of studying how principals identify, interact with, and support struggling teachers a qualitative method of study is appropriate.

Case Study.

Case studies are “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ of a case or multiple cases

over time through detail, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). In Creswell’s updated work (2013) he defines case study research as a “qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97).

Merriam (1998) defined case study by its end product: “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 27). She also focused on the bounded system of a unit and its context. “By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). The overall intent of the research study leads the researcher to an appropriate method. As Merriam (1998) noted, “Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences” (p. 41). To explore how principals respond to teachers who scored below the proficient level in effectiveness ratings, I used a bounded case study approach. The case is bounded to middle level principals who have supported teachers leading to improvement in a Tennessee school district.

Context for the Study

Middle school is the area in which I have worked for more than twenty years and provides the context of most relevance. Literature and research on instructional leaders’

work with elementary schools is more plentiful than that in the context of secondary, in particular, the middle grades level. There is a significant gap in the research on leadership practices showing significant achievement improvement in the middle grades.

Achievement in middle schools declines rapidly in comparison to the growth frequent in both elementary and high school levels. Alspaugh and Harting found “there is a consistent student achievement loss associated with the transition from self-contained elementary schools to intermediate-level schools” (as cited in Alspaugh, 1998, p. 20). For these reasons, the context of teacher improvement at the middle school level is central to this research study.

A large Tennessee school district with over 30 schools was contacted to gain permission to allow the researcher to explore working with principals on how they respond to struggling teachers. The data shared by this district indicates the middle schools provide the greatest number of teachers showing improvement in effectiveness ratings.

The data contained the number of teachers who improved more than two effectiveness levels and did not decline in scores during the school years of 2011-12, 2012-13, and 2013-14. This data was sorted by school level (elementary, middle, high) then by individual school. Three schools that had teachers who improved but the principals were no longer at the school site were removed from the data since the principals would not be available for the study. The remaining data was tallied to indicate the number of improving teachers at each individual school.

The data showed seven of 24 elementary schools had at least one teacher who improved, and of those there was one elementary school that had three teachers. Of the

seven middle schools, five schools had at least one teacher who improved. One middle school had one teacher, three middle schools had four teachers, and one middle school had six teachers who improved. The high school data showed four of the seven high schools with at least one teacher who improved. Two of the high schools had two teachers, and two high schools had three teachers showing improvement of at least two effectiveness level scores.

Data from the elementary schools did not show large numbers of teachers improving at any schools. There was only one school with more than one teacher improving over the span of the three years. For this reason, elementary schools were ruled out for the study. High schools showed more growth with two or three teachers improving at about half of the schools. In reviewing the schools that showed the greatest number of improvement in teacher scores, middle schools stood out in their growth compared to the high schools and elementary schools. Middle schools had more than half of all schools reporting teacher improvement and larger numbers of individual teachers at each school who improved in their effectiveness levels. For this reason middle schools were identified as the bounded case study for this research.

Of the seven middle schools, one school was excluded because the principal during the years reported in the data was no longer assigned to the school. One school was excluded because it had no teachers who showed improvement. One school was excluded because the principal is the researcher of this study. The remaining four schools have principals who are still in the leadership positions and data showing teacher improvement.

Participants.

The bounded system of a case is a specific criteria of a case study. In this study the research was focused on the self-reported practices of school principals that impact teachers leading to improvement. Middle school principals were recruited that had at least one teacher who significantly improved (and did not subsequently decline) in effectiveness levels during the schools years 2011-12 to 2013-14. Significant improvement was defined as increasing the effectiveness levels by at least two points using the Tennessee's effectiveness level ratings of one to five. The case study was bounded to middle school principals in this district in Tennessee. Participants were identified using effectiveness level ratings for teachers at each school. Current principals with teachers who increased their effectiveness levels by at least two points and did not regress in subsequent years were identified and requested as participants. Removing the researcher from this list of middle school principals with teachers showing improvement left four middle school principals as participants for this research study.

Data Collection Procedures and Data Sources

Data collection for the case study included a variety of data to develop an in-depth understanding. Creswell (2013) noted that to accomplish this, "the research collects many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews, to observations, to documents, to audio visual materials. Relying on one source of data is typically not enough to develop this in-depth understanding" (p. 98). For this study initial interviews, document artifacts, and follow up interviews were used for data collection and analysis.

Interviews.

Principals were interviewed separately at their school locations at a time convenient for the principal. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. An interview protocol guide (see Appendix A) was prepared prior to the interview and contained the key interview questions. The guide contained information about the time, date, location, and interviewee's name along with key interview questions. The interviews started with general questions such as, "What is the process you go through when you receive effectiveness ratings and find a low score?" I asked some probing questions to prompt the interviewees to elaborate on responses. An example of this is, "Why is that your first action when receiving the effectiveness ratings?"

Interviews were audio-recorded using a hand held recorder. During the interview I recorded notes from the interview on the interview guide paper. After completion of the interviews, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. Interviews took place during May 2016, and transcriptions were completed within two weeks of the last interview (mid-June).

Document Artifacts.

At the end of the interviews, principals were asked to provide copies of related documents or artifacts that show evidence of any actions taken, or practices used, to support struggling teachers. Artifacts gathered for this study included any documents provided by the principals that note plans for development, communication with struggling teachers, documentation of growth, and any other artifacts principals use in working with the teachers. All documents had redacted any identifying information of the teachers. Examples of these documents are development plans, documentation of support,

feedback forms, etc. I collected copies of document artifacts from the principals after the interviews. Each of the artifact copies were scanned and saved as pdf documents within two weeks of the last interview (no later than mid-June).

Follow Up Interviews.

After conducting the interviews and completing the document analysis, a second follow up interview was conducted to ask targeted questions related to the documents or actions taken by the principal. For example, a follow up question regarding a development plan that the principal created was, “How do you provide feedback on the actions steps taken by a teacher in her development plan?” An example of a follow up question regarding a principal’s action or decision-making was, “What led you to do that?” and “What kinds of resources did you use?” The follow up interview questions were designed to extract further information from the interviewee on how the documents were developed and utilized as well as questions to clarify the relationship between interview responses in the initial interview and items in the documents. The follow up questions also inquired deeper into the decision-making of principals.

Follow up interviews were audio-recorded using a hand held recorder. During the follow up interviews I recorded notes in a journal. After completion of the interviews, the interview recordings and journal notes were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. The follow up interviews were conducted within four weeks of the first interviews and by mid-July. The transcriptions were completed within two weeks of the last follow-up interview (end of July).

Table 3.1*Research Questions and Corresponding Data Collection Tools*

Research Questions	Data Collection Tool(s)
How do principals perceive their role as instructional leader for struggling teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Follow up interview
What leadership practices do principals report using to assist teachers for improvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Document analysis • Follow up interview
How do principals develop and justify a plan for teacher improvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Document analysis • Follow up interview
In what ways do principals monitor and adapt teacher support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Document analysis • Follow up interview
In what ways do principals' reported leadership practices manifest examples of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Document analysis • Follow up interview

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred using the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). This method of data analysis provides an inductive approach in which the knowledge emerges from the data using inductive reasoning. Glaser and Strauss found, “The *constant comparative* method of analyzing qualitative data combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained (as cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 134). After data

was collected through interviews and transcribed, and the document copies were saved as pdf documents, each data page was divided into chunks of unit of meaning. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this process as unitizing the data. The unitizing consisted of reviewing the data pages for portions, or units, of meaning in the data. These units were marked on the transcripts or data pages and include a notation of a word or phrase about the unit's meaning. During the unitizing, units of meaning that indicated the components of situated learning were noted as such. For example, some relationships and time assigned with experienced teachers reflected the apprentice-master relationship, while an emphasis on the work of professional learning communities during collaborative planning reflected a community of practice. These units were noted both as practices of the leaders to support struggling teachers, as well as through the lens of situated learning components.

As each new unit of meaning was identified, it was compared to others already identified and those with similar meaning. Eventually it was grouped through categorization and coding. Using a prominent, or recurring, idea from the data a provisional coding category was identified on a new poster document. The unitized data cards were reviewed to find all units of meaning that fit the category using the "look/feel-alike" criteria described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). As units were identified, they were added to the category poster. Any unit cards that did not fit the current category poster were reviewed to determine if a new provisional category should be created. "The researcher asks himself or herself whether the unit of meaning on one card is very similar to the unit of meaning on another card. In this systematic and painstaking way, salient categories of meaning are inductively derived" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 136).

Once several unitized data cards were accumulated in a provisional coding category, a rule for inclusion (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was written. Maykut & Morehouse (1994) describe the goal of writing a rule for inclusion is “to distill the meaning carried in the cards, and write a rule that will serve as the basis for including (or excluding) subsequent data cards in the category” (p. 139). After writing the rules for inclusion, data cards were reviewed to determine if each fits the rule to remain in the provisional coding category. Cards that no longer fit based on the rule of inclusion were removed and reviewed later to determine if they fit any other category. After the rule for inclusion was written and data cards were reviewed for appropriate inclusion or exclusion, a category code was identified to mark the data cards indicating their category inclusion. Categories were reviewed to look for any overlap or lack of clarity and any adjustments or redefining were made.

After the coding categories were well defined and clear, the categories were analyzed for relationships and patterns or other connections as outcome propositions as described by Maykut & Morehouse (1994).

Issues of Validity and Reliability

Lincoln and Guba (1994) outline several components of qualitative research processes that contribute to validity and reliability. In this research study, three components were utilized. First, multiple methods of data collection were used to fully understand the context, depth, and dynamic of the practices of principals as instructional leaders. Interviews, document collections, and follow up interviews provided ample

sources of various data to support a deep analysis and lead to major themes or patterns. Second, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process ensuring that the data generated in the study was an organized collection of materials, and there was a clear description of the procedures used and the analysis that occurred. Third, to ensure that the transcripts and document notes accurately captured the participants' experiences member checks (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) were used. Participants reviewed the transcripts to ensure accuracy and appropriateness.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also support the use of triangulation and member checks as strategies for ensuring validity. As Merriam and Tisdell describe, qualitative researchers "seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it" (p. 250). Since human behavior and experiences are not such that can adequately be replicated by another, reliability in qualitative research "is whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 251). Merriam and Tisdell highlight similar strategies of Lincoln and Guba by noticing, "Strategies that a qualitative researcher can use to ensure consistency and dependability or reliability are triangulation, peer examination, investigator's position, and the audit trail" (p. 252).

Limitations of This Study

Marshall and Rossman (2011) noted, "All proposed research projects have limitations; none is perfectly designed" (p. 76). This research study has its limitations as well. I work as a middle school principal, and as such will naturally have some researcher bias. Currently serving in my seventh year as school principal I have experience working

with struggling teachers. As a principal I am always reflecting on how to improve my professional practice and improve student learning. My relationship to this topic of study is to understand other principals' experiences in supporting struggling teachers.

I serve as a school principal in the same district in which the participants are employed as school principals. We have collegial relationships due to our common roles and having to attend many of the same meetings or trainings in the district. Considering this, there may be assumptions they have about my understanding of their responses due to working in a similar role and it will be essential to probe further after responses to ensure full and accurate understanding without assumptions. Additionally, because of these relationships they may not be as forthcoming. Therefore, I will use due diligence to probe in order to ascertain accurate, thorough, and credible information from their responses.

The purpose of this study was to describe principals' experiences; it was not to make claims about best practices in general for struggling teachers. In this study it would be impossible to draw causation between principals' actions and teacher improvement, but what I provide is a description of their instructional leadership practices and experiences with struggling teachers.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the self-reported practices of principals that impact struggling teachers and lead to improved teacher performance and student learning. Principals participated in interviews, provided documents, and answered follow-up interview questions. During the interviews participants described their practices for responding to a struggling teacher. They also shared their strategies and experiences in working with these teachers. Through the analysis of the data collected from the interviews and documents, several themes emerged.

The following research questions informed this study:

1. How do principals perceive their role as instructional leader for struggling teachers?
2. What leadership practices do principals report using to assist teachers for improvement?
3. How do principals develop and justify a plan for teacher improvement?
4. In what ways do principals monitor and adapt teacher support?
5. In what ways do principals' reported leadership practices manifest examples of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models?

The research findings reported in this chapter are based on analysis of all the data acquired throughout the case study.

Case Study Context

The case study was bounded within one school district in Tennessee and its middle school principals who had at least one teacher who significantly improved (and did not subsequently decline) in effectiveness levels during the school years 2011-12 to 2013-14. Using Tennessee's effectiveness level ratings of one to five, significant improvement was defined as increasing the effectiveness levels by at least two points. Principals were selected who had teachers who significantly improved and who were still serving as principal in the same school building. Removing the researcher from this list of middle school principals with teachers showing improvement left four middle school principals as participants for this research study.

The following section provides a contextual description of each participant to support a broader understanding of the case being studied. Table 4.1 below shows the teaching and leadership experience of each participant and is followed by additional information about each participant's background and school demographics. The names of all participants are pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Table 4.1*Comparison of Experiences of Participants*

Participant	Years of Classroom Teaching Experience	Years in the Current District	Years as Principal
Michael Mitchell	10	8	6
Diana Samuelson	12	21	6
Stephanie Bradford	16	24	8
Rachel Wilkerson	4	4	6

Michael Mitchell.

