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Female Principals Leading in 21st Century Urban Schools: Instructional Leadership,
Supervision and Evaluation in the Era of Accountability

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Female Principals Leading in 21st Century Urban Schools: Instructional Leadership, Supervision
and Evaluation in the Era of Accountability

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Abstract

This study examined the leadership practices of female principals in a 21st century urban school district. The purpose of this study was to describe the present status of instructional leadership, teacher supervision and evaluation in the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as experienced by ten female school principals in a Florida school district. The study compared the findings from the literature in the areas of instructional leadership, supervision and evaluation. The literature cited focused on the ways that female principals enacted the role of an instructional leader when supervising and evaluating teachers.

The study took the form of a case study in order to provide a detailed description of the leadership practices of female principals in a single school district in the state of Florida. Interview questions were constructed based on the research question. Each interview was transcribed and content analysis was employed to identify commonalities in the data. Common themes were identified for the research question based on the responses of the principals.

The study revealed profound consistency between the information cited in the literature and the information reported by the ten principals in the areas of instructional leadership, supervision and evaluation. The study also revealed the potential conflicts between the beliefs of the principals and the NCLB legislation and the effects of NCLB on the practices of the principals.

Keywords: female leadership, instructional leadership, supervision and evaluation,

Introduction

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) altered the landscape of public education and transformed the practice of school principals. Principals are a key element in school improvement efforts. The emphasis on accountability brought on by the No Child Left Behind legislation, required principals to work in prevention reality. They worked to prevent their schools from being placed on a warning list or school improvement plan for failing to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) that NCLB mandated. There was an era when principals had time to experiment with innovative programs; however, now principals were bound by the considerations of scientifically-based research when determining what programs to implement. Principals once could look at the individual strengths and weaknesses of students to gauge their progress in the school's curricula, now they must analyze student progress based on the results of standardized test scores and their contribution to meeting AYP.

The principal's work with teachers was also impacted by NCLB since schools were evaluated and possibly disciplined based on student achievement. Kaplan and Owings (2004) observed that improving teacher effectiveness was the center of educational reform. Increasingly, research confirmed that teacher and teaching quality are the most powerful predictors of student success. Teacher effectiveness was cited as one of the most decisive factors in student achievement, (Kennedy, Peters, & Thomas, 2012; RAND Corporation, 2012; Sanders, 2004; Wenglinsky, 2002). After nearly 30 years of revamping increased graduation requirements, curriculum standards, and high-stakes testing, stakeholders concluded that unless changes occurred inside the classroom with improved teaching and learning, educators cannot prepare all students for proficiency in advanced education and work. In short, principals enabled higher student achievement by assuring better teaching (Wenglinsky, 2002). Due to the increasing demands on the principal's time for both instructional and managerial activities, as well as the ever present threat of NCLB sanctions, one questions if the gender of the principal is a determining factor in his or her school's success.

This study was based on the assumption that a principal's gender may influence his or her practices as an instructional leader. The literature cited focused on the ways that female principals enact the role of instructional leaders when supervising and evaluating teachers. How the gender of the principal influenced instructional leadership, supervision and evaluation was a key study since teacher quality was a critical factor in the accountability movement.

Characteristics of Female Principals

Researchers depicted the lives of female principals (Stanley, 2002; Growe & Montgomery, 2001; Shakeshaft, 1989) as being child and achievement centered, more focused on teaching and learning, motivated by building and maintaining relationships, and more visible in schools.

In her extensive study of female administrators, Shakeshaft 1989 found that "women possess characteristics that are conducive to good schooling" (p. 200). She found that female principals focus on instructional and educational issues. In addition, female principals stressed achievement within a supportive environment. Other indicators of female principals were that they stressed cooperation, facilitated vision into action, and monitored and intervened more than men. Shakeshaft and Nowell (2000) suggested that female principals evaluated student progress more frequently than men, managed more orderly schools, and encouraged participation in decision-making.

