

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS
IN ALABAMA TORCHBEARER SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama. Principals who serve in schools that have high concentrations of students who are living in poverty face challenges in improving student achievement. Principals of these schools are required to promote school environments that are conducive to learning for all students. In February 2005, the Alabama State Department of Education began recognizing high-poverty public schools and their principals for overcoming the odds of low academic performance and standing out as high-achieving schools. These schools were identified as Torchbearer schools.

This qualitative study use a phenomenological design in an effort to enable the researcher to explore and gather rich descriptions of principals' self-efficacy in Alabama Torchbearer schools from the participants' perspective, using data collected directly from the participants through in-depth interviews, and site observations. Ten principals, who represented five school districts from across the State of Alabama, comprised this study. Each participant gave their explicit permission and the study was in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. After analyzing all the data collected, five themes with corresponding subthemes emerged. The five major themes that emerged were (a) leadership preparation, (b) approach to leadership and collaboration, (c) ap-

proach to school related obstacles, (d) sources of efficacy, and (e) philosophical beliefs about student achievement.

This study of perceptions of principals' self-efficacy beliefs in Alabama Torchbearer schools may be helpful to schools, districts, boards of education, and colleges and universities. Exploring the approaches implemented and perceptions of principals of high poverty, high achieving schools will add insight to this population of students. This may be beneficial to principal professional development planning and educational leadership programs with the goal of preparing principals to be successful in high poverty school environments.

Keywords: principal, self-efficacy, Torchbearer schools, high-poverty schools

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing daughter, Morgan. Daddy loves you very much!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Thoughts, if given enough time and attention, will manifest themselves in your life through your behaviors and attitude.”

-Bobby D. Horn

School leadership has become critical during the past three decades, as public schools respond to the changing conditions of the 21st century (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). Today, principals are expected to be instructional leaders. According to Murphy, Goldring, and Porter, (2007) instructional leadership is a form of leadership that is intensely focused on teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment. This definition was later supported by Grissom and Loeb (2011) when they asserted that instructional leadership involves the principal’s role in facilitating teaching and learning. Principal leadership is important in meeting school challenges and addressing the expectations placed in schools (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Principal leadership has been shown to play an important role in contributing to student achievement in indirect ways (Kafka, 2009). In this era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with increased accountability, the principal has become the sole person held responsible to federal, state and local governmental bodies for student achievement in schools, especially with regard to their performance on standardized tests (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). As a result of

NCLB, the role of the principal in improving school academic outcomes has become paramount (Billger, 2007).

Principals who serve in schools that have high concentrations of students who are living in poverty, who have limited English proficiency, and who have persistently low academic achievement struggle to achieve their NCLB goals (Guin, 2004; Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008). In February 2005, the Alabama State Department of Education (ASDOE) began recognizing high-poverty public schools and their principals for overcoming the odds of low academic performance and standing out as high-achieving schools. These schools were identified as Torchbearer schools (Alabama Education News, 2005).

Torchbearer schools have more than 80% of their student populations receiving free/reduced lunch; moreover, these students perform above the national average on the Stanford Achievement Test 10th Edition (SAT-10) and above the state average on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) (Alabama Education News, 2005). In 2005, the Alabama State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Joseph Morton, administered a survey to principals of Torchbearer schools to determine why their particular schools succeeded while others did not (Alabama Education News, 2005). He believed that what these principals shared would “truly benefit other schools with similar demographics” (p. 3). Dr. Anita Buckley-Commander, Alabama State of Education Director of Classroom Improvement, also cited leadership as the core of the Torchbearer program (Alabama Education News, 2005). Dr. Angela Mangum, Director of the Torchbearer Schools Program, declared that Torchbearer schools “light the way as examples of places of learning

that exhibit exemplary leadership and overcome adversity in student achievement” (Alabama Education News, 2009, p. 3).

Principals play a key role in setting the course for successful schools (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Without a principal’s leadership effort to raise student achievement, schools cannot succeed (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Principals’ sense of self-efficacy is a promising, yet largely unexplored, avenue to understanding principals’ motivation and behavior (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), self-efficacy is a judgment of an individual’s capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to attain the goals of a school campus. Bandura (2000) demonstrated that highly efficacious persons have a strong belief in their capabilities and redouble their efforts to master challenges. Instead of focusing on the past, individuals who are highly efficacious, focus on future expectations of being able to attain high levels of performance (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

Self-efficacy beliefs are an element of social cognitive theory (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). These beliefs and judgments refer to an individual’s capabilities and their ability to motivate others to accomplish the goals they set for themselves (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has been associated with setting higher goals, exerting greater effort, and persisting longer in the face of difficulties or adversities (Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008). School principals with low efficacy will not pursue challenging goals and will not attempt to surpass obstacles that get in the way of their goals (McCollum & Kajs, 2009). In contrast, principals with high efficacy may believe that they have a positive effect on student achievement and increase the academic emphasis in their schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Self-efficacy is important to study because it is one of the few characteristics that

consistently relates to student achievement (Tucker et al., 2005). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) argued that the principal's sense of self-efficacy plays a vital role in meeting the expectations and demands of the position of principal.

Based on their statements, Drs. Morton, Buckley-Commander and Mangum believe principals' leadership behavior to be a key factor in overcoming the negative influence of low socioeconomic status in Torchbearer schools (Alabama Education News, 2005, 2009). Williams, Rosin, and Kirst (2010) provided additional support to the belief that principal leadership is important. In a study examining 303 California schools with at least 50% of students living in poverty, these researchers found that schools with principals who value the professional community and school-wide accountability perform better academically. Similarly, Herman and colleagues (2008) identified four strategies for improving schools' academic performance in chronically low-performing schools. Chief among these strategies was strong leadership.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have tried to identify school variables that make a difference in student achievement and to overcome the negative influences of low socioeconomic status (Jamar & Pitts, 2005; Linda & Christine, 2004; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Researchers involved in school reform efforts to improve student achievement have demonstrated that the school principal is the key player in school effectiveness (Finnigan & Steward, 2009). However, findings from earlier research has consistently indicated the effect of principal leadership as primarily indirect (Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2005; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Effective school principals are

able to promote school environments that are more conducive to learning and are more successful than their less effective peers in attracting, retaining and supporting high quality teachers (Leithwood et al, 2004). In addition to principals having influence on student achievement, there has been a great deal of research regarding teacher self-efficacy and its impact on student learning (Tucker et al., 2005). Teacher self-efficacy appears to have a positive effect on the achievement among of minorities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 1998).

Ruebling et al. (2004) contended that school improvement and student achievement are the result of leadership behaviors that focus on the academic program, assessment data, and professional development. Recent research by Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010) explored principal practice. The authors discovered that the practices of the principals in the study were related to both changes in instruction and teacher peer influence, both of which were associated with higher levels of student learning. Despite these findings, there remains a paucity of research on the topic of principal self-efficacy (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). The restructuring of schools toward improvement, as in Torchbearer schools, requires that school principals be highly self-efficacious in the goal of improved student achievement. Self-efficacy beliefs regulate principals' efforts, adaptability, and persistence in the face of obstacles (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Individuals with high efficacy focus on the opportunities worth pursuing and view obstacles as surmountable (Bandura, 2000). Principals' self-efficacy beliefs play an essential role principals' behavior and the goals they set. This study focused on self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama.

Purpose of the Study

Without a principal's leadership efforts to raise student achievement, schools cannot succeed (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Collins (2008) stressed that successful schools are a result of high quality leadership. Principals' sense of self-efficacy is a promising, yet largely unexplored, avenue to understanding principals' motivation and behavior (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama. Gaining insight into these principals' self-efficacy beliefs may assist in developing programs or professional development focusing on strategies to increase principal self-efficacy.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study was intended to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama. The major research questions that guided this study included the following:

1. How do principals' self-efficacy beliefs influence their leadership behaviors in Torchbearer schools in Alabama?
2. How do principals describe the challenges of leading high poverty/ high achieving schools?
3. How have the principals' self-efficacy beliefs for school leadership evolved throughout their careers?
4. What sources contribute most to the principals' sense of self-efficacy?
5. What sources impede the principals' sense of self-efficacy?