Michael Mitchell has served as principal in his current school for six years.

During that time the school's overall annual achievement data and student growth data have shown continuous improvement. The school at which Michael leads is the newest middle school in the district. It opened in 2007. The demographics of Michael's school include a large population of military dependents, 45% of the student population. 13% of the student population is students with disabilities, 50% are students of low socioeconomic status, and 64% are non-white ethnicities. Michael has a faculty of 66 certified educators.

Michael taught social studies as a classroom teacher. He has never been a classroom teacher in the district in which he currently works as an administrator. Michael's passion for keeping students the epicenter of school is evident through his interviews. "I think if we can get people to be student-centered. If you can get them focused on doing what's best for kids, that'll drive them." Additionally, his background

as a coach influences his work as a leader. "The day in day out, the week in week out, of mentoring and being beside that person and being positive and staying focused on the right things, and support. There's true leadership right there."

Diana Samuelson.

Diana Samuelson leads the oldest of the middle schools in this study, and one of the oldest middle schools in the district. The school was opened in 1980. Demographic data for Diana's school includes 19% military dependents, 11% are students with disabilities, 38% are students of low socio-economic status, and 29% are non-white ethnicities. Diana has a total faculty of 67 certified educators, and includes the most veteran, or experienced, number of teachers of the middle schools in this case study.

Diana's teaching background was in Reading/Language Arts in the middle grades level. All of her educational experiences, both as a classroom teacher and as an administrator, have been in the district in which she currently serves as principal. Diane's fervor for building relationships with teachers in order to support them was evident. "I think that struggling teachers, if they trust you and trust that you really do care for them and are not out to get them, and that you want to help them and that you'll do what you say you're going to do, they will feel safe. If they don't feel safe I don't think they're going to grow."

Stephanie Bradford.

Stephanie Bradford has the most years of experience in education in the study. She also has the most years of teaching experience of the principals. Her teaching background was in the career technology education content area. She taught in the district in which she now leads as principal. In the eight years of leading as principal, she has

supervised the 55 faculty members in the school. Stephanie's school is the most rural school in the county, and it is the smallest in student population. It opened in 1988. Demographic data for this school includes 13% military dependents, 16% are students with disabilities, 55% are students of low socio-economic status, and 21% are non-white ethnicities. Stephanie is compelled by the urgency of intervening with a struggling teacher and not waiting or ignoring it. "It is too easy for an administrator to go into a struggling teacher's classroom and go, 'What's going on here?' then shut the door and not do anything about it. It's very, very easy because there are 455 other things that need to be done in that day. But if you don't do it immediately it becomes too ingrained and it's too hard for them to change."

Rachel Wilkerson.

Rachel Wilkerson has the last number of years in education in this study. She has four years of teaching experience and six years of experience as school principal. The school Rachel leads is the most affluent middle school in the district, and it is the largest in student population with an ever-increasing enrollment. The school opened in 1998. Rachel has a teaching background in the elementary grade levels with a strong content background in Reading/Language Arts. She has never taught in the school district in which she now serves as principal. Demographic data for this school includes 25% military dependents, 11% are students with disabilities, 38% are students of low socio-economic status, and 35% are non-white ethnicities. There are 73 certified teachers under Rachel's supervision.

Data Collection

Data collected by the participants for this study was collected between May 2016 and August 2016. The results presented in this section will follow the data collection tools outlined in chapter 3 and reprinted in table 4.2 below for reference.

Table 4.2

Research Questions and Collection Tools

Research Questions	Data Collection Tool(s)
How do principals perceive their role as instructional leader for struggling teachers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Follow up interview
What leadership practices do principals report using to assist teachers for improvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Document analysis • Follow up interview
How do principals develop and justify a plan for teacher improvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Document analysis • Follow up interview
In what ways do principals monitor and adapt teacher support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Document analysis • Follow up interview
In what ways do principals' reported leadership practices manifest examples of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview • Document analysis • Follow up interview

Research Findings

Research Question 1: How do principals perceive their role as instructional leader for struggling teachers?

Principals are responsible for the instructional quality and academic achievement in their school buildings. As instructional leaders, how they respond to and support struggling teachers for improvement illustrates their perception of their role in this capacity.

Rachel Wilkerson starts with the data as the underpinning to her decision-making and her leadership. "I want to be owner and master of that data. As the principal I feel like I'm responsible for all of it. So if I don't have a good handle on it and people ask me questions and I don't have the answers, I don't feel like I'm doing my job." Her understanding of the current state of progress in her building is essential to her work. "I think it's my job to know and thoroughly understand what's going on in the building because I'm the one that has to make a plan to fix it. Or maintain it, either way. Which maintenance is sometimes harder than improvement."

Rachel understands that working to support teachers requires building relationships and understanding them as individuals. "Each teacher has a set of circumstances that comes with them. There's all these circumstances so you kind of have to look at the whole person and figure out how am I going to get you to grow." She makes connections with their strengths. "Everybody's good at something. You don't want to hurt their strengths, you want to connect things to that." Encouragement is essential as well. "Keep trying. That's my motto. Keep trying. I tell the teachers I will help you as long as you continue to try, but when you tell me you're at the end and you're giving up

on yourself, I'm done." The role sometimes includes employment discussions as well. "You've got to send messages in different ways. At the beginning it's all about trying to help them. But then it might become about helping them see that this might not be the right profession for you."

Rachel's responses highlighted her sense of responsibility for all things in her building. Understanding all of the data in great depth is essential in her role. Along with that knowledge she identified relationship-building as critical in her work. The understanding of another's situation, perspective, and strengths and weaknesses is essential in how she carries out her work with teachers. Michael Mitchell also identifies the importance of building relationships, specifically through the work of coaching.

Michael Mitchell considers his role as a model of coaching. "I think that's just being a coach. You can always encourage—you've got this, this is nothing. You can achieve this. Get them realizing and thinking that the developmental plan is about their growth and about them being here long-term, to maybe inspire them to dig a little deeper, to want to do." He directs people back to the instructional practices they use and whether those are impacting learning. "That's where we've been kind of focusing—really get people to examine teaching practices and what's working and what's not." The process is not done in isolation. He employs his entire administrative team to diagnose the issues and prescribe support. "It's just by observation. Figuring out where they're struggling and what we think. And it's a collective thought process between Jim, and Mandy, myself, and the coach. It's all of us trying to figure out what is the best, what is that thing. I think that's really how we do it."

Michael also recognizes his role can move from determining supports for growth to ending employment. "Who's really got the heart and desire to get it done versus the one that can't do it. They just don't have it. So when you do figure it out, it's even harder when you realize they just can't do it and you have to let them go." Michael explained that is a very difficult decision and provided an example of the challenge. "I think it's when you wake up and realize that you're working harder to save their job than they are, you know. There just came a point where I wanted her to keep her job more than she did. It's at that point when you wake up and you realize you're working harder to save their job than they are. That's when you just kind of have to divorce yourself of it. You have to quit worrying about this is someone's livelihood, and you start worrying about the kids." Leading people comes from caring about them and the children they teach. That's where Michael's focus remains. "So I think it's be honest, do the hard work, don't shy away from the hard work, but do it with care and compassion. You've got to care about people at the end of the day. The last thing I would say is keep kids the focus. If you can always come back to it's about kids, you can't go wrong."

The work of leading teachers carries great responsibility for the children being taught. Michael explained that deciding between continuing support and ending employment are both challenging decisions, and they must be done with caring. Diana also identified relationships as critical in supporting growth in teachers.

Diana Samuelson identified the importance of building a relationship with people and understanding their unique needs. "You know, it's understanding. Trying to figure out what's going on and not just making assumptions. You have to talk to them, listen to them probably more than talking with them. You have to really show them that you are

there to support them, and you know sometimes even when you're there to support you have to have corrective or disciplinary conversations and that's part of the process." She elaborated by describing how she wants the teachers to perceive when she works with them to improve. "I want them to feel supported by me and not feel like I'm threatening them." Diana also outlined the role of principal includes being diagnostic and prescriptive. "We've got to figure out what is the root cause of the issue. I mean you can have a plan for any of them, regardless, but you've got to figure out what is the struggle." She also articulated that although the role of principal focuses on improving instruction, it still encompasses management of people. "I think our biggest issue has been more of an issue of work ethic than it has been with competency."

Developing relationships with individuals in order to understand their unique needs and situations helps school leaders to make well-informed decisions on next steps for support, decisions about continued employment, and modeling the expectations. The school leaders identify this as a critical practice of an instructional leader, however, they also identify the urgency to intervene. Stephanie explains this and how she tempers her response based on the relationship with an individual teacher.

Stephanie Bradford characterizes her role by the importance of recognizing and addressing problems in the classroom. "It is too easy for an administrator to go into a struggling teacher's classroom and go—'What's going on here?' then shut the door and not do anything about it. It's very, very easy because there are 455 other things that need to be done in that day. But if you don't do it immediately it becomes too ingrained and it's too hard for them to change." She described the longevity of the work with struggling teachers. "My experience working with struggling teachers has been ongoing since the

day I took the job. Identifying exactly why they're struggling, that has been a challenge throughout the years." Stephanie also understands the importance of the knowing the teacher as an individual with unique characteristics. "With some you can be quite frank with them and go at it rather quickly, and then others you have to go at it around the edge and get to the meat of it." She elaborated by stating, "If you approach it from a punitive stance, they're not going to grow." Her role to support and grow includes prescriptive plans. "Setting up goals for them to work toward, kind of prescribing the solution so to speak for what they should be doing to help them grow."

The participants view their roles as instructional leaders who develop individual relationships with teachers to understand unique needs and circumstances. They also identify the sense of responsibility for knowing and understanding all of their school's data in great depth, including individual teacher data that is poor. Being responsible for understanding individual situations, intervening with urgency when struggles are evident, and prescribing appropriate supports are critical in their descriptions of their roles.

Research Question 2: What leadership practices do principals report using to assist teachers for improvement?

There were several common leadership practices from the four participants in this case study. These common leadership practices for supporting teachers for improvement included data review, teacher conferencing, reflective questioning, collaboration, coaching relationship, setting expectations, and coaching planning. Each of these practices is examined in detail in subsequent paragraphs.

Data Review.

Using available data for review and analysis is a leadership practice that was evident from the interviews and document analysis. Some participants described it explicitly, while others were not as explicit but referenced using data in decision-making for their work with struggling teachers.

The process for Rachel Wilkerson starts with her own research of the data. "My process is, I look for the surprises first. I'll dig before the teachers can get into it. I want to have the answers for them because I'm usually the first person they ask about why something is the way that it is. Then I look for trends in the department as well."

Diane Samuelson detailed how she uses the data with a team approach to her process. She explained, "First we talk as a (administrative) team and we include the academic coach. We try to decide is this a surprise or is it not a surprise (from the data)?" From the team discussion a plan is developed to begin the process. "First you've got to have a plan. Then we basically figure out who all is going to be involved and what the time line is going to look like. How are we going to check on each part to see how things are going? It's that monitor and evaluate piece."

Stephanie Bradford referenced reviewing data in her preparation for working with a struggling teacher. "What strategies did the teacher rely on predominantly? What did the lesson plans look like for that particular standard, or indicator on the RCPI data?" Studying RCPI data indicates she uses summative data to inform her work and impact her decision-making.

Michael Mitchell reviews annual state data when it is released, then goes back to it as he refines his work with struggling teachers. "Reevaluate before you just start

talking to people about scores. Really go back and reflect on where do you really think they were. Look at your observations, what did we see that past year? Why is it that we thought your questioning was great, your feedback was good, that you had kids doing stuff everyday, and yet you're a one on the effectiveness rating?"

Analyzing the different pieces of data to create a fuller picture of where a teacher has needs is central to his work.

School leaders use all components of data to gain a full picture of effectiveness, and they involve a team of administrators to provide varied perspectives on the data. In addition, multiple types of data are reviewed and analyzed including summative state testing data, formal observation data, classroom visit data, and other relevant data.

Teacher Conferencing.

Examining the processes used by the four participants shows parallels in practices. All four participants described holding initial discussions with the teachers as an integral early practice. A plan that included checkpoints and identified personnel was another parallel in the participants' processes.

Michael Mitchell starts with conversations with the struggling teacher. "I think for me it's probably more of the conversations that we have and even in private, calling them in. Here's where I need you to get to. Here's your area of weakness. If we're honest, this is where you struggle. So this is where we've got to work." He continued by explaining an overview of the conference with the teacher. "I like hearing their mindset. I don't like doing it over the phone or email. I like to have a face-to-face. Hey, why don't you come in the office and sit down, let's just talk. Here's what your scores are. I like to see their

disposition, where are they." The conference helps initiate a plan for improvement. "We try to keep it as simple as possible. Focus on the area of weakness that we have identified, and then I give a vote of confidence at the end. 'I know you can do every bit of what we are asking. You can do this.' I think that's just being a coach."