As a result of her research, Shakeshaft described schools headed by a female as child centered, small, nonhierarchical, and marked by shared decision making. She also concluded

that the style of female principals was motivated by a focus on building community, establishing relationships, and improving teaching and learning. Shakeshaft added that female principals spend more time interacting with others in order to improve their schools. In describing the female principal's work day, she noted, "Women spend more time with people, communicated more, care more about individual differences, are concerned with teachers and marginal students, and motivated more" (Shakeshaft, 1989 p. 197). Shakeshaft concluded that female principals viewed their role as master teacher or educational leader.

Conceptual Underpinnings

Instructional Leadership

Smith and Andrews (2008) identified four roles for an instructional leader: resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence. In the role of instructional resource, "the instructional leader supervises the staff, using strategies that focus on the improvement of instruction" (p.14). They added that when a principal displays strong instructional leadership, "Teacher evaluation is characterized by frequent classroom visitation, clear evaluation criteria, and feedback" (p. 8). In addition, Blasé and Blasé (2007) concluded that positive instructional leadership improved teacher performance and student learning.

Although there are many roles involved in instructional leadership, the primary focus of a principal was to improve teaching and learning through completing formal and informal observations and discussing teaching and learning with teachers. These are two important activities in instructional leadership that affected teaching and learning. By being visible in classrooms via informal and formal observations, the instructional leader can improve teaching and learning through supervision. First, the instructional leader can monitor the curriculum. Wiles and Bondi (2000) contended that "the primary purpose of instructional leadership is to improve classroom teachers' link between the planned curriculum and the learning experienced by the student" (p. 234). In order to achieve this purpose, the principal must have extensive knowledge of learning and teaching theory to recognize what was seen and not seen in classrooms. The knowledge principals hold must include understanding of planning elements, learning activities, and evaluation (Wiles & Bondi, 2000).

By being visible in classrooms, principals used their knowledge of learning and teaching theory to improve instruction. This required the principal to stay up to date with the latest research on teaching and learning. Visibility in classrooms allowed principals to motivate teachers, monitor instruction, be accessible, provide support, and keep informed (Blasé & Blasé, 2007). Therefore, being visible in classrooms – an essential component of instructional leadership – enabled principals to help improve teaching and learning. By discussing teaching and learning with teachers through informal conversations and post-observation conferences, principals used their role as supervisor to improve teaching and learning. Mainly, principals shared their knowledge of teaching and learning theory. Since "most teachers expand their teaching range only with carefully designed support and assistance," the conference was a pivotal element in improving student achievement (Blasé & Blasé, 2007, p. 19). Next, supervisors accomplished many tasks through conferencing. The conference allowed the principal to give feedback, model good instruction, use inquiry, make suggestions, and solicit advice and opinions about instruction (Blasé & Blasé, 2007; Springer, 2006).

Florida Instructional Evaluation System

The supervision and evaluation of teachers was a key task for principals which became increasingly important under the mandates of NCLB. States were more involved in the evaluation process. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) reviewed and approved

each school district's instructional personnel evaluation systems and any substantial revisions subsequent to initial approval. In addition, the Department assisted districts in monitoring the fidelity of implementation of each district's evaluation system for compliance with the law. The FLDOE approved the following Teacher Evaluation Instructional Practice Models: State Model based on the research and meta-analyses of Dr. Robert Marzano, and the Danielson Model based on the research of Charlotte Danielson (<http://www.fldoe.org/profdev/adpes.asp>).

Florida Statute 1012.34 (2011) mandated that evaluation systems support effective instruction and student learning growth, and that performance evaluation results must be used when developing district and school level improvement plans. This rule also dictated that evaluation performance levels must differentiate among four levels:

1. Highly Effective;
2. Effective;
3. Needs improvement or, for instructional personnel in the first 3 years of employment who need improvement, Developing; and
4. Unsatisfactory.