6. What are the perceptions of principals about their resilience in leading a Torchbearer school?

Significance of the Study

The results of this phenomenological study are intended to add critical knowledge to current literature regarding principals' sense of self-efficacy. According to West, Peck and Reitzug (2010), the role of the school principal has changed in both accountability and authority. In this era of high stakes testing, significant pressure has been placed on school administrators to improve student achievement (Smith et al., 2006). Under the George W. Bush presidential administration, accountability for public schools and principals was magnified with the signing of NCLB. As a result of NCLB, schools, districts, and states are holding principals to an increasingly higher standard of accountability as it relates to improved school outcomes (Billger, 2007). Although accountability measures have increased, the authority of principals to affect change has been limited (Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2000). Principals have been restricted by district and state regulations and policies; as a result, the principalship tends to be less focused on leadership for student learning and more focused on middle management (Usdan et al., 2000). Similarly, Lortie (2009) concluded that heavy emphasis on testing has increased central office control in school related matters and, the subordination of the school principal.

Over the past four decades, researchers in the field of education have made significant contributions to the study of teacher self-efficacy and its effect on student achievement (Gibson & Dembo 1984; Hoy et al., 2008; Tucker et al., 2005). These researchers did not, however, directly examine principal self-efficacy and school academic success. Leithwood et al. (2004) asserted that of all the factors that contribute to what students

learn at school, principal leadership is second only to classroom instruction. Further, these researchers declared that effective leadership has its most significant impact on underperforming schools (Leithwood et al., 2004).

The schools in this study have high concentrations of students living in poverty; additionally these schools perform above the national average on the SAT-10 and above the state average on the ARMT. Studying the self-efficacy of principals of Torchbearer schools may contribute new knowledge to the educational field about principals' self-efficacy. In addition, findings from this study are intended to guide improvements in professional development for existing and future principals.

Limitations of the Study

The focus of this study was to examine principals' self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama. The scope was limited to the following limitations:

1. Principals of 10 Torchbearer schools in Alabama.
2. Because qualitative research involves the use of the researcher as the key instrument for collecting data, the researcher may introduce biases into the interpretation and analysis of data.
3. Due to the subjective nature of qualitative research, the results of the study cannot be used to make generalizations beyond the schools in this study.

Assumptions of the Study

The study was guided by the following assumptions:

1. It is assumed that the principals of 10 Torchbearer schools in Alabama will participate in this study.
2. It is assumed that the participants will report honest responses to the legitimacy of the study.
3. Transcripts of interviews will be subject to participant verification to enhance validity.
4. The researcher will approach all participants as a learner, treating each with respect and accepting each viewpoint as valuable.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks provide explanations, predictions, and generalizations about how the world operates (Creswell, 1998). According to Creswell (2003), qualitative researchers employ theory as a broad explanation for attitudes and behaviors. The theory may provide a perspective that raises questions related to gender, class, and/or race (Creswell, 2003). The theoretical framework for this study was Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory; more specifically, self-efficacy theory, an underpinning of social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy theory was employed to better understand the sense of principals' self-efficacy beliefs in Alabama Torchbearer schools. It was intended to provide an understanding of how the strength of self-efficacy beliefs can produce positive behavioral outcomes (Smith, Guarino, Storm, & Adams, 2006). As stated in social cognitive theory, individuals with strong self-efficacy beliefs recover more quickly after setbacks and at-

tribute failure to insufficient effort or a personal lack of knowledge or skills which can be acquired (Pajares, 2002). According to Bandura (2003), among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more pervasive than beliefs of personal or self-efficacy. All other factors that serve as motivators are rooted in the essential belief that one has the power to produce desired effects by one's own actions; otherwise one has little incentive to act or persevere in the face of difficulty.

Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief concerning his or her own ability to perform given actions (Pajares, 2002). Human behavior is affected by self-efficacy beliefs through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes (Bandura, 2003). Specifically, social cognitive theory posits that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between individual factors and outcomes, as well as partially mediates the relationship between environmental factors and outcomes (Bandura, 1986). In social cognitive theory a person's demographics, individual differences, and predispositions, as well as environmental impacts, influence self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. These in turn affect the formation of interest and subsequently influence goal setting, actions, and performance (Brown & Lent, 1996). This phenomenological study attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of self-efficacy of 10 principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following is a list of defined key terms:

Accountability: Accountability is based primarily on student assessment results in reading and mathematics from the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) and the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE). The state used criteria from

the federal NCLB to establish “starting points” (baselines) in both areas. Annual measurable objectives were established in both reading and mathematics for schools and local education agencies (LEAs) based on the state’s starting points. All students are expected to reach or exceed the proficient level in both content areas by the end of the 2013-2014 academic year. All schools and LEAs in the state are required to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) on the same set of academic content standards and academic assessments, academic related indicators, and percentage of students participating in the academic assessments. While the basis for accountability decisions will be uniform across all schools and LEAs, consequences in terms of interventions will be different based on the extent of low performance and the length of time a school has not made AYP among all students and groups of students (ASDOE).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Under section 1111 (b) (2) of NCLB, AYP is the measure of yearly progress of the state and of all public schools and school districts in the state towards enabling all public school students to meet the state’s academic content and achievement standards (ASDOE).

Alabama Math and Reading Test (ARMT): A criterion-referenced test, which consists of selected items from the Stanford Achievement Test (Stanford 10; SAT 10) which matches the Alabama State content standards in reading and mathematics. Additional test items were developed so that all content standards were fully covered. It is this combination of SAT 10 items and newly developed items that is known as the ARMT (ASDOE).

Collective Efficacy: Beliefs emphasize that teachers have not only their own self-efficacy perceptions but also beliefs about the unified capability of a school faculty (Bandura, 1997).

Locus of Control: Locus of control refers to the extent of control individuals perceive they have over the expectancies of reinforcement or outcomes in their lives (Rotter, 1966).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): Legislation that requires states to test all public school students annually in reading, language arts and math in grade 3 through grade 8 and once in grade 10 through grade 12. A science component was added in 2007. It also requires districts to report student test results disaggregated by race and ethnicity, exceptionality, and students living in poverty. Furthermore, NCLB requires schools and districts to demonstrate AYP on state tests overall and in each subgroup of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Phenomenon: A phenomenon is fact, occurrence, or circumstance observed or observable something that is impressive or extraordinary. Creswell (1998) defines a phenomenon as “The central concept being examined by the phenomenologist. It is the being experienced by subjects in a study” (p. 236).

Phenomenology: “The study of lived experiences and the way we understand those experiences to develop a worldview” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112). The researcher attempts to identify the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by the participants (Creswell, 2003).

Principal: Persons certified for the position of school leader as prescribed by the ASDOE and who are employed by an employing board as the chief administrator of a school, including a vocational center (Code of Alabama 1975, 16-24B-2).

Principal Efficacy: Principals' sense of efficacy is a judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads. These beliefs determine how principals feel, think, behave and motivate themselves (Bandura, 1997).

Poverty schools: For the purposes of this study, schools with at least 80% of the student population receiving free/reduced meals (Alabama Education News, 2005).

Qualitative Research: Research that begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007).

Resiliency: The ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risks (Benard, 1993).

Self-Efficacy Theory: A person's judgment about his or her capability to organize and execute a course of action this is required to attain a certain level of performance (Bandura, 1997).

Social Cognitive Theory: A theory which explains how people acquire and maintain certain behavioral patterns, while also providing the basis for intervention strategies (Bandura, 1997).

Stanford Achievement Test Tenth Edition (SAT-10): A standardized, norm-referenced achievement test that utilizes a multiple choice test format. Students are administered the Reading (Comprehension and Vocabulary) and Mathematics (Problem

Solving and Procedures) subtest. The SAT-10 provides achievement data that can be used to compare local students' performance with the performance of other students in the nation (ASDOE).

Torchbearer School: Schools with more than 80% of the student population receiving free/reduced lunch, while also performing above the national average on the SAT-10 and above the state average on the ARMT (Alabama Education News, 2005).

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 is outlined as follows: (a) an introduction, (b) statement of the problem, (c) purpose of the study, (d) research questions, (e) assumptions of the study, (f) theoretical framework, (g) terms and definitions, (h) limitations of the study, and (i) the organization of the study. Chapter 2 focuses on a review of the related literature of the research topic. Chapter 3 addresses methodology and describes the following: (a) method of inquiry, (b) participants, (c) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) verification procedures, and (g) the role of the researcher. Chapter 4 describes the findings and the analysis of the data gained through interviews of participants as well as themes that emerge from the data. Chapter 5 provides implications for practicing educational leaders, conclusions, findings related to the research and recommendations for further study.