Stephanie Bradford uses the data to begin the discussion with a struggling teacher. "Anyone that has less than a three (effectiveness level), we've set down for the past years and specifically have a data chat with them looking at their data. They would have been given prior to this data chat a set of questions very pointed at disaggregating their data. They got directions on how to do it. They had to come back with what subgroups, gender, etc. They had to reflect on what they had done." From the discussion the process moves to a more diagnostic approach which was difficult for Stephanie. "Identifying exactly why they're struggling—that has been a challenge throughout the years."

Diana Samuelson stressed the importance of conferencing in order to develop understanding. "You know, it's understanding. Trying to figure out what's going on and not just making assumptions." The understanding helps to identify the root cause and determine appropriate supports. "We've got to figure out what is the root cause of the issue. I mean you can have a plan for any of them, regardless, but you've got to figure out what is their struggle."

Teacher conferencing was described by the participants as a critical initial practice in the work with struggling teachers. Meeting with the teachers privately to discuss concerns, data, and plans for improvement also provides an opportunity to hear the teacher's voice and use it in consideration of a plan for support.

Reflective Questioning.

Often the teacher conferencing included using questioning to help direct a teacher's reflection on their practices. This practice used by school leaders helps the teacher develop understanding, ownership, and a personalized plan for improvement.

Reflective questioning is a tool Michael Mitchell uses to help teachers discern what is effective. "That's where we've been kind of focusing—really get people to examine teaching practices and what's working and what's not."

Diana Samuelson also frequently utilizes the practice of reflective questioning to support teacher ownership of areas in need of improvement. "Ask them to provide information. Also, sometimes the more questions you ask and dig deeper they almost always, even if they don't want to change, hit it on the head. But you've got to find a way for it to come out of their mouths instead of yours. So it's question after question."

Diana Samuelson further explains reflective questioning, "Sometimes asking that person, why do you think it's not working? Sometimes they'll tell you something that's really, ahh. They may not even realize that they're giving you something helpful to help them. So you've got to ask lots of questions and have lots of conversations." The reflective questioning is critical for Diana to use in developing the appropriate plan for supports. "If we don't really figure out what's going on, we may not create the right plan."

Reflective questioning can be used to help focus the teacher's attention on needed areas, but also to help uncover areas that might be impacting their effectiveness. Getting to root causes is critical to ensuring appropriate action is taken. Understanding the

teacher's perspective and developing ownership of the problem is critical in school leader's work.

Stephanie Bradford uses reflective questioning to uncover the teacher's perspective and degree of ownership of the student outcomes. "I want to see where they go, so I give them some guiding questions. It's always a tell for a level one teacher as to what their explanation is going to be about." She further identifies the reflection specific to the data. "When they bring the data in, did they disaggregate the data based upon themselves, or did they disaggregate the data based upon the student?"

Rachel Wilkerson finds that reflective questioning helps the teacher build ownership and self-identify areas for improvement. "I think it's always more beneficial when the person can come to it on their own and say, 'Okay, I didn't really hit the mark there so I guess I'm going to work on that.' Then I can just encourage them and ask them about how they want to do that and if there's any way I can support them in doing that." In order to facilitate this process for teachers she created the reflective questioning. "I had to build a reflective opportunity for them."

Through the use of reflective questioning the participants develop a clearer understanding of the root causes of problems, provide opportunities for teachers to share critical information, and build ownership of the problem and a plan for improvement. This practice can promote teacher development and growth beyond simple compliance.

Collaboration.

Teaching has historically been a somewhat isolated activity without much opportunity for teachers to labor together about their work. Collaboration between colleagues is now a common practice in current educational practice, and the participants

clearly identified their practices included establishing and maintaining collaboration in their buildings.

Collaboration with colleagues is a central part of support under Michael Mitchell's direction. Michael described how struggling teachers were supported through the collaborative planning structure established at his school. "We start within our collaborative planning. If all of us collectively built the same common assessment prior to teaching the lesson or unit, we're using backwards design. Now we're collectively building our daily lesson targets of this is what it needs to look like." Michael further elaborated on the impact of collaborative planning. "I feel like that support more than anything else is what is helping young teachers, struggling teachers."

Diana Samuelson echoed the impact of collaboration among several colleagues on supporting struggling teachers:

I think that the point is they are getting access to multiple professionals—their peers, administrators, academic coach, whoever else is in there. I think that just having that access means they are not on their own trying to figure things out by themselves.

Rachel Wilkerson also described the impact of the shared work of collaboration. "It comes through collaborative planning with their team leaders so sometimes that's just building capacity in somebody else in the group to help them understand what the planning process entails and giving more support that way." The collaborative process encourages ongoing growth for all participants.

The situated learning perspective examines the context in which learning occurs, and how it impacts the learner. The component of community of practice reflects the structure of collaboration as described by the participants. Communities of practice have

three interacting dimensions: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. The participants all described the importance of collaborative planning with their content area grade level colleagues as critical in the growth of a teacher. This designated time to collaborate together on common work and share ideas and strategies was critical in their responses to struggling teachers. Structuring the time for collaborative planning and setting the expectations for the work of collaborative teacher teams was a practice noted by all of the principals.

Michael Mitchell stated, "It's just for a lot of people I think it's getting over the idea it's okay to take someone else's idea and run with it. You don't have to be right about everything." He also elaborated on the impact when the individuals work together, uphold the decisions within the community of collaboration, and clarify what the instruction will look like. The following excerpt from Michael's follow up interview helps to illustrate this:

The collaboration allows struggling teachers to get a much clearer picture of the standards, of what the standard means, of building the common assessment, of where the children need to get to. So as a collaborative group of 3 or 4 teachers, if you have one teacher who's struggling, obviously you've got time to come to a consensus of this is what this (instruction) looks like. The hope in my mind is that if they see that, then they're better able to go execute it in their classroom to the depth that they need to be at.

The community of practice can establish a clearer picture of what quality instruction looks like and how everyone in the community develops it. Being a part of a community of practice can impact every teacher's practice and support growth for all teachers, not just struggling teachers. In doing so, everyone is learning and growing. Stephanie Bradford highlighted the characteristics of collaboration that develop the community of practice that supports learning for all teachers involved:

It's an environment that's not threatening. They (struggling teachers) can sit and listen, or as a small group in collaboration they can take the lead depending on the situation. It works because it's pairing them up with people who may, hopefully, have experience in the classroom and with this curriculum and the standards so they can come together with a plan. They can help them see that this might be the best teaching strategy. It's really just a good way even for the veterans to grow, not just the struggling teacher.

A community of practice is comprised of multiple people collaborating together in common work. The group includes multiple people who each bring their own unique experiences and ideas. This provides a struggling teacher with a wealth of diverse perspectives and supports the teacher in knowing that he or she is not isolated in learning the practice. Diana Samuelson described the many people involved in collaboration as a community of practice and the benefit of being in the community of practice versus working independently:

Sometimes it might help them with focus. It might be helping them with understanding the content better. It's having that extra support and accountability. It's both. If they were on their own they just wouldn't have it. I see in specific examples from the past that learning from others is the biggest thing for the struggling teacher. The hope is that they're going to walk away feeling prepared, with a better understanding of the assessment, and having strategies to use in their classroom instruction when they are not with the other teachers.

The community of practice can provide a safe, idea-sharing space for teachers to collaborate and learn from each other and provide support to each other as they develop new ideas, strategies, and share struggles. Having multiple perspectives included in the community assists with problem-solving and developing a place where struggling teachers can get assistance in the areas in which they need support. Collaborating in the community of practice helps all teachers refine and sharpen the picture of high quality instruction which means all teachers, not just struggling teachers, can develop and

advance. The improvement of each individual then impacts the improvement of the community. It's a cyclical support system.

Coaching Relationship.

Struggling teachers who are working in chorus with other teachers as mentors to engage in practice reflect the apprentice relationship outlined in situated learning. Mentor teachers who model, observe, provide feedback, and work alongside the struggling teacher help to create a view of effective instruction and high quality practices. All of the participants mentioned the use of an academic coach as well as other veteran teachers to provide this type of support.

Diana Samuelson referenced the variety of people who can help mentor teachers. "It could be just a subject area partner. Almost every group has a very strong, supported, wise teacher in every subject area grade level." She further elaborated on the work involved in coaching. "Letting them see what the issue is, coming up with strategies together, giving them opportunity to practice, and giving them feedback. It's an ongoing cycle." As a contrast to collaboration, Diana described the individualized nature of coaching. "Coaching is very focused on the individual teacher's needs, which aren't always directly related to what will happen in collaboration—like classroom management, for example. Some things they discuss in collaboration might be helpful with that, but that may not really be what they need in terms of the coaching piece."

Michael Mitchell identified the work of mentoring is walking alongside someone and supporting them each day to improve. "But the day in day out, the week in week out, of mentoring and being beside that person and being positive and staying focused on the right things, and support. There's true leadership right there."

The following excerpt from Michael illustrates the difference between collaboration and coaching:

I would say coaching is different because coaching is one-on-one. When we're coaching we're getting very specific to the individual need of that teacher. Beyond just the collaborative piece and the content, it's probably drilling down to some facet or piece that they actually need. Your questioning could be better. We need to work on classroom management. I think the coaching piece is more specific, whereas the collaborative piece is more of that group effort of drilling down into the standards. What do the standards really look like, what is the best way for us to teach it, what do we want the kids to ultimately be able to do. What does the assessment look like? In collaborative environments it's also about what are we going to do for the kids who don't get it? What are we going to do about the kids who already have it? To me in coaching, it's now I'm sitting and watching you actually teach and critiquing your teaching and helping you with very specific things within your personal teaching ability. To me that's how I view it.

Rachel Wilkerson illustrated the apprenticeship component by describing how she directs different personnel to work with the struggling teacher to model and provide feedback. "I need you to talk to so and so because it just didn't go over the same as it did in your classroom. Can you guys talk about that?" She continued, "He (academic coach) could make a point of getting in there and monitoring faster than we probably could. And that seemed to be way more effective and then he could see trends, too." Rachel specifically identified the work of the academic coach to personalize support for the teacher. "Our academic coach does a lot individually with them. Sometimes just the coaching cycle with them, or getting them resources, or I'll say I need you to spend a couple planning periods with someone." The one-on-one structure provides the opportunity to personalize the supports and model effective practices.

Stephanie Bradford expounded on the relationship foundation of an apprenticeship-type coaching relationship:

I kind of always see coaching like that rah thing. Finding out what the strength of that person is and going to that strength. Knowing in that process, in the process of building the relationship, as to when it would be time to introduce something foreign to them, or they'd feel a little nervous about. You introduce it at a time because you've built that relationship. I think coaching is 'I know you can do it because you've already done this' and it's completely different than collaboration.

The apprenticeship nature of coaching was very evident in the participants' responses. The concept of an experienced educator working side by side with a struggling teacher to provide individualized support, identify when the next steps should be outlined, build a relationship for ongoing support, and encourage and embolden the colleague to improve is encapsulated by the apprenticeship relationship of situated learning. The parallels are apparent, however, in this study one notable difference in the apprenticeship relationship should be identified. The academic coaches referenced by the four participants in this study are all full-time coaches, and therefore, not currently in teaching positions. The role provides the freedom of time to meet with, observe, and model for the struggling teacher; however, it also means the coach is not managing all of the same factors and tasks that a classroom teacher must. The roles are different, although the purpose of academic coaching is to support teacher improvement but not through an evaluative role.

Setting Expectations.

Setting expectations and providing clarity of the level of quality required are important steps for the participants in this study. Informing teachers so they know the demands is a key early step in their responses. All of the participants talked about the importance of setting expectations, however they used various methods to do so.

Stephanie Bradford creates a plan focused on small goals for individual teachers and defines the expectation for improvement. Her process includes, "setting up goals for them to work toward, kind of prescribing the solution for what they should be doing to help them grow." Stephanie works to break down the larger goal into smaller goals that were scaffolded. "For struggling teachers, if you try to bite off the whole piece off that elephant you're never going to be able to determine whether or not they're getting it." At times this was challenging to articulate for Stephanie. "It's not really hard to see, it's just hard to tell a struggling teacher what it is—identify what it is."

Diana Samuelson focuses on the individual teacher to personalize the plan when developing a plan for supports. "We keep going back to what we determined the need, the area of need is. Also looking at personality. Personality is huge because who will they work well with? Who will they not work well with? That's a huge, huge piece right there." The individualized plan of supports ensures expectations are clear and appropriate supports are identified.

Michael Mitchell believes that keeping the expectations clear requires keeping the focus areas and the goals to a minimum. "We to keep it to about three goals. We try to keep it very limited to some very specific things." In addition, Michael provides clarity of expectations as he visits the classroom and follows up with the teacher. "I'm gonna tell you what I saw that was good, and I'm gonna tell you what I think you might wanna fix."