According to the rule, performance evaluations were to be based upon sound educational principles and contemporary research in effective educational practices in three major areas: Performance of Students, Instructional Practice, and Professional and Job Responsibilities. In measuring performance of students, Florida utilized a value-added model that measured the impact of a teacher on student learning, by accounting for other factors that may impact the learning process. The value-added model considered a student's prior performance, current performance, and predicted performance. An advantage of value-added models is that they leveled the playing field by accounting for differences in the proficiency and characteristics of students assigned to teachers. The value-added model also recognized that there was an independent factor, the school component, that impacted student learning which is taken into account when "leveling the playing field" (American Institutes For Research, 2011). The Florida Value-Added Model is one part of a multi-faceted teacher evaluation system in the state.

Limitations

Only elementary and middle school female African American principals in a local school district in the state of Florida were included in this study, and results may not be generalizable to other school districts in the state of Florida, other states, and nations. However, the findings may have relevance to researchers in these settings as they examine leadership practices in schools and foster student performance.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study: How do female principals construct their roles as instructional leaders, supervisors and evaluators of teachers in the era of No Child Left Behind?

Methodology

Research Design

Since the few studies that exist on the supervision and evaluation of teachers conducted by female principals are dated, qualitative research was appropriate. Qualitative research was also appropriate for this study because of its intent to describe the meaning female principals ascribed to their experiences as instructional leaders and in the supervision/evaluation process. This study took the form of a case study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), "A case study is a detailed examination of one setting or a single subject ..." (p. 54). Yin (2003), noted that the case study was the best form to use when seeking the answers to "how" and "why" questions.

The case study was most appropriate when the researcher seeks to provide a detailed description of a single subject using a variety of sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents (Yin, 2003; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). It brought new discoveries, broadened experiences, and confirmed previous knowledge (Merriam, 1998). In education, the case study allowed specific problems to be articulated and defined (Merriam, 1998).

Interviewing is an appropriate technique when behavior and feelings cannot be observed directly, when past events are being studied, and “when conducting case studies of a few selected individuals” (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Yin (2003) adds, “Interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs” (p. 92). An initial interview occurred with each principal to collect baseline data; a second interview occurred after the researcher reviewed the documents and transcripts; final interviews seeking clarification occurred during the writing of the case study.

Interview questions were constructed to answer the research question. Interviews in qualitative studies were usually more open ended and less structured and flowed like conversations (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). “The largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time,” advised Merriam (1998, p. 74). Two interview protocols were created: initial questions derived from the literature for female principals, and follow-up questions derived from the interview transcripts of the principals. Questions were modified when necessary to become clearer to the audience. Additional probing questions were devised to gain deeper responses. Interviews were conducted, taped, and transcribed with the participants. The transcripts became a data source for future analysis (Merriam, 1998). Each transcript was sent to the appropriate participant to ensure accuracy. One participant made subtle changes in wording to her transcript.

Data Analysis

Each interview, along with related documents from the site, was analyzed after it was conducted: “The right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (Merriam, 1998, p. 162). This process enabled the researcher to pose clarifying questions when needed and helped to develop common and uncommon patterns in the data.

After each interview was transcribed, the data were examined for common patterns and irregularities and coded based on those patterns since “typically, qualitative research findings are in the forms of themes, categories, typologies, and concepts” (Merriam, 1998, pp. 7–8). Content analysis was employed to review the data and categorize it according to the research questions. Content analysis enabled large amounts of data to be reduced into smaller chunks to create meaning (Weber, 1990). Merriam (1998) noted, “Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study’s purpose, the investigator’s orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves (p. 179).

The data were initially coded as they related to specific research questions, however new categories emerged from the data (Merriam, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Initial categories were determined by the researcher after a review of the transcripts. Microsoft Word software was also used to find keywords in the transcripts based on the research questions. The search command was also used to determine the frequency of words in order to develop categories.