Summary

In this era of NCLB with increased accountability, the principal has become the sole person held responsible to federal, state and local governmental bodies for student

achievement in schools, especially with regard to their performance on standardized tests (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). Principals who lead schools that have high concentrations of students who are living in poverty have found it difficult to achieve their NCLB goals (Guin, 2004; Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008). The study of principals' sense of self-efficacy is a promising, yet largely unexplored, avenue to understanding principals' motivation and behavior and goal setting. Using a phenomenological research design, this study sought to explore, "principals' self-efficacy beliefs in Alabama Torchbearer schools." Chapter 1 provided the context for this study a statement of the problem, research questions which guided this study, the significance of the study, assumptions and limitations of the study, definitions of key terms, and the organization of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“In order to succeed, people need a sense of self-efficacy, struggle together with resilience to meet the inevitable obstacles and inequities of life.”

-Albert Bandura

Introduction

The essential role of the school principal, as the leader of instructional improvement, has been a central focus of school improvement efforts since the effective schools movement of the 1970s (May & Supovitz, 2011). Today, the influence of reforms; the changing student body; and the expectations of teachers, parents, and the community all contribute to the complexity of the principalship (Walker & Carr-Steward, 2006). The age of the principal as manager where he/she was simply required to keep the school orderly, assign classes, conduct discipline and maintain the building is long gone (Hulme, 2006). According to Guthrie and Springer (2004), expectations for principals radically changed in 1983 with the release of *A Nation at Risk*. In fact, *A Nation at Risk* was the catalyst for more federally supported changes in American public schools than any other event before it (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). As a result of this report, the U.S. Department of Education began to move toward unifying standards and developing programs to improve public schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Researchers and educational policymakers have begun to increasingly focus their attention on the role of building-level school leadership and its impact on student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Ross & Gray, 2006; Ruebling et al., 2004). According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), leadership explained 3% to 5% of the direct variability in student achievement. The effect of school leadership on student achievement appears to be primarily indirect (Ross & Gray, 2006). This analysis suggests that of all the factors that contribute to student learning at school, leadership is second highest in strength only to classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004). School leaders influence internal processes that are directly tied to student achievement. Davis et al. (2005) asserted that successful school leaders influence student achievement through their support and development of effective teachers, influence on structures of their organization, and through their influence on effective school processes.

Murphy (2008) conducted a review of the literature from the organizational sciences to develop a grounded narrative of turnaround leadership. The term turnaround refers to moving a school or organization from a failing trajectory to a successful one. This literature review employed a 10-step process to explore and make sense of the turnaround literature from the organizational sciences. Murphy (2008) found that leadership was the most critical element in the turnaround equation and that changing leadership is generally an essential element in an organization's recovery. According to the author, in nearly all turnaround situations, leadership is seen as a central variable in the acquisition of organizational success. Murphy (2008) further asserted that it was the type of leadership (i.e.

optimistic that goals can be met, change agents, knowledgeable, achievement oriented), not the style, which is important in organizational success.

Parrett and Budge (2009) conducted a study that examined how school leaders' actions influenced a turnaround in six low-performing schools. The researchers examined the leaders of these high-poverty, high-achieving schools to gain insights into what actions are needed to make a successful school turnaround. Parrett and Budge discovered that a school can indeed overcome the powerful and pervasive effects of poverty on a student's learning. Based on data obtained from these six schools, the findings revealed that leaders in high-poverty, high-achieving schools begin by asking questions related to: (a) building leadership capacity; (b) focusing teachers' everyday work on student, professional, and system learning; and (c) fostering a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for all. School leadership in these schools made tough decisions which reflected their school's beliefs about the conditions necessary to sustain success for all students.

Leithwood and Strauss (2009) examined the keys to successful turnaround leadership in schools. The study was conducted in two stages. During the first stage, interview data were collected in four elementary and four secondary schools. In the second stage, surveys were sent to a total of 472 teachers and 36 administrators in 11 elementary schools and 3 secondary schools. The researchers' findings revealed that low performing schools require effective leadership to turn around. Moreover, Leithwood and Strauss (2009) produced eight key findings about successful turnaround leadership. The researchers found: (a) low performing schools require effective leadership to turn around, (b) core leadership practices are the keys to success, (c) the 'core' leadership practices en-

compass most of what is required to successfully lead a school turnaround, (d) as the school turnaround process evolves, the 'core' leadership practices are enacted differently, (e) effective turnaround school leadership is narrowly distributed, (f) as school turnaround processes evolve, the nature and number of sources of leadership change, (g) the leadership challenges in beginning the turnaround process are predictable, and (h) leaders turn their schools around by changing teacher attitudes and school cultures.

In a 2-year study of principal leadership in 10 low performing elementary schools in Chicago, Finnigan and Stewart (2009) established that school leaders who maximize the below listed processes directly affect and improve student achievement. From the lens of transformational leadership, the authors found the following school processes that positively affected student achievement: (a) articulated the school vision, (b) provided support and resources to teachers, (c) established collaborative structures and norms, (d) developed commitment to collective goals and, (e) managed the school as essential factors in which principals used in schools that moved off of probation in a short period (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009).

Given this information, support for school leaders needs to focus on strengthening, training, and supporting principals so that all students can learn. Researchers have shown that one of the most fundamental processes to improving student achievement is to increase the level of principal self-efficacy (Hillman, 1986; Lyons & Murphy, 1994; Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2004).

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory was developed from the theory of social learning which was proposed by Miller and Dollard in 1941 (Pajares, 2002). In 1963, Bandura and Walters expanded the social learning theory by adding the principles of observational learning and vicarious reinforcement. In 1977, Bandura identified self-belief as an important element of his own social learning theory (Pajares, 2002).

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior. In addition, this theory explains the control humans exercise over their lives through their actions (Bandura, 1977). According to the theory, human behavior is an interaction of several sources of influence including (a) personal factors, (b) behavior, and (c) the environment (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2000b). Structured as a triangle, these sources influence and interact with each other bi-directionally. The interrelated nature of these sources does not happen at the same time, nor does it mean that the weight of their power is equivalent. As a result of the bi-directionally, the social cognitive perspective proposes that people are at the same time products and producers of their environment (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

According to Bandura (1999), individuals are in control of their life's direction not just witnesses of internal mechanisms which are controlled by environmental events. In social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is a personal factor in the context of the triadic model of human agency. Individuals are conscience players of their experiences rather than simply inactive participants of experiences (Bandura, 1999).

Bandura (2009) asserted that in social cognitive theory, motivation and performance attainments are governed by several self-regulatory mechanisms that operate to-

gether. The emphasis of this theory is the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1994). Personal or self-efficacy is one of those mechanisms that occupy a central role in this regulatory process (Bandura & Wood, 1989). Social cognitive theory is the basis for perceiving the interaction between self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Among the self-regulatory mechanisms, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over the events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1989). According to Bandura and Woods (1989), social cognitive theory provides explicit guidelines about how people will enhance both their well-being and their accomplishments with self-regulatory capabilities, and a resilient sense of efficacy. Social cognitive beliefs or a sense of personal efficacy do not arise from incantation of capability. Unless individuals believe that they can produce desired effects and prevent undesired ones by their actions, they will have little incentive to act (Bandura, 2000b). It is important to note that simply saying something is so should not be confused with believing it to be so (Bandura, 1989).

Locus of Control

Locus of control theory or general expectancies was developed by Rotter in 1966. Central to the theory is that individuals perform tasks differently due to their beliefs about achieving their expected goals or purposes. According to Rotter (1966), locus of control refers to the extent of control individuals perceive they have over the expectancies of reinforcement or outcomes in their lives. Locus of control development begins in early childhood by the influences from child-parent interactions and child-teacher interactions (Lawrence, 1998).

Rotter (1966) coined the terms internal and external locus of control. Internal versus external locus of control refers to a self-initiated change orientation (internal locus of control) versus change that can be attributed to a source or power outside of the individual (external locus of control) (Rotter, 1966). Individuals with an internal locus of control orientation believe that the ability to influence outcomes resides within themselves. Conversely, individuals with an external locus of orientation attribute outcomes to forces outside their personal control (Rotter, 1966).

Locus of control has been theorized to affect motivation, learning, and behavior. Individuals who believe they have control over whether they can succeed or fail are more motivated to assume more difficult tasks, expend more effort, and persist than those who believe their actions have little impact on outcomes (Connor, 1995). According to Connor (1995), repeated failures may lead to an external locus of control.

Kernis (1984) conducted a study involving 182 female undergraduate students. The researcher examined the impact of locus of control on responses to success. Participants were asked to attribute either internal or external attributions for their success at a particular task. The researcher showed that subjects in the internal attribution condition performed better when tested on the same task than on a different task; the opposite was true for those in the external attribution condition. This suggested that individuals with an internal locus of control are more likely to continue working at a task in which they have succeeded. Conversely, individuals with an external locus of control are more likely to stop working on the successful task and move on to a different task (Kernis, 1984).