Rachel Wilkerson addresses expectations by using the evaluation cycle to identify the expectations and also how a teacher will work to meet the expectations. "I've gotten better at kind of winding it up in an evaluation cycle. So if I tell a teacher this needs to be

improved, here are the steps. I'll put it in their formal observation. Then before we do the next one I can review it and say okay, now I know what I'm looking for. But it's been on the teacher to make sure they've done that."

Coaching Planning.

The document analysis of the plans indicated two of the four participants identified a great emphasis on coaching planning with the academic coach as a key strategy for teacher development. Their development plans repeatedly identified this strategy. Utilizing this strategy involved the academic coach as a knowledgeable other to explain and model the lesson and/or unit planning process, plan together with the teacher, and provide feedback as the teacher moves toward independence in planning. This practice uses the knowledge of others to inform and impact the work of struggling teachers.

Research Question 3: How do principals develop and justify a plan for teacher improvement?

Responding to a teacher's low effectiveness score is the responsibility of a school leader. Tennessee's evaluation framework requires that the school leader meet with the teacher with low effectiveness ratings at the beginning of the school year about what supports the teacher will receive to improve student achievement. School principals often outline the supports in the form of a development plan.

Michael Mitchell explained how he determines when to write a development plan as part of the supports he provides to teachers. He first discerns who is in need of a detailed plan. "So to me a developmental plan is written for those people who I truly believe need help." The plan is not for those who choose not to follow guidance and

support but those in need of support. When the evidence does not show improvement at the level expected, the plan is adjusted. "At the same time the number of meeting times increase, the expectations increase, and maybe we adjust the developmental plan. Create a plan for them to be able to meet with us more often, more frequently because clearly it's not working."

Rachel Wilkerson understands the impact of a plan for improvement on a struggling teacher. This is one of her supports. "The simplest one that's monitored is a growth plan, or a development plan. I call them growth plans because I just think the terminology says that we're in it for you to improve."

Stephanie Bradford determined that support plans must be scaffolded with small, very specific goals for each one as a progression of skill. "So, it's really that very, very small. You might have to write ten developmental plans to get to the end of the year. But I've found I'd rather write ten different development plans and let that teacher know on the front end we're going to do this piece by piece and that way we'll know we've done it. Versus here's the whole shebang that we've got to do, and you can't collect your evidence and know if you've done it." In order to start the process, Stephanie zeroes in on a very specific area. "Identify something very, very succinct." She reiterated the need for small, particular steps. "But very, very succinct and no more than one goal. If you write more than one goal on a developmental plan it's just going to get laid off to the side and the teacher's not going to be able to work it."

Diana Samuelson outlined the process she and her administrative team use to provide support. "You can't eat the whole elephant at one time. You've got to figure out first what can you really accomplish? You have your overall plan, and that's where here's

all the needs, here's what we need to address, but what can we get? What are the most urgent needs, and what can we get the biggest bang for our buck in terms of making a difference?" After the reflection and brainstorming the next step for her is the plan development. "So first you've got to have a plan. Then we basically figure out who all is going to be involved and what the time line is going to look like. How are we going to check on each part to see how things are going?"

All of the participants provided documents showing development plans for unidentified teachers. The document analysis of the plans identified a great emphasis on coaching planning with the academic coach as key strategies for teacher development. These were noted in almost all of the documents and were the most frequently utilized in-house strategies. Other key strategies identified on multiple development plans included: observing other teachers for a specific purpose, utilization of a specific resource, completing district provided in-service courses, and completing book studies. Table 4.3 below shows the frequency of the various strategies identified in the document analysis of the development plans provided by the participants in this study.

Table 4.3*Frequency of Strategies on Development Plans*

Strategy	MM	DS	RW	SB
Academic Coaching	X	XX		X
Collaboration		X		
Book Study			XX	X
Observation of Another Teacher		X	X	X
District In-service or Training		XX	XX	X
Lesson Planning with Academic Coach	XXX	XXX		
Use of Specific Resources (EDI template for lesson planning, classroom management plan)	X		X	XX
Script lessons			X	
Number of Development Plan Documents Provided	2	4	3	3

Research Question 4: In what ways do principals monitor and adapt teacher support?

The participants discussed several components related to their processes and tools for monitoring a teacher's progress. Practices included classroom walk-throughs, coaching sessions with an academic coach, collecting evidence from follow up conversations, connecting the teacher's growth to the formal observation cycle, and providing various forms of feedback.

Classroom Walk-throughs.

Classroom walk-throughs are a less formal version of a classroom observation and typically shorter in length. These classroom visits provide brief snapshots into the classroom activities.

Stephanie Bradford referenced the impact of classroom walkthroughs on how teachers perceive the support. "I have the paper trail, but I really use that follow up piece so that the teacher sees we're taking it seriously and that we do see some growth."

Both the challenge and the powerful impact of classroom walkthroughs as monitoring tools were voiced by Rachel Wilkerson. "If I fall down it's usually with the monitoring after the walkthrough with the feedback. But that's actually where I think the biggest bang for your buck is."

Diana Samuelson also mentioned the impact and the importance of classroom walkthroughs. "It would be walkthroughs—probably our biggest piece along with observations. That means somebody's got to be there to monitor that. But those are the biggies."

Michael Mitchell echoed the significance of being in the classrooms to connect what is observed with appropriate feedback on the teacher's growth. "After that coaching conversation obviously we talk about how many observations are going to happen, but we try to get in the classroom as often as possible." He references the walkthroughs as steps on a teacher's development plan as well. "There will be walkthroughs on it, and we try to get them done at a pace to where we are giving feedback." The time spent in the teacher's classroom on a regular basis provides data about the teacher's progress which is used to provide feedback to the struggling teacher.

Coaching Sessions.

Frequent references were made throughout the interviews to the utilization of the support of an academic coach which each of the principals has in their buildings. The academic coach is a full-time teacher support and is, therefore, available to work with teachers in various capacities and various schedules. Principals identify specific areas in which a teacher needs to grow, and the coach works with the teacher to model the skills

as well as support the teacher with feedback in the identified areas. The coaches work with the teachers, then follow up with the principals on the teachers' progress.

Rachel Wilkerson utilized the coach for regular classroom visits. "The academic coach will have a list of people that he needs to regularly be checking in on and supporting. She also recognized the unique possibilities of the academic coach's role. "He (academic coach) could make a point of getting in there and monitoring faster than we probably could. That seemed to be way more effective, and then he could see trends, too—like if we weren't clear of what our expectations were, or if teachers thought it was stupid what we were asking them to do."

Michael Mitchell required specific sessions with the academic coach to focus on planning and preparation. "We assigned mandatory 30-minute meetings on a weekly basis with the academic coach. This is how you're going to improve. In your developmental plan, you will meet with the academic coach once a week at this time. Come prepared to talk about next week and what you're going to do." The requirement for meeting is coupled with the purpose and expectations for the teacher.

The academic coach is involved from the very beginning of the process under Diana Samuelson's leadership. "First we talk as a team and we include the academic coach." Diana further emphasizes the importance of the academic coach in support of struggling teachers. "Our biggest support is our academic coach." Although others in the building can provide support and mentoring, such as colleagues or content area partners, the role of the academic coach is integral to the supports she provides for struggling teachers. "The primary one (support) is our academic coach and administrators, but we have many in-house supports, too."

The academic coach is part of Stephanie Bradford's response team for struggling teachers. Stephanie included administrators, the academic coach, and a new teacher mentor (in-house) in her team. She established regular meeting times to share updates, specifically focusing on the work of the coach. "Every other week the administrative team and academic coach meet and the discussion at those meetings is all about teachers. What did you see in the walkthroughs? Who is showing some growth in this area? Did we see anyone doing this new strategy that you showed in that professional development? Everything we did at that meeting was all about the teachers." The insight of the coach was critical in the team's discussion and decision-making.

Collecting Evidence.

A method for collecting evidence is critical for school leaders to monitor a teacher's progress, or lack of progress, as well as determining next steps in supports. The methods for collecting evidence varied in the responses from the participants and in the analysis of the documents provided by the participants.

Stephanie Bradford described weekly meetings with the struggling teacher to keep notes on their progress. "We would meet with that person and collect evidence through notes." She also organized scheduled meetings with the supervisory team to review notes and progress of teachers. "Every other week the administrative team and academic coach meet and the discussion at those meetings is all about teachers. What did you see in the walkthroughs?" This discussion and the notes would serve as checkpoints and help determine next steps.

Stephanie also described the process of deeper questioning when evidence of growth was not apparent. "I'm sorry, I wasn't seeing any evidence of this. Do you have

evidence?' And you put it in their court." When the teacher is not improving and is unable to identify evidence of growth, further questioning occurs. "If it still wasn't there then I would say, 'I'm sorry, I'm not seeing it. So is it a matter of you not being able to do it, or is it because you don't want to do it?' That is a powerful question."

Rachel Wilkerson utilizes lesson plans as one method for checking progress. "Their lesson plans are an easy check, too, to see if they're actually thinking about what you need them to think about."

Document analysis provided data of the development plans created by the participants. There were many similarities in actions and formats. Analysis of the documents provided examples of goals, strategies, actions steps, and evidence collection in working with struggling teachers. Table 4.4 below consolidates examples of data from all participants.

Table 4.4*Examples of Development Plan Components*

Participant	Problem	Goal	Strategies	Anticipated Evidence of Completion
Michael Mitchell	<u>Lesson Structure and Pacing:</u> Teacher has not planned effectively or with advice from appropriate members of the team.	Teacher will plan lessons that are content and grade level appropriate.	Teacher will use the Explicit Instruction (EI) structure to develop lesson plans that clearly show the content to be taught and appropriateness for 6 th grade. Teacher will meet with Academic Coach to execute plans and to gain help in area of EI.	*Feedback from appropriate others taken from walkthroughs of classroom instruction. *Review of lesson plans by administration.
Diana Samuelson	Classroom observations indicate instruction that is below expectation.	Improved Instruction: Classroom observations will reflect indicators that are mostly 3's	Coaching cycle weekly to plan and implement lessons Observe other teachers with academic coach	Monitored weekly. Academic coach notes. Evidence of strategies shared and learned.
Rachel Wilkerson	Feedback lacks academic focus and specificity	Use student responses to inform instruction and next steps	Use Academic Feedback indicators from TEAM rubric to script lesson	Score scripts using Academic Feedback indicators on the TEAM rubric
Stephanie Bradford	Lesson pacing and structure does not allow for adequate use of EDI model so the teacher can determine student mastery.	Teacher will teach lessons using the EDI model to ensure time is spent with students in the most effective way for each lesson so that target mastery is achieved.	1. Teacher will structure lesson plans to include components of the EDI model—three parts of “do”, opening, closure. 2. Teacher will read and participate in a book study of “Explicit Direct Instruction”.	1. Through walk through and formal evaluations, the teacher will demonstrate use of the model. 2. The teacher will read and discuss 3 chapters per month with a member of administration.

Observation Cycle.

The formal observation cycle is dictated by the state of Tennessee to indicate the number and type of observations required for each teacher based on the teacher's effectiveness levels or growth scores. The participants in this study use this required observation cycle to connect their work with struggling teachers. Some participants use the cycle to guide or connect with the supports provided, while others use the cycle as opportunities to gather evidence on whether or not a teacher has improved throughout the year.

Rachel Wilkerson connected the supports being provided to a struggling teacher with the requirements of the formal evaluation cycle. "I've gotten better at kind of winding it up in an evaluation cycle. So if I tell a teacher this needs to be improved and here are the steps, I'll put it in their formal observation. Then before we do the next one I can review it and say okay, now I know what I'm looking for. But it's been on the teacher to make sure they've done that."

The responsibility is on the teacher to accept and utilize the supports.

Michael Mitchell described the difficulty of ensuring that a struggling teacher uses the supports that are provided. "That is the hard part, isn't it? I think it's just having a schedule, putting that into any type of developmental plan—a schedule. Getting things put into a developmental plan that require weekly or biweekly conversations, but we also put a lot of that back on the teacher." Michael creates a schedule that follows the observation cycle in order to ensure he meets the challenges of monitoring whether or not a teacher utilizes the supports that he provides.

Documents provided by Diana Samuelson included evidence of the observation cycle cited as progress monitoring. Scores on formal observations are used as checkpoints throughout the year to indicate progress or lack of it. Notations in the Assessment and Update Information column of the development plan for an unidentified teacher included, “2nd observation was still showing instruction that was below expectations.” Another entry in the same column with a later date noted, “3rd observation still showing lack of improvement.” The formal observation cycle provided indicators that insufficient improvement was made throughout the year.

Stephanie Bradford’s documents also indicate the use of the formal observation cycle in the development plan. The column Anticipated Evidence of Completion noted, “Through periodic walk through and formal evaluations, the teacher will demonstrate the use of the model.” The observation cycle provides additional opportunities to monitor a teacher’s progress.

Feedback.