Context

One school system was selected to participate in the case study. The criteria for selection of female principals were that the district had at least three African American female principals and these principals had at least three years of administrative experience. Over 20,000 students attended the elementary, middle school, and high schools located in this Florida school district. The district served a diverse population of students from various social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The district described itself as offering a rigorous educational program to help each child maximize his or her potential to achieve success. The district has won many awards and was characterized by high achievement. The district's dedication to high achievement was directed by its strategic plan, which addressed goal areas in student achievement, curriculum and instruction, technology, global competence, collaborative leadership, and Common Core Standards. These areas have influenced the district's focus on instruction and student achievement, dedication to various forms of professional development, and its development of a teacher supervision and evaluation model.

Ten female principals participated in the study. The principals reported a range of 3–37 years of principal experience and were former teachers (see Table 1).

Table 1
2012–2013 Principal Profile As Reported by Principals

Principal	Years of Experience as Principal	Years of Experience as Principal at School	Year of Teaching Experience	Highest Degree	Ethnicity
Principal A	22	17	10	M.Ed.	African-American
Principal B	3	3	15	M.Ed.	African-American
Principal C	30	28	10	M.Ed.	African-American
Principal D	37	3	10	Ph.D.	African-American
Principal E	10	10	10	M.Ed.	African-American
Principal F	17	7	15	M.Ed.	African-American
Principal G	3	3	19	Ed.D.	African-American
Principal H	12	12	8	M.Ed.	African-American
Principal I	6	3	11	M.Ed.	African-American
Principal J	8	4	14	M.Ed.	African-American

In addition, all of the principals participating in this study reported that they served in schools that were high poverty and high minority (see Table 2). Also, the principals participating in this study were African American females (see Table 2).

Table 2
 2012–2013 School Demographics As Reported by Principals

Principal	School Population	% Free/Reduced Lunch	Florida School Grade	Type of School	Student % Ethnicity
Principal A	469	83%	A	Elementary K-6	87% African American 9% Hispanic
Principal B	568	95%	A	Middle 6-8	93% African American 4% Caucasian
Principal C	284	69%	A	Elementary K-6	82% African American 13% Caucasian
Principal D	527	77%	B	Elementary K-5	99% African American
Principal E	398	82%	B	Elementary K-5	99% African American
Principal F	347	92%	A	Elementary K-6	86% African American 4% Hispanic 4% Asian 6% Caucasian
Principal G	346	58%	B	Elementary K-6	77% African American 21% Caucasian
Principal H	291	52%	A	Elementary K-6	92% African American 7% Caucasian
Principal I	247	59%	A	Elementary K-6	99% African American
Principal J	295	58%	B	Middle 7-8	99% African American

Results/Discussion/Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to describe the present status of instructional leadership, teacher supervision and evaluation in the era accountability as experienced by ten female school principals in a Florida school district compared to the findings from the literature in the areas of instructional leadership, supervision and evaluation. The study took the form of a case study because the researchers sought to provide a detailed description of a single subject using a variety of resources (Yin, 2003; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). This particular case took place in a single setting, a school district in Florida. The researchers connected the practices experienced by the principals involved in the study with discoveries from the related literature to demonstrate similarities and differences between current practice and the practices as described in the literature. Common themes were identified for the research question based on the responses of the principals.

The research question asked: How do female principals construct their roles as instructional leaders, supervisors and evaluators of teachers in the era of No Child Left Behind? The district's supervision model required the principals to frequently observe in classrooms and interact with teachers to improve teaching and learning. Visibility in classrooms allowed supervisors to motivate teachers, monitor instruction, be accessible and provide support, and keep informed (Blasé & Blasé, 2007). The four domains of teaching/evaluation were explored, allowing teachers a fair and comprehensive evaluation. They observed the teachers not only in classroom settings, but in their interactions with parents and in professional development and committee work settings. They also supervised teachers by reviewing lesson plans and providing feedback to the teachers on these documents. Smith and Andrews (2008) explained that when a principal displays strong instructional leadership, "Teacher evaluation is characterized by frequent classroom visitation, clear evaluation criteria, and feedback" (p. 8). Principal sample responses follow:

Principal Three: I'm in and out [of classrooms] frequently in order to see what's going on. I may only stay ten minutes. I focus on a different area during different parts, and I try to align it with their goals.