Anderman and Midgley (1997), conducted a study of students and external locus of control by examining 341 fifth grade elementary school students and then again when

the students were middle school students in sixth grade. Anderman and Midgley (1997) discovered that students with an external locus of control were more prone to react to failure by giving up and not trying harder. Additionally, these students believed that their poor academic performance was a result of influences beyond their own control (Anderman & Midgley, 1997).

In a study by Park and Kim (1998), the researchers compared top university students who received scholarships with university students who did not receive scholarships. The researchers examined behavioral patterns and locus of control of the students. The results revealed that the scholarship students showed higher internalized locus of control while the non scholarship students.

In another study, Hoover (2000) examined the effect of college entrance scores, high school grade point average, self-efficacy, locus of control, and student grade expectations on college achievement. The researcher discovered that there was a statistically significant correlation between college-specific locus of control, high self-efficacy, and academic success among college freshmen. Moreover, general locus of control and self-efficacy were also positively correlated with academic success. However, this correlation was at slightly lower levels of strength and significance when compared to college-specific measures.

According to Bandura (1983), locus of control interacts with self-efficacy to influence behavior and emotions. While self-efficacy is the perception of one's ability to take action, locus of control refers to one's belief about the outcome. According to Karabenick and Srull (1978), individuals with an internal locus of control are more persistent when facing difficult tasks. Additionally, researchers theorized that individuals with a

more internal locus of control will have a higher self-efficacy than individuals with a more external locus of control (Phillips & Gully, 1997; Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Self-Efficacy Theory

The concept of self-efficacy is a key element in Social Cognitive Theory and has a profound impact on the study of motivation and achievement in academic settings (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986). The theory of self-efficacy was originally proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977 (Betz, 2004). Bandura (1977) theorized that self-efficacy is the essential component for understanding how a person's belief about his or her capabilities influences his or her actions. Bandura (1995) defined self-efficacy as:

The belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action to manage prospective situations. It influences the choices we make, the efforts we put forth, how long we persist when we confront obstacles and in the face of failure, and how we feel. (p. 2)

Perceived efficacy plays a key role in human functioning because it affects behavior not only directly, but also by its impact on other factors, such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations, affective proclivities, and opportunities in the social environment (Bandura, 2000b).

Bandura (1988) argued that human accomplishments and positive well-being require an optimistic and resilient sense of personal efficacy. Bandura (1997) further proposed that these beliefs and judgments about personal capabilities, rather than their actual abilities, motivate people to accomplish goals they set for themselves. Self-efficacy judgments influence choice of activities and whether individuals perceive situations optimistically or pessimistically (Bandura, 2001). Simply knowing what behavior is required in a situation to achieve a particular outcome is not predictive of behavior in and

of itself; rather, it is the perceived ability to perform the behavior that determines whether or not an individual will engage in a behavior. Self-efficacy plays a significant function in the approach people take to obtain goals, complete tasks, and overcome obstacles (Wagner, 2008). When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who question their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions (Bandura, 2000a). Conversely, people with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as situations to be avoided (Bandura, 1994).

In a meta-analysis of 18 studies, Multon, Brown, and Lent (1991) explored the relationship among self-efficacy beliefs, academic performance, and persistence. The results of this meta-analysis revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, academic performance and persistence outcomes across a wide variety of the participants (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991).

Bandura (1997) found that a person's beliefs system is a key predictor of future actions. Research by Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons (1992) illuminates this position by examining the role of students' self-efficacy beliefs on the academic goals that elementary social studies students set for themselves. The students' self-efficacy beliefs, personal grade goals, and their parents' aspirations for them were measured at the start of the semester. The researchers concluded that self-efficacy and personal goal setting influence grades indirectly through student grade goals, but they found it to influence grades directly as well (Zimmerman et al., 1992). This relationship is consistent with that reported by Pajares (1996) who concluded that the mathematics self-efficacy of college

undergraduates was a better predictor of their mathematics interest and majors than either their prior math achievement or mathematics outcome expectations.

According to Bandura (1997), efficacy beliefs are not permanent once they are established. They can fluctuate in strength because the individual is constantly evaluating new information. However, once efficacy beliefs have been established over extended periods of time and built on a large amount of information, they are unlikely to be altered (Bandura, 1997).

Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) asserted four sources of self-efficacy expectations: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal.

The first and most essential source is performance accomplishments or mastery experience. This refers to one's mastery of an experience, that is, a person's past successes or failures. Performance accomplishments provide tangible and immediate evidence of whether or not a person can master a particular task. The belief is that past successes in an endeavor will lead to higher levels of efficacy. Conversely, past failures will lead to lower efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) hypothesized that interpretations of past performance serve as an indicator of self-efficacy. This finding has been substantiated by a subsequent study by Usher and Pajares (2008). Individuals measure the results of their actions and their beliefs and these results help create efficacy beliefs. Successful experiences raise self-efficacy and failure lowers it (Pajares, 2002). Mastery experience has an enduring effect on an individual's self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

The second source is vicarious experience. This refers to the act of observing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Vicarious experience enhances self-efficacy by demonstrating that the task can be performed with persistence and minimal effort. This source is less influential in changing efficacy beliefs than a person's direct performance; however, it remains significant in influencing efficacy expectations (Bandura, 1977). This source of efficacy is increased when a person observes an individual whom they believe to be similar to him or herself, such as a peer, persevering and successfully attaining their goal (Bandura, 1997). Conversely, a perceived peer's failure to attain his/her goal lowers efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 2002).

The third source of self-efficacy expectation is verbal or social persuasion. This refers to leading a person to believe that he/she can successfully accomplish a task or behavior through the use of suggestion, exhortation, or self-instruction. Similar to vicarious experience, verbal or social persuasion is not considered to be as powerful an influence on efficacy beliefs as performance experiences. Verbal or social persuasion is most effective when a person has confidence in the person who is persuading him/her; that is, when he/she is confident in the knowledge and skills that the persuader possesses (Bandura, 1997). Successful persuaders cultivate a person's beliefs in his/her capabilities, while at the same time ensuring that the envisioned success is attainable. These messages of encouragement must be realistic and specific to the task at hand in order to be effective. Encouraging messages that are overly exaggerated or are too general in nature can actually undermine the confidence of the person (Bandura, 1997). Just as positive persuaders may work to encourage and empower an individual, negative persuaders may

work to defeat and weaken self-efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 2002). According to Usher and Pajares (2008), it may actually be easier to undermine an individual's self-efficacy through verbal or social persuasion than to enhance it.

The fourth and final source of self-efficacy expectation is emotional arousal. This refers to raising self-efficacy by diminishing emotional arousal such as fear, stress, and physical agitation. These arousals are associated with decreased performance, reduced success and other avoidance behaviors (Bandura, 1997). Emotional arousal may increase or decrease efficacy for performance depending in part on previous success or failure following similar emotional arousal. When an individual experiences aversive thoughts and fear about his/her capabilities, those negative thoughts can in themselves trigger the stress and agitation that helps ensure the inadequate performance the individual fears (Pajares, 2002). High anxiety can actually undermine self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008). As with the other three sources of efficacy, the degree of emotional arousal in and of itself does not offer information about perceived ability to execute specific behaviors; rather, it is perception and interpretation of the information that has its effect on efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

In summary, the four sources of information include performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal influence efficacy beliefs by way of cognitive processing (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Individually, these sources of influence do not offer information about perceived competence; rather, effects on efficacy belief are mediated by cognitive processes (Bandura, 1997).