The frequency of references to feedback by the participants during interviews indicated the importance of feedback in their work with struggling teachers. Stephanie Bradford emphasized the frequency in which feedback occurred. “It was immediate, we didn't wait.” Feedback from Stephanie’s administrative team was frequently done by email, sticky notes, and little cards provided to the teachers. The team also utilized technology tools for feedback and documentation. “We used Google docs to collect the data. It would generate an email, and the teacher would receive an email with what we had listed in the form. It also collects and houses all that data.” Stephanie’s feedback was also very direct for teachers who were not making progress and showing resistance to the

supports provided. "I'm not trying to fire you I'm trying to grow you, but you've got to do the work."

Rachel Wilkerson also highlighted the frequency of feedback provided to teachers. "I write a lot of notes, send a lot of emails. But the biggest thing my people like is when I go to them and I tell them what a great job they're doing and can be specific about it." However, the type of feedback for those continuing to struggle is differentiated. "It's like parenting. If the person needs me to be disappointed to change, then I'll be really disappointed in them. If the person needs me to be angry with them, then I will be angry with them. If the person just forgot, then I'm going to have to deal with just your ignorance. So it's differentiated based on the person but it never goes unnoticed, that's for sure." Rachel also focused on the importance of highlighting the successes and efforts of those who are working toward improvement. "If I see that a person half tried, I'm excited because usually they're harder on themselves than I can be on them. There are very few people that I've had to get them to understand how terrible they are. Most people are hard. So I need to make sure they see all of the good things they're doing and have maintained."

Diana Samuelson provides feedback for different purposes. "Personal feedback could be prescriptive to what we see in the classroom. It could be constructive. It could be critical feedback; it could be positive. There is a lot of personal feedback, a lot of written, handwritten, email. To me the more personal feedback you can give the better." Diana also uses reflective questioning to develop ownership and build capacity in the teachers for their improvement.

" Question them--what made the difference? Help them see the connection between what they did and where the improvement came from."

Michael Mitchell recognized the need for feedback in response to a teacher's effort. "If it's something they have worked hard on and they're excited about it, and they're anxious about it, they need feedback on it." He also stressed the frequency and timeliness of feedback in supporting struggling teachers. "When you realize it's happening, whether it's in that weekly meeting, or during that walkthrough and you see it. You go back around and stop them in the hallway, or slide into their classroom during their planning period—'What I saw today was really good.'" Michael described the purpose behind the positive feedback centers on helping teachers understand and connect the actions of their work with the outcomes of their work to build their individual capacity. "You try to build that confidence. 'See the work you did; see the result of the evidence of that? This has got to make you feel good.' Help them see the results of their hard work. That's what you've got to keep them focused on." Providing the feedback to teachers can motivate them to continue to work and provide direction regarding what are the next steps for improvement.

Adapt Support.

While monitoring a struggling teacher's progress there is sometimes the need to adapt the support based on the progress. Rachel Wilkerson described the tiered support outlining how support is adapted for teachers who do not show progress through coaching and feedback from classroom walkthroughs. "Then they get to meet with me. I've had a couple of teachers who have had to check in with me in the morning every day

to tell me what they are going to do that day. They'll have to respond to me and they don't like that, but they come do it anyway."

Michael Mitchell noted that the intensity of the supports increases in proportion to the needs of the teacher when progress is limited or not evident. "At the same time the number of meeting times increases, so do the expectations and we might adjust the developmental plan. Create a plan for them to be able to meet with us more often, more frequently because clearly it's not working."

Stephanie Bradford works with her administrative team to determine when the support plan should be adapted. "The information from walkthroughs was shared with the collective team. We determined whether or not we needed to continue with that piece, or if that plan was finished." When several supports were provided and there was a lack of progress or progress was not evident, Stephanie asks the teacher to reflect on a deeper level. "If it (evidence) still wasn't there then I would say, 'I'm sorry, I'm not seeing it. So is it a matter of you not being able to do it, or is it because you don't want to do it?' That is a powerful question."

Diana Samuelson echoed the significance of reflection when teachers are not making progress. "Is it not working because the teacher is not complying? Or is it because they're still struggling? If it's a compliance issue there might need to be some disciplinary conversations. If we don't feel like it's a compliance issue we need to revisit and think what's a more intensive strategy? It might mean more time in other teachers' classrooms seeing some other things. It might be more coaching. You have to be sure if you're really addressing what the problem is."

Diana also described the decision-making regarding when to provide additional supports. "We just continue to monitor and create goals with more supports as needed." Deciding when to remove the supports is also critical. "Deciding where do you start pulling back? That goes back to what I said earlier. You have to sit down and have some conversations with the teacher."

She referenced the similarities of supporting teachers for growth and teaching students. "It's just like kids in the classroom. You're going to be able to let go of some of the supports over time faster than others. It depends on the individual." The gradual release of supports is mentioned, however, the process for the removal of supports is not addressed.

Research Question 5: In what ways do principals' reported leadership practices manifest examples of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models?

Current research and school leader evaluation systems focus largely on three models of school leadership: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership. Table 4.5 below provides a description of the central components of each model along with related findings from this study.

Table 4.5*Comparison of Leadership Models and Related Study Findings*

Model	Summary of Model	Related Study Findings
Instructional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key components: define the school’s mission, manage the instructional program, promote a positive school-learning climate ▪ Focus is on curriculum and instruction rather than managerial tasks of a principal ▪ Encourages a focus on improving classroom practices of teachers as the direction for the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants identified specific instructional practices (such as lesson structure and pacing or use of Explicit Direct Instruction model) ▪ Focused on expanding the number of instructional strategies of teachers
Transformational Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key components: individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modeling ▪ Focus is on developing the individual or staff relationship and capabilities ▪ Involves shared leadership condition, in which others are a part of the leadership and direction of the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shared goals through collaborative planning ▪ Individualized diagnosis of root causes ▪ Individualized plan for support ▪ Collective work ▪ Consideration for the whole person, not just the instructional components ▪ Relationship-building is critical
Distributed Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key components: examining the identification, analysis and enactment of tasks as well as the social distribution in the enactment of the tasks ▪ Focus is on the interdependencies of the leaders, followers, and situation ▪ The work of leading instruction and learning is distributed among multiple leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-administrative supporters: Academic coach, subject area partners, new teacher mentors ▪ Relationships impact decisions on selecting appropriate supporters

The actions and practices of the study participants were analyzed for examples of manifestations of each model. The findings from this study indicate that manifestations of transformational leadership were more numerous and more descriptive than the other two leadership models, instructional leadership and distributed leadership.

Transformational Leadership.

The focus of transformational leadership is on developing the individual or staff relationship and capabilities. Key components include individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual simulation, culture building, rewards, high expectations, and modeling. The participants identified multiple strategies that highlight individualized support, modeling, and shared goals. In addition, the culture of collaboration was a foundational component within several schools for supporting growth in struggling teachers. Finally, learning through personal connections reflects the foundation of transformational leadership. It highlights one of the basic premises of situated learning perspective—we are social beings.

Michael Mitchell described the shared goals through the collaborative planning structure established at his school. “We start within our collaborative planning. If all of us collectively built the same common assessment prior to teaching the lesson or unit, we’re using backwards design. Now we’re collectively building our daily lesson targets of this is what is needs to look like.” Michael further elaborated on the impact of collaborative planning. “I feel like that support more than anything else is what is helping young teachers, struggling teachers.”

Rachel Wilkerson also described the impact of shared goals of collaboration. “That will come through collaborative planning with their team leaders so sometimes

that's just building capacity in somebody else in the group to help them understand what the planning process entails and giving more support that way.”

Diagnosing the needs and developing an individualized plan for support was a common response echoing the individualized nature of transformational leadership. The act of diagnosing demands a high level of questioning by the leaders. Stephanie Bradford explains, “What strategies did the teacher rely on predominantly? What did the lesson plans look like for that particular standard, or indicator on the RCPI data?” Diana Samuelson described getting to the root cause. “We've got to figure out what is the root cause of the issue. You can have a plan for any of them, regardless, but you've got to figure out what is the struggle.” Rachel Wilkerson identifies the importance of this as well. “The reluctance to simplify has to be there. I try to dig in as much as I can. Then they've got to dig in and look at their kids as well.” The danger of incorrectly identifying the core issue for a struggling teacher, and subsequently developing an inappropriate individualized support was described by Diana. “If we don't really figure out what's going on we may not create the right plan.”

Learning through personal connections was embedded throughout the responses of the principals, and reflects the components of transformational leadership. The participants in this study noted both the relationships they build with struggling teachers as well as those they encourage among others and the struggling teachers.

Diana Samuelson highlighted the importance of the relationships and personal connections with teachers in order to help them grow and improve.

I think if you can really help them see that you care about them as a person—the relationship piece—that’s important...I think that struggling teachers, if they trust you and trust that you really do care for them and are not out to get them, that you want to help them and that you’ll do what you say you’re going to do, they will feel safe. And I think if they don’t feel safe I don’t think they’re going to grow.

Rachel Wilkerson found the personal relationships are essential to build up teachers’ self-efficacy. "Everybody’s good at something. You don’t want to hurt their strengths, you want to connect things to that." She recognized the importance of providing emotional support and being available to teachers when the data is low or there are other disappointments. "I want them ready to work so I want to get all the emotional part out of the way. So I give them my cell phone and they call and we cry and then it’s over and done." That connection is built through communication, encouragement, and feedback. "I write a lot of notes, send a lot of emails. But the biggest thing my people like is when I go to them and I tell them what a great job they’re doing and can be specific about it."

School leaders focus time and attention to support struggling teachers through building relationships with personal connections, connecting mentor teachers to support growth and development in an apprenticeship role, and creating a community of practice where collaboration supports the common enterprise of highly effective instruction for student learning.

Transformational leadership’s focus on developing the individual relationships and capabilities was evidenced as well. Rachel stated, "Each teacher has a set of circumstances that comes with them. There’s all these circumstances so you have to look at the whole person and figure out how am I going to get them to grow." Individualized

support for teacher development is a major component in the transformational leadership model.

Instructional Leadership.

The central key of instructional leadership is the focus on curriculum and instruction rather than the many managerial tasks of a principal. The work is centered around improving classroom practices as the direction of the school. The interview data showed a focus on the instructional practices of teachers, and the differences in instructional practices of a struggling teacher from those of an effective teacher.

Rachel Wilkerson highlighted that new teachers often struggle because they “just don’t have basic skills such as classroom management, or modeling strategies, or time management”. Stephanie Bradford highlighted the limited repertoire of instructional strategies and its impact on the quality of instruction. “When it comes to teaching strategies, they have two they use. It’s lecture and powerpoint, that’s it. I know those aren’t strategies, but that’s what they say.”

Michael Mitchell noted that lack of strong classroom management often directly impacts instruction. "What we find are teachers who are struggling in classroom management are just kind of going through the motions of some of those pieces." Michael tries to be very specific in his feedback about specific instructional practices in order to direct a teacher for improvement. "I’m going to tell you what I saw that was good, and I’m going to tell you what I think you might want to fix within lesson structure and pacing.” The focus is clear and very specific to instructional practices.

Distributed Leadership.

Distributed leadership is founded on the contributions of many persons within the organization, and the work of leading instruction and learning is distributed among multiple leaders. Participants in this study identified several people who are utilized in supporting struggling teachers in a variety of ways.

Rachel explained, “The academic coach has a list of people that he needs to regularly be checking in on and supporting.” Diana indicated multiple people are involved with supporting struggling teachers. “The primary one is our academic coach, and of course the administrators, but we have so many in-house supports.” Diana also mentioned colleagues as supports. “It could also be just a subject area partner. Almost every group has a very strong, supported, wise teacher in every subject area grade level.”

Stephanie outlined administrators, academic coach and new teacher mentors in the building. Michael identified that the relationship with the teacher can help determine which people will provide support. “All of us—the administrators, academic coach, mentor teachers, consulting teachers, just anybody we feel like has the best relationship with that teacher.”

Beyond noting the specific people such as academic coaches, mentor teachers, and subject area partners, there was little noted in the findings about how the leadership is actually distributed. The identified individuals were described in the findings as being assigned for specific tasks, however the findings were limited in how those individuals or the enactment of the tasks they were assigned were connected to the larger work of leadership and its ongoing work.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study. These findings are derived from the analysis of initial interview transcripts with participants, documents provided by the participants, and follow up interview transcripts. The findings were shared in two parts based on the lens of situated learning and the themes that emerged from the data and answered the research questions.

Data for situated learning perspective focused on the contexts in which learning and support for struggling teachers occurs, and how it impacts the teachers. The components of community of practice, apprenticeship, and learning through personal connections were explored to identify how principals identify and facilitate the specific practices that will lead to teacher improvement and increased student learning. Participants described collaboration groups as communities of practice who learn and grow together. They identified academic coaches and lead teachers as mentors for apprenticeships with struggling teachers. Participants also described the important practices of building relationships and making personal connections in order to reinforce learning and growth in struggling teachers.