Principal One: Most of my time is with the teachers, talking to them about issues when I'm walking around. If I feed and water the teachers, then they'll feed and water the kids.

Principal Seven: With this model, I am in and out of the teachers' rooms. We rarely have a set time for me to come and observe.

The following themes emerged: classroom expectations, defining teacher quality, collaborative supervision, providing feedback, promoting teacher growth, and visibility.

Classroom Expectations

The principals based what they expected to see teachers and students doing in classrooms on a student centered constructivist learning environment and approach to curriculum. Although each principal was interviewed separately, their responses were remarkably similar when describing what they expect to see in classrooms. The common themes included interaction (between teacher and student, between student and student, and among the class), movement, use of a variety of resources, integration of subjects, focused inquiry, engagement, and emphasis on the whole child (social, academic, and emotional aspects). The principals examined the learning environment to see that classrooms were bright and inviting, with standards and student work posted on the walls. By emphasizing the whole child, the principals believe that a teacher's instructional delivery and the classroom learning environment should allow students to be happy to be in the class and to see learning as fun.

In addition to identifying what they expected to see in classrooms, the principals detailed what they hoped not to see. They did not want to see a lot of teacher talk or a majority of the class devoted to direct instruction. Instead, they preferred the teacher to act as facilitator and the children to view each other as experts. They wanted the students to know the goals of the lesson, why they were learning what they are learning, and how they would be assessed. Principal sample responses follow.

Principal Six: The classroom should not look the same at the beginning of the lesson as it does at the end of the lesson.

Principal Two: There needs to be a lot of checks for understanding with the kids during instruction, so that the teachers can get a real feel for where the children are individually and as a whole group.

Principal Ten: I expect to be able to go up to students and ask them what they're doing and have them tell me about the assignment, why they're doing it, and how they know if it's good work. I expect them to have criteria that they're using to judge their own work and take responsibility for it.

Principal One: The teacher should say 'This is the expectation as to why we are doing this. This is how it's connected to the standards.' Those are the kinds of things I'm looking for.

Defining Teacher Quality

The district's model for teacher supervision and evaluation, along with the principals' descriptions of what they expected to see in classrooms, were consistent with the research on what comprises teacher quality. Researchers identified the teacher's knowledge of content and pedagogy, the teacher's skills and classroom practices in delivering the curriculum, and the teacher's relationships with students and other members of the school community when defining teacher quality (Wenglinsky, 2002).

Collaborative Supervision

The district's model and the principals' resulting approach were consistent with the positive research associated with a collaborative approach to supervision. Collaborative supervision enabled teachers to evaluate their own instructional effectiveness (McBride & Skau, 1995) and to solve instructional problems (Nolan & Francisa, 2008; Beck, 2004; Zepeda, 2003). Collaboration placed responsibility for teacher learning and growth on the teacher and the principal equally (Grimmett, Rostad, & Ford, 2002). They believed that a teacher's practice can only improve when teachers play a central role in their evaluation process. Drago-Severson (2004) noted, "The central goal of reflective practice is improving one's teaching ... Creating a context wherein teachers are encouraged to engage in reflection promotes (and models) risk taking" (p. 105). Just as they hoped teachers would encourage their students to take risks and try new approaches to learning in their classrooms, the principals modeled this process in their interactions with teachers. Principal Two explains the process:

[The goal] could be something that they do already and expand or learn more about. It's supposed to help them in their role as teacher. I usually let them pick an area of interest, and then I'll encourage them if I see something that they're doing that's great. I'll support that, and I'll want them to share that.

Whether the teacher was marginal or satisfactory, these principals believed that the teacher/principal relationship was critical to the teacher's improvement. They remembered their own classroom experiences as teachers, the good and the bad, and realize that teachers have these same good and bad days. Focusing on the positive allowed these principals to maintain relationships with teachers so that teaching and learning was constantly improving in their buildings. Shautz (2005) affirmed this view that the principals have of their teachers: "Female principals generally viewed the teachers with whom they worked as being professional, dedicated individuals. Female principals placed a great deal of trust in teachers" (p. 212). Principal sample responses follow.