Principal Self-Efficacy

School reform efforts towards student achievement require that school improvement tasks be performed by principals who are comfortable in the role of instructional leader. Self-efficacy has been seen as an important construct in developing educational leaders, because it is a construct tied to success in learning, success in work (McCollum & Kajs, 2009) and school-oriented tasks (Imants & DeBrabander, 1996). There has been extensive research on efficacy particularly with regards to teachers (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Barr, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). However, the role of school principal has not garnered the same level of attention from researchers. According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004):

Enhancing leadership self-efficacy should be an important objective for those responsible for improving the quality of leadership in school. The study of principals' self-efficacy beliefs is a promising new line of research. Efficacy beliefs of school leaders are likely to be fruitful avenues of study. (p. 583)

A principal's sense of efficacy is a judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads (Bandura, 1997). McCollum and Kajs (2009) asserted that efficacious principals will be successful as school leaders. Additionally, Bandura (1986) put forth that a principal's self-efficacy beliefs had a significant impact on his or her level of aspiration and goal setting, effort, adaptability, and persistence. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) echoed Bandura's conclusions by (2004) stating:

Principals' efficacy beliefs influence the level of effort and persistence they put forth in their daily work, as well as their resilience in the face of setbacks. It is not enough to hire and retain the most capable principals – they must also believe that they can successfully meet the challenges of the task at hand. (p. 582)

Hillman (1986) was among the first to study and measure principal self-efficacy. In a study of the interaction among 758 fourth grade students, 35 teachers, and 19 principals within an educational setting, Hillman (1986) sought to measure student achievement and the self-efficacy levels of all three groups. Findings from the study indicated a strong sense of self-efficacy in students, teachers and principals had been linked to higher student achievement. However, the author conceded instability in the findings because the instruments used to measure the construct reflected a uni-dimensional view (Hillman, 1986)

Lyons and Murphy (1994) explored the relationship between principals' self-efficacy and principals' use of various power bases. The researchers surveyed 121 elementary school, middle school, and high school principals in a large urban area in a western state. The survey was constructed upon Hillman's (1986) instrument and was designed to measure principal self-efficacy and the use of power. The researchers defined power as the ability of the principal to induce or influence behavior. Lyons and Murphy put forth that principal power comes from the power of their position, personal power, or both. The researchers hypothesized that efficacy was positively related to expert and referent power and negatively related to illegitimate, coercive, and reward power.

Lyons and Murphy (1994) established that high efficacy principals lead by example; principals used personal power sources to influence teachers rather than using organizational resources such as policies, procedures and limitations imposed by contracts. The researchers discovered that principals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to use internally-based power when carrying out their instructional leadership role. The researchers also determined that as principals experience increases, so too does the likeli-

hood that principals will use externally-based power. Furthermore, the longer principals spent in one assignment, the more likely they were to use externally-based power (Lyons & Murphy, 1994). Moreover, Lyons and Murphy (1994) concluded that principals with low efficacy attempted to influence subordinates through the use of coercion. Coercive power includes using force to affect change, influence others to do something by controlling the consequences, rewards, punishments, and negative reward schedules in their work environment (Burns, 1978; Erchul, Raven, & Ray, 1962). Hogg (2001) suggested that leaders who use coercion are interested in their own goals and seldom are interested in the wants and needs of subordinates. He further asserted that using coercion runs counter to working with followers to achieve a common goal (Hogg, 2001). These low efficacious principals relied on external sources of power and did not believe in their ability as instructional leaders to effect student achievement either positively or negatively (Lyons & Murphy 1994).

Osterman and Sullivan (1996) conducted an in-depth analysis of 12 newly appointed principals in the New York Public School System. The authors investigated the personal and organizational factors that either supported or restricted principals' efforts to bring about school change. Osterman and Sullivan concluded that external and internal factors interacted to influence leadership behaviors. The greatest difference found between the principals with high and low self-efficacy related to their problem-solving processes. According to the authors, principals who were highly efficacious were found to be more flexible and adaptable, more likely to use collaboration in the change process, and more persistent in pursuit of their goals (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996). This study provid-

ed additional support to Bandura's (1986) theory that individuals with high self-efficacy are more persistent in pursuing their goals.

Aderhold (2005) conducted a study examining the relationship between elementary principals' perceptions of self-efficacy and student achievement in reading as measured by fifth grade students' SAT-10 test scores. Instructional leadership behaviors as well as personal and school demographics characteristics were also measured. A survey instrument was mailed to the entire population of 241 public school elementary principals in South Dakota and 165 surveys were returned. The information from the survey yielded four distinct scores for each principal respondent: efficacy for management, efficacy for instructional leadership, efficacy for moral leadership, and instructional leadership behavior. Twelve demographic characteristics for each participant were obtained from the survey and used in the data analysis. Findings from the study indicated that there were no significant relationships between principals' sense of efficacy and student reading achievement (Aderhold, 2005).

Although Aderhold (2005) did not show a significant relationship between principals' sense of efficacy and student reading achievement, there was a significant relationship between principals' perception of efficacy for instructional leadership and their leadership behaviors. Among the leadership behaviors cited were (a) providing feedback to teachers about their teaching, (b) leading discussions with teachers, (c) meeting with teachers to discuss student learning, (d) engaging staff in collaborative decision making, and (e) getting involved in the curriculum and instruction (Aderhold, 2005).

Smith, Guarino, Storm, and Adams (2006) conducted a study which examined principal self-efficacy beliefs for facilitating effective instructional environments in their

schools. The study consisted of 284 principals across 12 states. The researchers sought to address the following: (a) the relationship between principal efficacy belief and demographic factors, (b) differences between perceived beliefs and, (c) actual practices of principals and outcome expectancy for principals to facilitate effective teaching and learning at their respective schools.

Smith et al. determined that principal efficacy beliefs tended to increase with the complexity of the job. Principals working in larger schools with more complex organizational structures had significantly higher instructional leadership efficacy scores compared to the entire sample group. Female principals also reported spending more time on instructional leadership issues as well as having significantly higher self-efficacy for instructional leadership (Smith et al., 2006). The researchers also established that highly efficacious principals would be more apt to spend extra time on concerns related to instruction and expend greater amounts of energy, persevere longer, and bounce back from failure more quickly in the face of obstacles. Smith et al. (2006) suggested that schools with high percentages of free or reduced lunch students would likely benefit from principals with high levels of efficacy in instructional leadership.

In a more recent study consisting of 312 participants who were either principals or candidate principals, McCollum and Kajs (2009) indicated that there was a clear relationship between school administrators' efficacy and school administrators' goal orientations. McCollum and Kajs (2009) theorized that being an efficacious administrator is largely tied to having a mastery goal orientation. The results of the study confirmed the authors' theory. All of the dimensions of efficacy were statistically, significantly, and positively correlated with mastery goal orientation (McCollum & Kajs, 2009). Similarly, Leithwood

(2004) identified a significantly positive relationship between principal leadership and student outcomes that operates indirectly through school conditions, classroom conditions, and teachers' performance.

In contrast, principals with a low sense of efficacy have been found to perceive an inability to control the environment and tend to be less likely to identify appropriate strategies or modify unsuccessful ones (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). In a study focusing on principals' self-efficacy and the use of power, Lyons and Murphy (1994) determined that principals with low efficacy beliefs were less likely to hold themselves accountable for achievement. Principals were also less likely to attribute student achievement results to their own ability and amount of effort exerted.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

The connection between teacher efficacy beliefs and student achievement has been well researched (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Barr, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). In reviewing the connection between teacher self-efficacy beliefs and teacher behavior, one can recognize a similar connection between principal self-efficacy beliefs and principal behavior. Efficacy researchers have asserted that achievement is not swayed by student efficacy alone but that a teacher's efficacy can also influence student achievement, motivation, and sense of efficacy (Chong et al., 2010). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) stated that teacher efficacy is a type of self-efficacy and is defined as the extent to which a teacher feels capable to help students learn.

Teacher efficacy is grounded in Rotter's (1966) social learning theory. It was first conceived by the research and development corporation (RAND) researchers in 1966

(Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). In 1976, RAND published a study that examined the success of various reading programs and interventions. Teacher efficacy was strongly related to variations of reading achievement among minority students (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). The study of teacher self-efficacy has evolved over the years and has provided a wealth of knowledge indicating that self-efficacy may contribute to teacher effectiveness (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Ross and Bruce (2007) contended that highly efficacious teachers are more likely to increase student achievement. Similarly, Collier (2008) purported that students are more successful and academic improvement increases when teachers have high efficacy beliefs.

In a study which examined the relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement, Aston and Webb (1986) found that highly efficacious teachers were more likely to believe that all children can learn and take responsibility for student learning than their low efficacious peers. Additionally, the authors established the following characteristics of highly efficacious teachers: (a) spent more time on individual and whole group instruction, (b) encouraged their students more frequently, (c) were more attentive to student behavior, (d) coached students more carefully, (e) praised students more often and more appropriately, and (f) ran a more efficient classroom. Aston and Webb also established a statistically significant relationship between students' standardized math and language scores and teachers' efficacy scores on the researchers' survey instrument. Similarly, Marco (2008) determined that teachers with a greater degree of efficacy believe that their efforts and expertise will have more impact on student learning than such external variables as parental support, class size, student motivation, and student socioeconomic background.

Teacher attitudes and temperaments are important factors for how students perceive school, given that beliefs impact teacher behavior. In a key study, Gibson and Dembo (1984) affirmed such a link by comparing the classroom behavior of high and low efficacy teachers. The researchers noted several differences in instructional behavior. Gibson and Dembo reported that teachers with a higher sense of efficacy spent more time teaching the entire group and responded to students' incorrect responses differently than teachers with a low sense of efficacy. Moreover teachers with low efficacy were less likely to persist in failure situations, and were more likely to criticize students, as compared to teachers with higher levels of efficacy.