The second part focused on the themes that emerged from the reported practices participants utilized and the corresponding leadership frameworks. The principals perceived relationship-building with teachers to be a critical factor for helping a teacher to improve. Common leadership practices included data review, teacher conferencing, reflective questioning, collaboration, and setting expectations. Participants reported leadership practices manifested examples of all three major leadership frameworks. Their practices are centered around improving instructional practices in the classroom

(*instructional leadership*), building a foundation from building a relationship with teachers as individual with unique needs and capabilities (*transformational leadership*), and utilizing a variety of people in various roles (*distributed leadership*) to impact and support improvement in struggling teachers.

Leadership practices and daily actions of principals are critical to the work of helping struggling teachers to improve. This study has identified that the participants highlighted critical practices they use in working to improve effectiveness of struggling teachers. These included understanding how to use data, uncovering the steps for building relationships to encourage growth, differentiating and selecting the appropriate supports and goals for struggling teachers, designing monitoring and feedback processes, identifying appropriate personnel to work with the teachers, and being able to adjust the plan and supports as needed. Another critical finding from this study was the lack of training the participants had received both in their education and preparation to be a principal as well as during their many years serving as principal. These leadership practices and the gap in preparation and training are explored in Chapter 5 in the discussion of conclusions, recommendations, and implications.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Accountability measures such as the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, and the current Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) increase the accountability of schools to meet the needs of individual students. The responsibility for meeting the expectations is on the principal to ensure that every classroom has an effective teacher.

The principal must ensure that every classroom has a highly qualified teacher who is competent in both their content knowledge and pedagogy. This requires recruiting, hiring, and training teachers for every content and grade level in the building. It demands monitoring every classroom and every teacher to ensure that the instruction and learning are at high levels. When there is a deficit or a gap, the principal is responsible for intervening and doing whatever it takes to make the instruction and learning high quality.

Principals must not only diagnose the root causes of the teacher's low scores and effectiveness, but also prescribe the steps necessary for teacher improvement.

Determining whether the cause is a content knowledge deficit, poor classroom management skills, limited instructional practices, ineffective assessment methods, or misalignment of the content standards are some of the many decisions involved in a principal identifying the factors contributing to low effectiveness ratings or student

growth scores. Once these factors are identified, it is the principal's responsibility to map out a plan for improvement. Leithwood et al. (2004) found from their research that "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5). The importance of leadership for those who struggle with classroom instruction cannot be understated.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the practices school leaders use to help teachers improve through a case study methodology. Four middle school principals were participants in this qualitative case study. All four were still in the leadership positions and have data showing several teachers improved in effectiveness ratings under their leadership during the years of data provided by the middle Tennessee school district. Each of the four participants had worked with multiple teachers whose effectiveness ratings improved by at least two levels during the three years.

Participants for the study were interviewed in their school settings and all of them provided documents that illustrated strategies and tools they used in working with the teachers. Through the use of interviews and document analysis as qualitative research, practices and tools used by school principals to assist struggling teachers were analyzed. The analysis and findings from this qualitative research study describe how school leaders respond in supporting teachers and ensuring all students have access to highly effective teachers.

Research Questions

In order to examine, describe, and understand how principals respond to struggling teachers, the researcher engaged the principals in discussing how they respond to the teachers and examine the tools they use in their responses. To understand and describe principals' practices the following research questions were asked:

1. How do principals perceive their role as instructional leader for struggling teachers?
2. What leadership practices do principals report using to assist teachers for improvement?
3. How do principals develop and justify a plan for teacher improvement?
4. In what ways do principals monitor and adapt teacher support?
5. In what ways do principals' reported leadership practices manifest examples of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models?

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study are reported below. They are summarized by each research question and identify the themes that emerged from the analysis of each question.

Research Question 1: How do principals perceive their role as instructional leader for struggling teachers?

The results from the study indicate that principals perceive their role as school leaders in terms that reflect the responsibility they feel for all components in the school buildings. Rachel Wilkerson stated, "I think it's my job to know and thoroughly understand what's going on in the building because I'm the one that has to make a plan to fix it." The findings from this study indicate a heavy emphasis on diagnostic and prescriptive responsibilities in supporting teachers for improvement.

All participants during the interviews identified reviewing the summative testing data to identify scores that were expected to be low and any that were a surprise. Rachel Wilkerson stated, "I want to be owner and master of that data. As the principal I feel like I'm responsible for all of it. So if I don't have a good handle on it and people ask me questions and I don't have the answers, I don't feel like I'm doing my job." Their next steps were diagnostic in attempting to differentiate the specific areas of need for the teacher with low scores. Diana Samuelson pointed out the importance of being diagnostic, "We've got to figure out what is the root cause of the issue. I mean you can have a plan for any of them, regardless, but you've got to figure out what is the struggle."

This process also involved the use of reflective questioning to ensure the teacher's perceptions and understandings were included in the decisions for support. Stephanie Bradford stated, "I want to see where they go, so I give them some guiding questions. It's always a tell for a level one teacher as to what their explanation is going to be about." Understanding summative data can be challenging for many teachers, and

therefore, this practice of reflective questioning can unearth gaps in teacher knowledge and practice.

The school leaders who participated in this study described the heavy responsibility of ensuring that supports are provided for those that struggle, including setting expectations for planning and instruction. Outlining expectations was supported in the document analysis where each participant in this study had created a development plan that identified one to three specific goals regarding planning or instruction, such as effective use of explicit direct instruction model and utilizing higher order thinking tasks for students. Clearly identifying the specific areas in need of improvement and the steps necessary to improve are key components in their perceived responsibilities as a school leader.

Principals emphasized building relationships with teachers to understand them as individuals with unique needs. This connects with the research findings from Robinson's (2010) study on leadership capabilities that identified three capabilities that are directly or indirectly linked to student outcomes. Using interpersonal skills to build relational trust was noted. "Effective instructional leadership probably requires leaders to be knowledgeable about how to align administrative procedures and processes to important learning outcomes, to be highly skilled in using their knowledge to solve the myriad of problems that arise in the course of improving learning and teaching in their own contexts, and to use their knowledge, their problem solving ability, and their interpersonal skills in ways that build relational trust in their school community" (p. 21). The levels and types of support the participants in this study provided varied depending on their understanding of the needs of the individual teacher, the teacher's relationships

and personality traits, and the available personnel to assist with the teacher. This can present a challenge for school leaders who have large numbers of new or inexperienced faculty members, thus creating a deficit of personnel to draw upon in supporting the relationships for growth.

Research Question 2: What leadership practices do principals report using to assist teachers for improvement?

The actions that leaders take in the daily work of assisting teachers for improvement are critical for the findings of this study. Leadership practices for supporting teachers for improvement that were identified in the study included data review, teacher conferencing, reflective questioning, and collaboration.

Data review is a critical practice for all school leaders as it is required in order to establish goals, determine the school's progress, and uncover areas in need of improvement. It is essential for deciding whether or not a program or resource is effective, and for celebrating successes and improvements within the school community. Data review is critical in working with struggling teachers. School leaders must review the data to identify those who are struggling, determine the specific areas of weakness contributing to the ineffectiveness, and monitoring progress during the improvement process. Ensuring that a data review system is in place and easily translated for teachers is important to the work demanded by school leaders to support struggling teachers.

Teacher conferencing is a practice that emerged from the data in this study. Initial conferences with teachers who are struggling is an integral early practice for school leaders. The conference provides an opportunity to gauge the teacher's mindset and determine the teacher's level of knowledge and ownership of the data and the issues of

concern. Determining a root cause and a subsequent plan of action for improvement without conferencing with the teacher can be ineffective at the least, and could end up being counterproductive. The information derived from the conference can enlighten the school leader's understanding of the teacher's individual and unique needs, and thus, impact the decision-making involved in establishing the development plan. This echoes the work of Thoonen et al. (2011) who noted, "Teachers' sense of self-efficacy appeared to be the most important motivational factor for explaining teacher learning and teaching practices" (p. 497). Utilizing teacher conferencing provides the setting for a principal to gauge a teacher's sense of self-efficacy and determine next steps based on the teacher's mindset.

Reflective questioning promotes teacher understanding and ownership of their current state of effectiveness. It is a tool that helps to probe deeper with a teacher to help them consider and reflect in ways they may not do on their own. Diana Samuelson described her use of reflective questioning. "I think that often times in order for them to make progress, they've got to go back and reflect on their own situation, their lessons, whatever is the issue you're trying to address. Hopefully their reflections will be accurate reflections. If they're accurate reflections they're more to work together with whomever is coaching them to grow and improve. Some aren't very reflective so you have to put them in that position of asking those reflective questions." Michael Mitchell described, "Reflective questioning is am I looking at myself and asking myself the right questions, and thinking in terms of what can I change or do better." With reflective questioning, the teacher can come to conclusions and develop personal understandings that are more impactful than directives from his or her supervisor.

Collaboration is a current practice widely discussed and encouraged in school systems across the country. The leadership practices in place in order to establish the purpose of collaboration and the expectations for the work that is done in collaborations must be explicit. Michael Mitchell stated, “We spend staff development days, where each teacher will go back through another discussion with me about what good PLCs (collaborative teams) look like. What does it mean? What is a collaborative effort? We also build time into the structure so you just have to make it a priority, I guess, is the short answer. Then train people as to why it’s so important.” Michael’s practices provide an example of leadership practices that support collaboration which was a limitation in the work of Thoonen et al. (2011). They proposed that collaboration is a key practice for teacher experimentation, reflection, and improvement but their research does not outline the leadership practices and processes that develop and support collaboration.

Michael also elaborated on the purpose of collaboration, in particular how it is useful in his work with struggling teachers. “We’re trying to get them to that concept that not only do they need to be collaborating with people, with each other, but it’s more than that. They have commitments with each other, they have agreed upon goals of where they want their kids to get to... I think the goal-setting process coming out of a collaborative session is where it helps a struggling teacher become better.” Having clarity of a common goal and the agreed upon instructional practices that will be used to reach the goal provides both direction and accountability for the teachers. This is supported in the work of Lave and Wenger, “As apprentices, learners have strong goals and motivation, and through engagement in practice, they develop a view of what the enterprise is all about” (as cited in Driscoll, 2005, p.168). Collaboration provides a

structure for the struggling teachers, as apprentices, to grow through development of clarity in expectations and goals for instruction. Being a part of the collaborative team provides the opportunity to learn from others while developing a transparent picture of what high quality instruction looks like in execution and demands in preparation.

Research Question 3: How do principals develop and justify a plan for teacher improvement?

The findings from this case study indicate that a plan for teacher improvement is not designed for every teacher, but rather, specifically for those teachers who have skill deficits and not for those who are non-compliant. Michael Mitchell distinguished between the two:

We don't do a lot of them. I've heard of places that had 15 developmental plans, and all I know is there's dates out there you have to meet. If I don't meet them because as the leader who set those times, then I've shot myself in the foot. If somebody who is struggling needs help, but may also need to be terminated, I can't start. So I've always kept it at two, three, four people—at a reasonable, manageable amount that we can help them. So to me a developmental plan is written for these are the people who I truly believe need help. I don't put first year teachers on one until they prove to me that they need one.

Rachel Wilkerson identifies the teacher's efforts to gauge if a development plan is necessary. "Keep trying. Keep trying. I tell the teachers I will help you as long as you continue to try, but when you tell me you're at the end and you're giving up on yourself, I'm done. She elaborated further, "At the beginning it's all about trying to help them. But then it might become about helping them see that this might not be the right profession for you." Diana Samuelson also distinguishes between the two. "Is it not working because the teacher is not complying? Or is because they're still struggling?"

If the school leader determines the need for a development plan, one is designed to meet the individual and specific skill deficits that have been identified or diagnosed by the school leaders. The plan is a compilation of key pieces of information: the deficit, the goal, strategies for improvement, the supports provided (if not specified in the strategies), personnel involved, a time line, and evidence to show completion.

There was variation in the responses from the participants with regard to the breadth of the development plan. Some principals identified several key areas for growth with the corresponding components for each, while others broke down the development plan into several smaller plans, each with a very specific goal as a progression of skill development. This finding supports the individualized nature of the plan that is developed. It also highlights the need for principals to have an understanding of teachers as individuals, as well as a repertoire of appropriate supports to match the differentiated needs of each teacher.

Analysis of the documents provided by principals indicates that the heavy use of academic coaching, specifically another person whose role is to provide one-on-one intervention, training, and feedback to a teacher. All of the documents provided by the participants include this support. Other key strategies identified on multiple development plans included: observing other teachers for a specific purpose, completing district provided in-service courses, and completing book studies.

These findings indicated a common practice of possessing differentiated responses from which a principal can choose based on the deficits of a teacher. This parallels the description provided by Hallinger (2003) regarding the work of transformational leadership with its emphasis on behavioral components. “Behavioural

components such as individualised support, intellectual stimulation, and personal vision suggest that the model is grounded in understanding the needs of individual staff rather than ‘coordinating and controlling’ them towards the organisation’s desired ends” (p. 337). The customized plan requires that school leaders hold a variety of supports at their disposal.

Research Question 4: In what ways do principals monitor and adapt teacher support?