Principal Five: Because I bring fifteen years of classroom experience with me, I understand that sometimes your very best lesson is when no one is there. I do give them the opportunity to invite me in for something special, because sometimes I think teachers plan and work really hard and think, 'Oh I'd love for somebody to see this.' I give them that opportunity.

Principal One: A lot of my belief about supervision of teachers has more to do with the kind of relationship that you build with them than it has to do with the actual supervision.

Principal Nine: I think this is maybe a gender related way of feeling. You can say ten good things. You make one comment that's negative and that's what people focus on and feel badly about. So I don't want to do that.

Providing Feedback

The principals' focus on the positive in teacher performance characterized their verbal and written feedback to teachers. This feedback occurred not only after a formal observation but through informal interactions and conversations. The principals maintained visibility and made themselves available to teachers as part of their supervisory practices. This approach was consistent with what Nolan and Francis (2008) described as ideal: "Supervisors must see themselves not as critics of teaching performance, but rather as collaborators with teachers in attempting to understand the problems, issues, and dilemmas that are inherent in the process of learning and teaching" (p. 58).

Promoting Teacher Growth

The principals in this study reported the strategies they used to promote teacher growth as providing professional development, modeling teaching behaviors that they hoped to see in classrooms and working with the grade level teaching teams. The principals indicated that teacher learning and continued growth were the keys to student learning and growth. The principals' view of their role in promoting teacher growth was consistent with a study conducted by Drago-Severson (2004) in which she concluded: principals have a key role in supporting teacher learning and a responsibility to develop a clear vision of how school contexts can better support this learning; leadership supportive of teacher development made schools better places of learning for children; and schools needed to be places where the adults as well as the children are growing. Each principal devoted a substantial amount of time to informal and formal methods of professional development. Principal Two reports,

This district that I'm in enables us to provide a lot of professional development activities in the district as well as in the building. As a result, there's this environment, a culture of learning, which is real important to have a safe, nurturing community for everyone.

Each principal had at least two professional development meetings a month in place of the weekly staff meeting, preferring to handle announcements via email. Literacy, math, and technology coaches were also available to help teachers connect their lessons to standards. Other methods of professional development that the principals described were showing engagement in data analysis, videos of model instruction, encouraging teachers to observe each other, sharing what they see in classrooms, and distributing and discussing research. Blasé and Blasé (2007) noted that effective principals facilitated professional development, shared professional readings, and discussed teaching with teachers. The principals mentioned building wide, formal in-service experiences that were designed to promote teacher growth.

Visibility

All ten principals discussed the importance of visibility as part of their supervisory style. The principals had an open door, open calendar policy for teachers and were frequently out in their schools to promote accessibility. Principal Three noted that she kept her calendar available to her teachers so that they can easily schedule appointments. The principals indicated that their visibility allowed their teachers to view them as ready and available to help them solve problems, address instructional concerns, or just listen. Blasé and Blasé (2007) explained that being

available and providing an open, friendly, supportive environment were keys to teacher empowerment. Principal One reported that this informal learning, where individual concerns were addressed, were critical to a teacher's development and indicated:

The real learning and the real growth comes out of inspiring people to want to be better....

The real learning comes when they own it, they choose it, they know what it is that they want to learn, and I help facilitate their movement along that learning continuum.

The principals in this study reported that when not in formally scheduled meetings, they were roaming the halls in order to have opportunities to speak to teachers and students, observing informally in classrooms, and connecting personally with the teachers and students, practices consistent with those identified by Drago-Severson (2004). They indicated that their accessibility allowed their staff to view them as supports in the teaching and learning process, particularly if suggestions about performance needed to be made in the future.