Guskey and Passaro (1994) examined the construct of teacher efficacy of 342 prospective and experienced teachers. The authors discovered that teachers drew a distinction between their beliefs about the influence that teachers have or do not have on student learning. The teachers' responses included their beliefs about the learning of students who they considered unmotivated. According to Guskey and Passaro (1994) teachers believed that they could have a powerful influence on students, regardless of the effects of social, demographic, and economic conditions. Conversely, other teachers in the study believed that their ability to affect students was very limited, despite any additional factors. Guskey and Passaro identified teacher efficacy in terms of those teachers who believed they could influence students, even the ones considered difficult or unmotivated.

More current research by Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) showed that teacher efficacy was strongly related to variations in reading achievement among minority students. Tucker and colleagues (2005) echoed this sentiment by asserting that teacher efficacy is important to study because it is one of the few teacher characteristics that consistently re-

lates to student achievement, particularly the achievement of students who come from low income and culturally diverse backgrounds. Teachers who are self-efficacious are more likely to plan appropriate activities and expend considerable energy to find appropriate teaching materials (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007). According to Hoy et al., (2008), highly efficacious teachers set higher expectations, exert greater effort, and persist longer in the face of difficulties or adversities.

Similarly, in a study of 118 teachers, Brady and Woolfson (2008) observed that educators with a higher sense of efficacy attributed their students' difficulties more to factors within their control than did those with a lower sense of efficacy. The researchers suggested that teachers who feel more competent and have a greater belief in the power of their profession are more comfortable accepting some responsibility for their students' difficulties.

Featherstone (2005) also explored differences in teacher efficacy among high, medium, and low performing schools in six elementary schools in a large urban school district in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. The study consisted of data from 125 elementary teachers who completed the Teacher Efficacy Scale along with a survey of teacher demographics. Data were analyzed to determine if teacher efficacy differences varied according to how well schools performed academically. The results indicated that students performing higher on their end-of-grade tests had teachers with higher levels of personal teacher efficacy than teachers in low performing schools.

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) established that teacher self-efficacy was raised by the behaviors of their principals. Among the principals' behaviors cited were (a) modeling appropriate behavior, (b) providing rewards contingent upon performance,

(c) fostering a healthy school climate through establishing order, (d) creating a strong emphasis on academic achievement and, (e) allowing teachers' flexibility and autonomy over classroom affairs. Similarly, Ware and Kitsantas (2007) agreed that a teachers' commitment is raised when teachers have the confidence to enlist the support of their principals.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy is an important organizational asset because the strength of social institutions depends in part on shared ability and willingness to solve problems (Bandura, 1997).

According to Foster, Loving, and Shumate (2000), principals are aware that they cannot achieve school success without the collective support of teachers among others. Collective teacher efficacy and individual teacher efficacy are highly correlated (R., Goddard & Y., Goddard, 2001). Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) defined collective teacher efficacy as the belief that teachers have about the capability of the collective faculty to influence student achievement. Perceived collective efficacy, like individual teacher efficacy, is strongly linked to student achievement, whose effects outweigh the effects of low socioeconomic status and race (R., Goddard & Y., Goddard, 2001).

In a study involving 452 urban elementary teachers in 47 schools, Goddard et al. (2000) detected a one-point increase in a school's collective efficacy score was associated with about an 8.5 point increase in student achievement. Similarly, Goddard and colleagues (2004) asserted that, after controlling for students' prior achievement,

race/ethnicity, SES, and gender, collective efficacy beliefs of teachers had a stronger effect on student achievement than the student's race or SES.

In an additional study conducted by R. Goddard and Y. Goddard (2001), of 438 teachers in 47 schools in a large urban school district, the authors sought to analyze the relationship between individual teacher self-efficacy and teachers collective efficacy. The authors found that individual teacher self-efficacy was higher for schools in which collective efficacy was more prevalent. In fact, the authors noted that collective efficacy was a greater predictor of teacher efficacy than the effects of prior achievement and SES. Goddard and Goddard (2001) postulated:

Where teachers tend to think highly of the collective capability of the faculty, they may sense an expectation for successful teaching and hence work to be successful themselves. Conversely, where collective efficacy is low, it is less likely that teachers will be pressed by their colleagues to persist in the face of failure or that they will change their teaching when students do not learn. (p. 815)

Parker, Hannah, and Topping (2006), explored the relationship among collective teacher efficacy, SES and student attainment levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The study consisted of 66 teachers in 15 schools. Parker et al. (2006) detected significant positive relationships between SES and attainment in reading and mathematics (but not writing). However, significant positive relationships were also found between collective teacher efficacy and attainment in reading and writing (but not mathematics). Parker et al. asked the faculty to vote on the factors that led to their success and also conducted a group discussion about such issues. The findings from the study indicated that school climate or ethos, quality in-service training, and a focus upon pedagogy were perceived as the most potent factors in raising student achievement. The authors theorized that when factors serve to heighten collective teacher efficacy, the impact of SES on student

achievement may be reduced, and this may be easier in some subjects than others (Parker et al., 2006).

Collective efficacy has also been shown to enhance a group's capability to enlist administrative support, foster creative problem solving, influence decision making, and bolster the individual capability for classroom management, which, in turn, relates to teacher commitment (Chong et al., 2010). Collective efficacy beliefs and student outcomes rely in part on the mutual relationship among the collective efficacy beliefs, teachers' personal sense of efficacy, teachers' practice and teachers' influence over instructionally relevant school decisions (Goddard et al., 2004). Teacher collective efficacy has been identified as a major component needed to foster a strong academic climate in a school (Chong et al., 2010). Hoy and colleagues (2006) established that schools in which the faculty had a strong sense of collective efficacy flourished, while those in which faculty members had serious doubts about their collective efficacy declined in academic performance or showed little academic progress.

The impact of principal leadership ability on teachers is significant, because teachers are fundamental stakeholders in schools and because teachers' satisfaction and high turnover have been linked to lower student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). In a study involving 3,042 teachers in 205 schools in Ontario, Ross and Gray (2006) proposed that principals have an effect on teacher commitment and collective efficacy. Ross and Gray asserted that principals who flattened hierarchy structures and gave teachers opportunities to participate in developing goals and improvement plans obtained higher commitment. The authors also indicated that individual and collective efficacy can be built if principals diagnose specific instructional needs and arrange appropriate profes-

sional development opportunities for teachers (Ross & Gray, 2006). Additionally, principals can influence collective efficacy by setting attainable goals, clarifying standards, and linking teacher actions to student outcomes (Ross & Gray, 2006).

In addition to the strong relationship between collective efficacy and student academic outcomes, collective efficacy is also important to goal attainment (Goddard et al., 2004). Little and Madigan (1997) have shown that perceived collective efficacy is a strong predictor of work group effectiveness. The researchers observed that a group's sense of collective efficacy had a facilitating effect on team performance. There appears to be a strong link between group performance and perceived collective efficacy, which explained the confidence with which the efficacious pursue given goals (Goddard et al., 2004). Bandura (1982) stated that the strength of groups, organizations, and even nations lies in part in people's sense of collective efficacy, the belief that they can solve problems and improve their lives through concerted effort.

Leadership and Resiliency

Resiliency comes from the Latin roots meaning "to jump or bounce back." Benard (1993) conceptualized resiliency as, "the ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risk" (p. 44). Similarly, Grotberg (1997) asserted that resiliency is the human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by experiences of adversity. Patterson, Goens, and Reed (2009) viewed resiliency as a relative concept, not an all or nothing or any fixed characteristic. Reed and Patterson (2007) asserted that resilience is not merely surviving; it is about rising from obstacles stronger. That is, resilient

leaders recover, learn, and grow stronger in the face of adversity. According to Masten (2001):

What began as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary. Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities. (p. 9)

Resiliency is an important trait since principals face setbacks and challenges as they attempt to meet the demands of their jobs, particularly in this era of increased accountability.

There has been a limited amount of research on resiliency as applied specifically to school leadership (Giles, 2008; Gu & Day, 2007). Most of the early research on resiliency focused on studies of children. In 1955, researchers Werner and Smith began a longitudinal study that followed all of the children born on the island of Kauai in Hawaii during that year (Werner & Smith, 2001). This seminal study of risk and resilience followed nearly 700 children growing up with risk factors (one third of whom had multiple risk factors) from birth to adulthood. Werner and Smith (2001) found that there were a percentage of children in their sample that faced very adverse conditions as they grew: perennial stress, chronic poverty, parents who had not graduated from high school, and family environments that were engulfed in the chronic discord of parental alcoholism or mental illness. Many of these children developed serious problems of their own by age 10. The researchers checked in with the study participants regularly until participants reached the age of 40 years. However, to the researchers' surprise, most of the high-risk children became successful in their adult lives, in spite of difficult home lives. Werner and Smith called them the "vulnerable, but invincible" (Werner & Smith, 2001).