The evidence gathered from this study indicates several tools for monitoring and adapting support for struggling teachers. The participants discussed several components related to their processes and tools for monitoring a teacher’s progress. Practices included classroom walk-throughs, coaching sessions with an academic coach, collecting evidence from follow up conversations, connecting the teacher’s growth to the formal observation cycle, and providing various forms of feedback.

Diana Samuelson described the key tools her administrative team uses to monitor. "It could be walkthroughs, probably our biggest piece, and observations. It could be through collaboration sessions because it could be a collaboration issue. That means somebody’s got to be there to monitor that. But those are the biggies. We just continue to monitor and create goals with more supports as needed.”

Coaching is a practice that provides individualized, one-on-one assistance to a teacher. A mentor teacher or other experienced practitioner, often called an instructional or academic coach, works closely with the teacher to critique lesson plans or execution of instruction, model effective strategies, and provide feedback for next steps.

Follow up conversations with the teacher allows for continued monitoring by hearing the teacher's perspective on their progress. It allows the administrator to determine if the teacher's perception is aligned with the expectations of the school administrator, and if not, provides opportunity for clarification and any adjustments to the development plan.

School systems have some form of formal observation system containing rubrics, standards, or expectations outlined in various ways. In Tennessee, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (2016) is comprised of several rubrics that describe indicators of effective practices and an outline of the observation process (see Appendix B). Connecting a teacher's growth plan to the formal observation cycle of TEAM will align the focus of the improvement plan and reduce the likelihood of creating confusion and misunderstanding of how the teacher is expected to improve. Linking the two processes together provides clarity and limits distraction for both the teacher and the administrator. Rachel Wilkerson explained:

I've gotten better at kind of winding it up in an evaluation cycle. So if I tell a teacher this needs to be improved, here are the steps. I'll put it in their formal observation. Then before we do the next one I can review it and say okay, now I know what I'm looking for. But it's been on the teacher to make sure they've done that. If I write it right in the observation then the onus is on the teacher to improve, and I'm just going to check to see if they did that at the end.

Monitoring and adapting support involves providing various forms of feedback. The feedback provided to struggling teachers helps to ensure they continue on a trajectory that is aligned to the goals for improvement, or it can redirect a struggling teacher who is not exhibiting improvement as expected. Feedback to teachers can be both encouragement or supportive in nature and also critical and acknowledging deficiencies

in the teacher's development. The purpose of feedback is to provide direction for the teacher on either continuing on a course that is showing evidence of improvement, or changing the course of action that is not leading to improvement.

Rachel illustrated this differentiated response, "It's like parenting. If the person needs me to be disappointed to change, then I'll be really disappointed in them. If the person needs me to be angry with them, then I will be angry with them. If the person just forgot, then I'm going to have to deal with just your ignorance. So it's differentiated based on the person but it never goes unnoticed, that's for sure." Diana Samuelson also noted the different types of feedback she provides. "Personal feedback could be prescriptive to what we see in the classroom. It could be constructive. It could be critical feedback; it could be positive. There is a lot of personal feedback, a lot of written, handwritten, email. To me the more personal feedback you can give the better." Michael Mitchell described feedback to keep teachers focused in the right direction. "You try to build that confidence. 'See the work you did; see the result of the evidence of that? This has got to make you feel good.' Help them see the results of their hard work. That's what you've got to keep them focused on."

Without feedback the teacher has no indication of his or her progress in meeting the expectations set out in the development plan. The power of feedback cannot be understated in working with struggling teachers for improvement. Hattie and Timperley (2007) studied the power of feedback. They described, "Feedback can only build on something; it is of little use when there is no initial learning or surface information. Feedback is what happens second, is one of the most powerful influences on learning, too rarely occurs, and needs to be more fully researched by qualitatively and quantitatively

investigating how feedback works in the classroom and learning process” (p. 104).

Struggling teachers need feedback that is coupled with the other supports provided by school leaders.

Research Question 5: In what ways do principals’ reported leadership practices manifest examples of transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership models?

The findings from this study identify leadership practices that reflect practices associated with all three of the leadership models. Findings from the study show the participants described practices associated with the transformational leadership model in greater frequency and detail than practices associated with instructional leadership and distributed leadership; however, the context of many of their practices were centered on instructional practices in the classroom with align with the predominant focus of the instructional leadership model. The emphasis and detail regarding understanding a struggling teacher as an individual, building a relationship to support trust and growth, and individualizing the designated supports to meet the unique needs of each teacher were evidence of the transformational leadership model.

Analysis of the interview data shows a consistent reference to improving instruction and assessment practices, the keystones of the instructional leadership model. Leithwood et al. (2004) reported, “Instructional leadership encourages a focus on improving the classroom practices of teachers as the direction for the school” (p. 6). Principals identified the work of utilizing data to identify areas in need of improvement, specifically identifying instructional practices that are key for high level instruction, and directing teachers to the work of their collaborative teams—instruction and assessment.

Michael Mitchell explained, “That’s where we’ve been kind of focusing—really get people to examine teaching practices and what’s working and what’s not.” The critical nature of accurately identifying the area of improvement was described by Diana Samuelson, “If we don’t really figure out what’s going on we may not create the right plan.”

Struggling teachers were identified through a lack of effective instructional strategies, or a limited repertoire of strategies. Stephanie Bradford stated, “Struggling teachers, when it comes to teaching strategies, they have two they use. It’s lecture and powerpoint, that’s their strategies. I know those aren’t strategies, but that’s what they say.” This suggests that as an instructional leader, a principal must be keenly aware and responsive to teachers’ needs for expanding their knowledge and use of varied strategies based on instructional goals.

Transformational leadership is centered on developing the relationships and capabilities of staff. Hallinger (2003) noted, “Behavioural components such as individualised support, intellectual stimulation, and personal vision suggest that the model is grounded in understanding the needs of individual staff rather than ‘coordinating and controlling’ them towards the organisation’s desired ends” (p. 337). The participants in this study identified multiple strategies that highlight individualized support, modeling, and shared goals.

The culture of collaboration was a foundational component within several schools for supporting growth in struggling teachers. Collaboration requires multiple teachers to work together toward a common understanding of curricular expectations and build a common instructional goal. These collective goals drive the work of the collaborative

teams of teachers. Michael Mitchell described, “We start within our collaborative planning. We start within this framework of, so if all of us collectively built the same, the common assessment prior to teaching the lesson, the unit, we already know the big assessments. We’re using backwards design which we have to be able to do. Now we’re collectively building our daily lesson targets of this is what it needs to look like.” School leaders practicing transformation leadership establish the structure, time, and training necessary for collaboration to occur and to be effective.

The utilization of reflective questioning is another theme that reflects the use of transformational leadership, as the practice intends to develop awareness and ownership in the individual teacher, thereby supporting his or her growth and expanding his or her capabilities. Diana Samuelson noted, “We also talk to the teacher and a lot of times depending on the situation sometimes they’re very reflective and can identify some things that we might not have identified.” Ensuring the teacher can reflect and share their individual insights is critical to developing the awareness and ownership for change.

Distributed leadership synchronizes several personnel in the work of support struggling teachers. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) outline leadership with a focus on leaders’ thinking and action *in situ*. “We argue that leadership activity is constituted—defined or constructed—in the interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation in the execution of particular leadership tasks” (p. 10). Distributed leadership is founded on the contributions of many persons within the organization, and the work of leading instruction and learning is distributed among multiple leaders.

Participants in this study designated multiple people within their school buildings to provide support, resources, and materials to teachers needing improvement.

Specifically the academic coach was recognized as pivotal in providing critique, feedback, coaching, and modeling within the teacher's classroom and school setting.

Rachel Wilkerson explained, "He (academic coach) could make a point of getting in there and monitoring faster than we probably could. And that seemed to be way more effective and then he could see trends, too."

The participants also highlighted the importance of subject area partners in working to support struggling teachers. Regular, daily interactions with these partners who teach the same content and have the same responsibilities can be influential, and they are opportunities to model effectiveness for struggling teachers. Diana Samuelson described, "It could also be just a subject area partner. Almost every group has a very strong, supported, wise teacher in every subject area grade level." Principals who recognize this and develop the relationships between colleagues through distributed leadership can reduce the challenges of isolated leadership. Marks and Printy (2003) explained, "Arguably, principals who share leadership responsibilities with others would be less subject to burnout than principal "heroes" who attempt the challenges and complexities of leadership alone" (p. 393).

The findings from this study show the participants' actions and practices manifest all three leadership models in varying levels. Marks and Printy (2003) identified the effectiveness of integrating the models of leadership. "The study demonstrates the effectiveness of integrated leadership—both transformational and instructional—in eliciting the instructional leadership of teachers for improving school performance" (p.

393). Engaging in practices that emphasize the core work of classroom instruction while developing individualized supports for teachers in a context that distributes leadership among many individuals can be the recipe for highly effective outcomes. Marks and Printy (2003) also noted, “When the principal elicits high levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers and works interactively with teachers in a shared instructional leadership capacity, schools have the benefit of integrated leadership; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels” (p. 393). The findings from this study parallel the findings of Marks and Printy and add to the literature.

Implications

The findings from this study have several implications for both practitioners and researchers. The participants in this study are current principals who have worked with multiple struggling teachers in ways that led to improvement in the teachers’ effectiveness levels. They have described the practices they utilize in their work, many of which parallel the research. These practices include utilizing transformational leadership characteristics of individualized support, specific and timely feedback on progress, developing communities of practice for collaboration, and developing apprenticeship relationships through coaching and mentoring opportunities. While the research has indicated the individual practices have effect, how they are carried out in practices or established by school leaders is not evident in the literature. For this reason, the study of these current practitioners holds merit for transfer to others’ practices. From this study, the implications for practitioners that are critical for supporting teacher improvement

include: immediacy of response, data collection, building relationships, training for school administrators, shifting from supports to maintenance.

Implications for Practitioners.

The findings of this study show that early intervention and response is critical for supporting a teacher who is struggling. The immediacy of response indicates that school leaders should be regular visitors to all classrooms and in those classrooms where instruction is not at the appropriate levels, the leader must intervene in some way in a timely manner. Student learning is in jeopardy and there is no time to suspend or delay interventions for the purpose of teacher growth and development. The magnitude of responsibility and the enormous list of tasks that a principal must complete each day can be daunting; however, the impact of an ineffective teacher on students' learning demands that classroom visits and appropriate response to ineffective instruction is priority.

In this study the principals' collection of data, and a wide variety of data, was evident as critical to providing appropriate and timely intervention for a struggling teacher. Summative annual testing data is one piece of data, but there are multiple pieces throughout the school year to collect and review. Some of these include: classroom walkthrough data, formal observation data, anecdotal notes from collaborative team sessions, analysis of student work, classroom discipline data, etc. Once a development plan has been created, there must be data collected and analysis that is ongoing to determine if the intervention supports detailed in the plan are impacting the quality of instruction, and to inform decision-making in next steps for the struggling teacher.

This holds implications for school districts in supporting school leaders in their work with struggling teachers. Many of the tasks of the traditional role of school

principal are managerial in nature, and they are still required to be completed. The data from this study indicate the practices and actions of the school leaders that are impactful for struggling teachers demand that principals are in the classrooms, participants in collaborative planning, providing frequent feedback, monitoring data, and structuring collaborative coaching relationships. These require a lot of time, and the managerial tasks of the role of principal can be shifted to others and reviewed for necessity by district personnel.

Although building relationships with others is not a new finding for school leaders working to improve school and teacher effectiveness, it is critical for the work of supporting teachers and was highlighted in the findings from this study. Robinson's 2010 study on leadership capabilities identified leaders must possess interpersonal skills to build relational trust in order to be effective. Leithwood et al. (2004) identified three sets of practices that make up the basic core of leadership, including a set on developing people. In parallel, all four participants detailed their belief that the relationship with the struggling teacher is critical to determine appropriate supports and interventions, make decisions about key personnel who will work with the teacher, and understanding the teacher's unique personality and needs. Just as all students are not alike, all teachers are not alike; they need differentiated responses according to their individual needs and dispositions. Engaging teachers to fully understand their needs and personalities will prevent administrators from making assumptions and selecting inappropriate or ineffective responses to their deficits.

There is little to no training provided to principals on *how* to intervene and coach a struggling teacher. Training for school administrators includes how to understand and

utilize data, how to evaluate, how to manage building responsibilities, how to develop a mission and vision, etc.; however it does not include the practices for *how to respond* to a teacher who is not meeting the expectations and providing effective instruction.

Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, and Orr (2007) noted this as well.

Yet study after study has shown that the training principals typically receive in university programs and from their own districts doesn't do nearly enough to prepare them for their roles as leaders of learning. A staggering 80 percent of superintendents and 69 percent of principals think that leadership training in schools of education is out of touch with the realities of today's districts, according to a recent Public Agenda survey. (p. 1)

Those responsibilities are left solely on the principals to figure out. The findings of this case study support the need for leadership training to build upon principals' understanding of adult learning in conjunction with training on instructional coaching, identifying root causes and issues, selecting resources and supports, and monitoring and responding to teacher progress. It also connects with the findings of Shatzer et al. (2013) who examined leadership practices and the impact on student achievement. They found more research is necessary on the specific leadership practices. "Leadership development programs can specifically target the most effective leadership practices rather than all the practices of instructional leadership—the specific practices that were associated with student achievement" (p. 456).