Summary and Connections to Related Literature

Based on the data reviewed for this research question, the presentation was organized into the following categories through data analysis, as delineated by the interview questions posed to the principals: purposes of supervision, the school district's model of supervision and evaluation, classroom expectations, defining teacher quality, collaborative supervision, providing feedback, promoting teacher growth, and visibility. The principals in the study reported that they supervised teachers in a variety of ways including utilizing the district's evaluation structure to promote teaching and learning through the implementation of a learning teams, devoting staff meetings to professional development, sharing resources and their own educational expertise, visiting and observing in classrooms, being visible in the school, and meeting with teachers about educational issues. These methods were consistent with those articulated by Zepeda and Ponticell (1998), and Beerens (2010). The principals reported a belief that the supervisors of teachers should examine teachers through a variety of lenses, not just the lens of a single classroom observation. This belief was similar to the views of differentiated supervision espoused by Danielson and McGreal (2000) and Glickman (2002).

Conclusion

Working in a high performing school district created unique advantages and challenges to meeting the mandates in this era of accountability. The principals explained that the pressure to constantly improve achievement was ever present in their daily lives as administrators. This pressure was complicated by the high levels of achievement currently present in their schools. The principals reported that it was harder to attain continuous improvement and to motivate their staff to attain higher levels of achievement when their FCAT scores were well above state averages. The principals indicated that as their schools moved closer to one hundred percent proficiency as mandated in this era of accountability, it became harder and harder to achieve adequate yearly progress. The parental pressure that comes with working in a high performing district compounded the problem. Parents in this district, while supportive, expected their schools to be the best. Since their schools were high poverty, high minority, and high achieving, they had to continually find new ways to motivate their staff and convince them that they cannot just work to maintain the status quo.

As the principals continued to work with their staff to improve student achievement, each of them employed a particular approach to motivate their staff. One principal relied on constant visibility in hallways and classrooms to ensure that she was available for students and teachers as needed to discuss teaching and learning. She viewed these informal learning opportunities as ways to improve achievement. Another principal constantly showed caring with teachers and

students so that they would do their best work. The sixth principal employed the committee structures in place in her building to build community and a shared vision of student success in her school. While all three of the principals utilized each of these approaches, the emphasis of each of them appeared to be related to their particular school context. Because she was new to her school, visibility helped one of the principals to bond with her staff. Since her school was perceived by some members of the community to be weaker than the other elementary schools, one of the principals used her caring to make the teachers and students feel special. As a result of her extended experience with her staff, another of the principals was able to rely on the committee structures to further improve her school.

Fortunately for this district, they had resources available to assist them in reaching the one hundred percent proficiency mandate. This school district closely emulated best practices as described in the research. Policymakers who are interested in ensuring that all schools are high performing would be wise to study these practices and include them in any revisions to NCLB or subsequent legislation. For instance, the district utilized models, such as differentiated supervision, which is associated with high achievement. Literacy, math, and technology coaches were employed to assist teachers in their classrooms. Professional development was a priority in this district so that the teachers can continually refine their skills. There was an abundance of supplies and resources for use in classrooms. The teachers in each school served as important resources as they often took on leadership roles; these roles assisted the principals in completing the many tasks they must perform. Finally, there was a great deal of parental involvement and support in the district. These advantages could help the principals as they strive to meet proficiency mandates.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study only focused on the perspectives of ten African American female elementary and middle school principals and their experiences in the areas instructional leadership, supervision and evaluation in comparison to the literature and reality in the era of NCLB, a number of suggestions were made for further research. First, the study could be repeated with female middle school or high school principals and teachers. Since middle schools and high schools are often more content driven, than child centered, this perspective may yield different findings. The study could be repeated with male elementary principals. Since the interview questions were drawn from literature related to female principals, a study of how male elementary principals coped with the mandates of NCLB may also yield different results. A comparison study between male and female elementary principals and their methods of addressing NCLB would prove insightful. This study indicated if there were still differences and what kinds of differences in their approach to meeting the mandates of NCLB. A final area of study would be to repeat this study with female elementary principals and teachers in a school that is on a warning or school improvement list. Such a study would reveal the perspective of teachers and principals who feel a greater sense of urgency in meeting the requirements in this era of accountability.

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