In later research involving children in an educational setting, Rutter (1979) conducted an epidemiological study of resiliency over a 10-year period. The researcher studied children on the Isle of Wight and in inner city London whose parents had been diagnosed with a mental illness. Rutter found that these children did not become mentally ill themselves, nor did they display maladaptive behavior. Rutter began to question why so many of these children showed no signs of the adverse conditions that they regularly witnessed from their parents. The author determined that both individual characteristics and the children's school environment were important protective factors. Rutter suggested that genetic factors do play an important role in shaping individual differences in personality characteristics and intelligence. Further, the researcher also found that the school environment contains vital protective factors, such as developing a sense of achievement in children, increasing their personal growth, and social contacts (Rutter, 1979).

Additional research of school administrators by Milstein and Hendry (2008) identified six resiliency characteristics for school administrators. According to the researchers, "Whether referring to children or adults or to schools or communities, these are the basic building blocks of resiliency" (p. 11). The researchers listed the following: (a) make positive connections with stakeholder groups, (b) establish clear and consistent limits or boundaries, (c) teach life skills through meaningful professional development, (d) provide care and support, (e) set and communicate high expectations provide, and (f) provide opportunities for meaningful participation.

According to Scott (2001), characteristics of resilient principals include a tolerance for ambiguity, the ability to delay gratification, and a propensity to tap internal and external sources of support and resistance. Patterson (2001) identified five leadership

strengths that are central for leaders to help the organization, as well as themselves, strengthen their resilience: (a) be positive in spite of the negative, (b) stay focused on what you care about, (c) remain flexible in how you get there, (d) act rather than react, and (e) apply resilience-conserving strategies during tough times. Other research supports that individuals who demonstrate high resilience characteristics report a greater job satisfaction and greater success in carrying out a demanding role (Montano, 1998). For example, Reeves (2004) observed the characteristic of resilience to be important in the assessment of educational leaders. In his leadership studies, he found that principals who were more resilient were more effective in their job performance (Reeves, 2004).

Principal Leadership and Student Achievement

Principals, regardless of the students they serve, are held accountable for student achievement in their schools (Ross & Gray, 2006). Much of the research on the effects of principal leadership on student learning appears ambiguous. Nettles and Harrington (2007) contended that the lack of consistency in the research was due to researchers not focusing on actual student outcomes, but rather on other peripheral results of principal practices. Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that leadership accounts for about one-fourth of the total direct and indirect effects on student learning, which is second only to classroom instruction. Kafka (2009) stated that principal leadership is important, although it does not directly affect student achievement in the way teachers' attitudes and beliefs do. Fullan (2003) contended that the leadership of a principal is a key factor in supporting student achievement. According to Nettles and Harrington (2007) there are seven generally accepted identifiers that are held as critical factors of effective school leadership: (a) safe

and orderly school environment, (b) mission and vision, (c) stakeholder involvement, (d) monitoring school progress, (e) professional development, (f) high expectations for student performances and, (g) instructional focus.

A safe and orderly school environment is one of the most fundamental duties of a school principal (Nettles & Harrington, 2007). According to Whitaker (2003) effective principals work to create a positive environment, and believe it is their responsibility to do so. Principals can affect the school environment by (a) setting and communicating behavioral standards for himself or herself, the faculty and staff, and the students; (b) implementing effective processes to ensure that behavioral policies are applied consistently for all; (c) assuring that discipline is used consistently and fairly; and (d) dispersing the responsibility for discipline throughout the school (Nettles & Harrington, 2007).

Hoy et al. (2006) suggested that in schools where learning environments are orderly and serious, students are motivated to work hard and have respect and appreciation for academic success. Similarly, Heck (2000) found that teachers, parents and students, consistently reported positive reactions to the extent to which they felt safe, comfortable, and cared for in their school. The more positive these reactions were the higher the school quality and the higher its achievement levels when student background factors were controlled. Moreover, effective principals display caring attitudes towards staff members, students and parents (O'Donnell & White, 2005). These findings were supported by a study of Chicago elementary schools. In the study, Bryk and Schneider (2003) encountered higher student achievement in school environments where trust existed among stakeholders. Teachers in school environments where students scored in the top quarter showed high trust in their principal, parents, and students. Schools in the lower quarter

were reflective of academic environments in which little or no trust existed. In this same study, researchers also discovered that more trusting school environments had an improvement in student attendance, persistent learning among students, and the willingness of faculties to experiment with new practices (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

According to Nettles and Harrington (2007), a clear mission and vision is important to the success of any school. McEwan (2003) found that while less effective principals offer excuses, highly effective principals visualized a successful school that has achieved its mission. According to McEwan (2003), principal were able to direct their efforts towards the possibility of a high-achieving school, and help their school community support that vision. Effective principals understand that while they help create the school's vision, they must also cultivate an environment that allows teachers to make decisions that result in ownership in the vision (Beck & Murphy, 1996). This finding was underscored by O'Donnell and White (2005). The researchers randomly selected Pennsylvania public middle schools with intent to identify significant relationships between principals' instructional leadership behaviors and student achievement. They established a positive relationship between leadership which clearly defined their mission and reading achievement.

According to Nettles and Harrington (2007), stakeholder involvement is another important component of effective school leadership. According to DuFour, R. DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004), low-performing schools can become successful as a result of a decision by the school stakeholders to come together and create positive change in their school. In part, this involves the ability of principals to garner outside resources toward the improvement of the school (Nettles & Harrington, 2007). Effective principals

gain resources that are aligned with instructional needs (Robinson et al., 2008). Simply being good at fundraising, grant writing and/or partnering with a business may not align resources for instructional purposes. Effective principals can influence student achievement through their decisions about staffing and teaching resources (Robinson et al., 2008). Grissom and Loeb (2009) posited that effective instructional leaders combine an understanding of the instructional needs of the school with an ability to target resources where they are needed, hire the best available teachers, provide teachers with the opportunities they need to improve, and keep the school running smoothly.

Monitoring school progress by the principal has been shown as a predictor of school effectiveness (Nettles & Harrington, 2007). Cotton (2003) argued that successful principals ensured there were systematic procedures for monitoring student progress at both the school-wide and classroom levels. According to Nettles and Harrington (2007), effective principals routinely visit classrooms, participate in team meetings, and pay very close attention to student progress. Leaders in higher performing schools are actively involved in planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and teachers. In addition, principals in higher performing schools ensure that teachers systematically monitor student progress (Robinson et al., 2008).

A principal's success comes from the amount and quality of professional development opportunities that he or she provides for the school's staff (Nettles & Harrington, 2007). Principals of higher performing schools both promote and participate in professional learning opportunities. They are also more likely to be described by their teachers as participating in informal staff discussions of teaching and student learning issues (Robinson et al., 2008). Graczewski, Knudson, and Holtzman (2009) also revealed the im-

portance of engaging teachers in content focused professional development with an emphasis on subject area curriculum and assessment. Professional development that engages teachers with content, curriculum materials, assessments, and instructional methods has been shown to improve student achievement (Hill, 2007).

Principals must have an instructional focus (Robinson et al., 2008). In schools with higher achievement or higher achievement gains, the principal makes student achievement the school's top goal (Robinson et al., 2008). Successful principals influence teaching and learning by building relationships and by focusing on the way teachers perform their work. In addition, leaders in higher performing schools tend to place more emphasis on communicating goals and expectations (Robinson et al., 2008). Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds perform much better when high expectations of teachers and principals are coupled with a safe supportive environment (Osher & Fleischman, 2005).

Nettles and Harrington (2007) argued that effective principals build the leadership capacity of their teachers and staff, encourage team learning focused on school-wide goals, and use organizational flexibility to enhance effectiveness as well as distribute leadership responsibilities throughout the school. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) defined instructional leadership as "leading learning communities" (p. 3). Based on this definition, principals are viewed as facilitators, guiding and encouraging an educational environment in which all stakeholders work collaboratively to diagnose and solve the problems facing their schools (Nettles & Harrington, 2007).