Principals work hard to map out plans for improvement and the monitoring, feedback, and relationship-building necessary to carry out the plan. The findings of this study show there was a lack of concrete steps regarding when the teacher has improved and how to remove the supports and maintenance for the improvement. Diana Samuelson noted, "Deciding where do you start pulling back? That goes back to what I

said earlier. You have to sit down and have some conversations (with the teacher). Diane continued, "It's just like kids in the classroom. You're going to be able to let go of some of the supports over time faster than others. It depends on the individual."

Michael Mitchell described encouraging teachers when improvement is evident, but did not specify steps for removing the supports. "Help them see the results of their hard work. That's what you've got to keep them focused on. People can see that and they're more apt to continue to do because they're starting to feel good about themselves. We all want to feel good about ourselves."

Rachel Wilkerson discussed responding to improvement through encouragement and praise so make connections for the teacher, but did not identify any steps or decision-making for removing the supports. "I need to make sure they see all of the good things they're doing and have maintained...I mean everybody's good at something. You don't want to hurt their strengths, you want to connect things to that."

Providing feedback when improvement is evident is important to Stephanie Bradford. She did not identify how she removes the supports once improvement is significant. "(We give) that really good feedback that you want to see your teachers giving... Doing what our part was very important to show them this is something that we're going to do together. I think that helped with some of them, too."

Determining when and how to remove supports is as essential to knowing when and how to provide the initial intervention plan. Ultimately the goal is teacher effectiveness, not teacher dependency. The participants in this study described at length their decisions for supports and how they implemented the supports; however, a process for eventually removing the supports was not identified.

Implications for Researchers.

This qualitative study attempted to identify the practices of school leaders in working with teachers who struggled but have improved. Educational literature is very limited in this area and thus research is sorely needed to support school leaders. The qualitative methodology of this case study provided analysis of the experiences of four school principals and how they have worked with struggling teachers that led to improvement.

This case study analyzed the experiences of four school principals and their processes for supporting struggling teachers. The findings of this case study add to the literature in this area by providing the perspective of the leaders who are currently in principal roles and responsible for working with ineffective teachers. The participants shared their personal experiences working with multiple struggling teachers, and they identified specific steps they take to identify and support those teachers. These principals are under the current guidelines of Tennessee's evaluation system, and their experiences can add to the literature on practices that lead to improvement.

Beyond the leadership frameworks and models are the daily actions of principals who successfully work with struggling teachers for improvement. The participants in this study have supported multiple teachers from ineffectiveness ratings to improvement by at least two rating levels. These participants have the experience and first-hand knowledge of practices that work. Using the findings from this study will add to the literature by utilizing current experiences of skilled school leaders to support future training and research.

Second, further research to explore the long-term effect of the supports on both

the principals and the struggling teachers would be important. The duration of this case study spanned across four months and included initial interviews, document analysis, and follow-up interviews. The initial interviews were in-depth and each interview lasted approximately one hour; the follow-up interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. The span of this study did not gauge long-term effects on principals and teachers. Further research to explore the long-term effects would provide critical information on the sustainability efforts demanded of both administrators and teachers. Identifying the key practices that lead to sustained and continuous improvement is beneficial to both school leaders and teachers.

Recommendations

As accountability systems continue to increase in education, the focus on student learning, and consequently, teacher effectiveness also continues to expand. School leaders must be equipped to identify, intervene, and lead improvement methods for teachers who are struggling with classroom instruction and all of its demands. Based on the findings and implications of this qualitative case study, the following are three recommendations for supporting the enormous work of school leaders in supporting struggling teachers.

Recommendation 1: Training for Principals on Instructional Coaching.

Instructional coaching is a relatively new role for building level school administrators. The role of school principal has shifted from building manager to instructional leader as the accountability measures in education have increased. This has

led to the necessity for acquisition of the skills of instructional coaching.

All four participants in this study stated they had received no training on how to support a struggling teacher—no training on how to diagnose root causes for poor performance, no training on how to select and/or provide intervention strategies, and no training on how to differentiate support for individual teachers. The practices and strategies they use were figured out by the individual principals in the course of their work. As Michael Mitchell stated, “There was no formal training. It was training on the job, on the fly, which was interesting.” Diana Samuelson stated she had training in other roles, but none in the role of a school leader. “I had tons of training as an academic coach, but nothing since I’ve been a principal.” Rachel Wilkerson echoed the lack of training and included the accountability on her to provide the supports anyway.

The only support I’ll get like from HR is what needs to go in letters, or what can’t go in letters, or who will and won’t be suspended for what purposes. The support that I get is someone coming in saying, ‘Show me where your weakest teachers are.’ We go and see them, and the question I get is, ‘What are you doing about it?’ So, I’ve got to have answers ready.

The only training any of the participants could identify having received that related to struggling teachers was training from their Human Resources department many years ago about how to write and document steps taken for a teacher, and what disciplinary actions could and could not be taken for a teacher not performing at expectations. None of them had received any training on how to grow, support, and develop a struggling teacher for improvement. The focus of their limited training was on documentation and accountability.

Educational leadership certification programs must focus on the realities of schools and accountability and provide preparation and guidance on how to respond to

struggling teachers. This would include training on the following skills: making diagnostic decisions using a variety of data; building relationships while maintaining supervision and authority; outlining plans for growth that include specific goals, strategies for development, tools for monitoring progress; and processes for moving from support to maintenance. These skills are imperative for today's educational leaders to ensure high quality, effective classroom instruction for all students and to combat the growing issue of teacher retention.

Recommendation 2: Identification of Best Practices for Supporting Ineffective Teachers.

Best practices for instruction are plentiful in the literature with many studies including the measurable impact on student learning for specific instructional practices. The work of supporting and coaching a teacher to improve is lacking a clear identification of best practices for teacher improvement. The findings of this qualitative study show that school leaders are lacking the specific knowledge of any best practices in the process of teacher improvement; consequently, the school leaders are utilizing a "trial and error" method of intervention strategies.

Developing a comprehensive list of best practices for teacher improvement would encompass all of the following: the principles of adult learning, research on teachers' self-efficacy and motivation, leadership models that address how to lead change, and the elements of instructional coaching. Figure 5.1 below illustrates the list.



Figure 5.1 Components for Developing Best Practices for Teacher Improvement

The list of components in the figure above is not all-inclusive but rather a starting point of key data to include in creating the comprehensive list. Much like the processes and practices associated with other leadership responsibilities such as creating a vision and mission, or developing a positive school culture for learning, a list of best practices for assisting teachers for improvement would be instrumental in preparing future leaders and supporting current practitioners. Integral to the development of a comprehensive list of best practices for teacher improvement would be the teachers' perspective on which practices have both supported and hindered their improvement. This is outlined in the third recommendation below.

Recommendation 3: Research on Teachers' Perceptions of Support Strategies for Improvement.

As previously indicated, there is a gap in the literature regarding the practices principals use in their work to support improvement in teachers. Studies are plentiful about the types and the impact of various leadership models; however, the specific practices used by principals to help teachers improve is not present in the literature. This study aimed at examining self-reported practices of principals who led teachers to improvement; however, one limitation of the study was that it did not include the teacher perspective regarding those same practices.

Further research is necessary to examine the experiences and perceptions of the teachers who struggled and ultimately improved. These teachers' perspectives of the supports that were provided would provide a critical missing element regarding which leadership practices were most empowering for teachers, and if any practices were actually detrimental to their improvement. Research should be conducted to examine the impact of leadership practices on teachers' understanding, motivation, and teaching practices. Furthermore, an analysis of the leadership practices that had any detrimental or obstructing impacts on teachers' improvement is critical to conduct. The findings from this proposed research could be used to design the training necessary for education leadership certification programs in order to prepare future school leaders for the demands and responsibilities of today's accountability systems.

Conclusion

School principals who work with struggling teachers to support their improvement are emphatic that this process is critical to ensuring effective instruction is provided to all students. While the school principals agree on the importance of building a relationship with teachers in order to develop a plan of support that is individualized, none of the participants in this study were trained in how to diagnose root causes, create a development plan focused on improvement, or where to find or how to create resources and approaches for supporting teachers to improve.

The data from this case study have highlighted many areas for future discussion including developing a set of best practices for responding to struggling teachers and providing specific training for school-level administrators on how to respond with an appropriate plan for improvement. The results of this case study suggest that school principals believe building relationships, utilizing data, intervening early, employing reflective questioning, and providing coaching are key practices that can support struggling teachers for improvement. Leithwood et al. (2004) found from their research that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school” (p. 5). Certainly, it is critical to understand the school leadership practices that can support struggling teachers to improve classroom instruction for the benefit and learning of all students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL GUIDELINES

Interview Protocol Study: Practices Principals Use to Support Struggling Teachers

Date of interview:

Time:

Place:

Interviewee:

School Site:

Questions:

- How many years have you served as principal?
- How many years in your current district?
- How many years of classroom teaching experience?
- What is your experience working with struggling teachers?
 - Have you had more than one?
 - Do you do the same thing with each teacher?
- What is your process when you receive effectiveness ratings and find a low score?
 - Why do you do that?
- How do you approach teachers with low effectiveness ratings?
- What types of supports do you provide for a teacher who is struggling?
 - Where do you find that support?
 - Is that a district support, or an individual support?
- How do you determine which supports are appropriate for a specific teacher?
- Who provides the supports?

- How do you make this happen?
- How do you ensure the teacher implements the supports?
 - What do you use as a monitoring tool?
- How do you respond when improvement is not evident after supports are provided?
 - Do you have a next level, or tier, of support?
- How do you respond when improvement is evident?
 - What type of feedback do you provide?
 - When and how do you provide it?
- Do struggling teachers receive different supports than non-struggling teachers (for example, new teachers or “proficient” teachers)?
 - How do you differentiate between the problems of a struggling teacher versus a new teacher?
- What are your most important pieces of advice to other principals for how to support struggling teachers?
- One final question—Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX B: TEAM DOMAINS

TEACHING SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND PROFESSIONALISM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The *Teaching Skills, Knowledge, and Professionalism Performance Standards* are divided into four domains, as shown in the overview below. Within each domain, performance indicators are listed with bulleted descriptors and a rubric specifying three performance levels for measuring actual teacher performance. Performance definitions are provided at levels 5, 3, and 1, but raters can also score performance at levels 2 or 4 based on their professional judgment. Teachers earn a score of 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 for each indicator.

INSTRUCTION	ENVIRONMENT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Standards and Objectives 2. Motivating Students 3. Presenting Instructional Content 4. Lesson Structure and Pacing 5. Activities and Materials 6. Questioning 7. Academic Feedback 8. Grouping Students 9. Teacher Content Knowledge 10. Teacher Knowledge of Students 11. Thinking 12. Problem Solving 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expectations 2. Managing Student Behavior 3. Environment 4. Respectful Culture
PLANNING	PROFESSIONALISM
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Instructional Plans 2. Student Work 3. Assessment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional Growth & Learning 2. Use of Data 3. School & Community Involvement 4. Leadership

The *Instruction, Planning, and Environment* rubrics are on the following pages.

APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
 Office of Research Compliance,
 010A Sam Ingram Building,
 2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
 Murfreesboro, TN 37129



IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Friday, June 03, 2016

Investigator(s): Tracy L. Hollinger (Student PI) and Julie Haun-Frank (FA)
 Investigator(s)' Email(s): tw3d@mtmail.mtsu.edu; julie.haun-frank@mtsu.edu
 Department: College of Education

Study Title: *Principal leadership practices that support struggling teachers for improvement*
 Protocol ID: 16-2283

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 58.110 within the category (7) *Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification	
Date of expiration	6/3/2017	
Sample Size	10 (TEN)	
Participant Pool	Middle school principals	
Exceptions	Permission letter requirement is waived	
Restrictions	Data involving sensitive professional information on teachers defined as "struggling" or documents pertaining to the teacher identity may not be discussed or shared	
Comments	The investigator is allowed to contact more schools without an addendum amendment as long as the protocol is followed without any deviations. Also, the study subjects represent governing authorities within the schools and separate permission letter to allow their participation may not be required.	
Amendments	Date	Post-approval Amendments
		NONE

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (6/3/2019) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 6/3/2017. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study **MUST** be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.

Institutional Review Board

Office of Compliance

Middle Tennessee State University

Continuing Review Schedule:

Reporting Period	Requisition Deadline	IRB Comments
First year report	5/3/2017	INCOMPLETE
Second year report	5/3/2018	INCOMPLETE
Final report	5/3/2019	INCOMPLETE

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. [Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website.](#) Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, investigator information and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
 Middle Tennessee State University
 Email: irb_information@mtsu.edu (for questions)
irb_submissions@mtsu.edu (for documents)

Quick Links:

[Click here](#) for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
 More information on expedited procedures can be found [here](#).