High Poverty Schools

According to Carter, in the introduction of the book *No Excuses: 21 Lessons from High-Performing, High Poverty Schools*, “American schools have utterly failed the poor” (p. 7). The author further asserted that half of low-income fourth graders cannot read with understanding and two thirds of low-income eighth graders cannot multiply or divide two-digit numbers (Carter, 2001). As recently as 2009, 1 in every 5 children in America lived in poverty, an increase of nearly 4 million since the year 2000 (Children’s Defense Fund, 2010). According to Hernandez (2011), poverty affects educational outcomes. The researcher asserted that 22% of the students who live in poverty do not graduate from high school compared to 6% of those students who have never been poor. Additionally, the author reported that this percentage increases to 32% for students who spent at least half of their childhood in poverty. Furthermore, Haycock (2001) asserted that low expectations, the scarcity of qualified teachers, and the lack of a rigorous curriculum are among the many of problems confronting high poverty schools. Branch, Hanusher, and Rivkin (2009) cite high school level administrator turnover as an added concern with high poverty schools. As a result, these schools are more likely to be led by principals who have limited or no experience (Branch et al., 2009). Often, in high poverty schools, the learning needs of students and families are not being adequately met (Linda & Christine, 2004). According to Jamar and Pitts (2005), low socioeconomic status presents many difficulties that affect student achievement in school. As a result, teachers with a higher concentration of students from poverty in their classes tend to be less optimistic about their students’ abilities to be successful in school. Additionally, mi-

nority students are too often the victims of these beliefs and their academic success is often a reflection of these low expectations (Jamar & Pitts, 2005).

The effects of poverty are exacerbated when there is a high concentration of low-income families and individuals in the neighborhood. Known as “collective socialization,” helpless attitudes and low motivation may be accepted as the norm, thereby reducing the expectations and hope for the future, and success in school of children of low socioeconomic status (Jencks & Mayer, 1990; L. Simons, R. Simons, Conger, & Brody, 2004; Wilson, 1997). Schools with high concentrations of poverty, both low-income and high-income students are impacted by the instructional climate of the school (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Similarly, Olson and Jerald (1998) concluded:

Concentrated school poverty is consistently related to lower performance on every educational outcome measured. School poverty depresses the scores of all students in schools where at least half of the students are eligible for subsidized lunch, and seriously depresses the scores when more than 75% of students live in low-income households. (p. 14)

High poverty schools, partly as a result of federal requirements, typically undergo countless reform efforts (Linda & Christine, 2004). The George W. Bush administration legislated NCLB, which requires states to test all public school students annually in reading, language arts and math in grades 3 through 8 and in grades 10 through 12. A science component was added in 2007 for grade 5, grade 7, and grade 11. It also requires districts to report student test results disaggregated by race, ethnicity, exceptionality and students living in poverty. Furthermore, NCLB requires schools and districts to demonstrate AYP on state tests overall and in each subgroup of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Under President Barack Obama reform efforts consist primarily of a \$4.35 billion, Race-to-the-Top-Fund (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). This fund consists of nationally competitive grants which highlight and replicate effective reform strategies (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). These grants are intended for reform efforts in four significant areas: (a) adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace; (b) recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals; (c) building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices and; (d) turning around the lowest-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Linda and Christine (2004) argued that reform efforts cannot be successful without changing the beliefs and attitudes of educators. The authors further asserted that the role of school leadership is essential in changing deeply ingrained beliefs and attitudes about the inevitability of low achievement in high poverty schools (Linda & Christine, 2004). Leadership appears to have greater impact on underperforming schools; as a result, building capacity in these schools must be a part of any improvement effort (Leithwood et al., 2004). Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that leadership is the key to the successful implementation of any large-scale school reform effort. Fullan (2003) supported the belief that principal leadership in high poverty schools should promote a moral imperative. The author reported that this leads teachers, parents and others to commit to deep cultural change which in turn improves the learning of all students.

Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009) provided additional support to the assertion that principal leadership is important, particularly in high poverty schools. Researchers

found that leadership practices supported student achievement in the schools studied. Among their conclusions, the researchers cited that despite the many constraints and challenges of high poverty contexts, the practices of principals (a) positively impacted student achievement, (b) increased school-wide expectations, and (c) fostered community resources to help accomplish the school's mission (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009).

In a study of 19 principals newly assigned to high-poverty, low-performing elementary and middle schools, Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, and Levy (2007) explored the conditions that these principals perceived to contribute to inadequate student achievement. The researchers organized the conditions into five clusters: (a) student achievement and behavior, (b) school programs and organization, (c) staffing, (d) school system concerns, and (e) parents and community. These conditions were analyzed to determine whether the principals, despite being assigned to high poverty and low-performing schools, believed they faced sufficiently different conditions to justify some form of differentiated school leadership. Duke et al. (2007) noted that although some conditions differed among schools there were also a generic set of common challenges. This suggested a need for principals to have both a general training as well as the need for additional specialized skill sets for use in specific school settings such as high-poverty schools.

Torchbearer Schools

In December 2004, the Alabama Leadership Academy conducted a study of the book, *No Excuses: 21 Lessons from High-Performing, High Poverty Schools*. This research-based book outlined methods used for raising achievement levels in 21 high-poverty schools across the nation that have beat the odds associated with educating stu-

dents of poverty by refusing to tolerate excuses for their academic failure. Carter (2004) identified five traits common to all 21 schools in the study; chief among them was the actions of the school principal. The schools highlighted clearly illustrate that dedicated professionals with a shared vision of excellence for teaching and learning can make any school successful. However, many of the schools in the book are charter schools, private schools, or magnet schools, and none are located in Alabama. Based on that study, the Torchbearer Schools Program was created to recognize those types of schools in Alabama for their success (Alabama Education News, 2006).

In order to be recognized in the Torchbearer program, schools must meet the following criteria: (a) have a poverty rate of 80% which is measured by the population of students receiving free/reduced meals; (b) 80% of the students score at least a Level III on both the reading and math portions of the ARMT; (c) have greater than 50% of the students scoring above the 50th percentile on the SAT-10; (d) at least 95 % of the 12th grade students passed all requirements of the AHSGA; and (e) have a graduation rate above the state average. These schools are often located in low socioeconomic neighborhoods. For their efforts, Torchbearer schools are rewarded financially through an incentive program based on levels of accomplishment (Alabama Education News, 2009). State educational leaders in Alabama have agreed that school leadership appears to be the key component to the achievement of these high achieving, high poverty Torchbearer schools (Alabama Education News, 2005, 2009).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to focus on the importance of the role of principal self-efficacy beliefs and how those beliefs influence their behaviors. This focus provided the rationale for using principal self-efficacy as the central phenomenon in this research. In addition, using social cognitive and self-efficacy theories, this chapter provided the theoretical framework for the study. Self-efficacy and its sources were reviewed through a historical lens. Studies were discussed outlining the importance of principal leadership behaviors on teacher efficacy and student achievement. The impact of principal self-efficacy beliefs on collective efficacy and achievement in low socioeconomic schools was also addressed.

The sections of this review of the literature provided a conceptual framework for this qualitative study which was designed to explore principal efficacy in Alabama Torchbearer schools. The next chapter provides an explanation of the research design and data collection and analysis procedures which were employed in this phenomenological study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

“To begin with, we put the proposition: pure phenomenology is the science of pure consciousness.”

- Edmund Husserl

Qualitative Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Alabama principals of Torchbearer schools utilizing a qualitative method of investigation. A qualitative study design provides a more holistic view by including multiple perspectives and factors involved in principal self-efficacy (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is associated with inductive inquiry. Inductive research is theory-generating, and is often linked to qualitative interviews. It starts with specific observations and move toward general ideas or theory (Mertens, 2008). In contrast, quantitative research is associated with deductive inquiry. Deductive research involves theory-testing, which is often tied to datasets, surveys, or other quantitative analysis. Deductive research starts with a general idea or theory and then moves to test it by looking at specific observations (Crowther & Lancaster, 2009)

According to Creswell (2007), “qualitative research can be described as an intricate fabric composed of small threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material” (p. 35). The use of qualitative research in educational settings is a relatively recent phenomenon. Additionally, Hatch (2002) contended that early qualitative researchers were most likely anthropologists who wrote ethnographies describing primitive

cultures in distant locations throughout the world. During the 1970s and 1980s qualitative work gained in stature as a legitimate form of educational research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that the researcher makes in deciding to undertake a qualitative study. According to Creswell (2007), researchers bring to the investigation their own worldviews, paradigms, and sets of beliefs which inform the conduct and writing of the study. Qualitative research is conducted if there is a need to empower individuals to share their stories (Creswell, 2007). This method was selected because the researcher planned to conduct the study in the participants' natural settings, Torchbearer schools. Additionally, the researcher was interested in uncovering the perceptions and lived experiences as described by the participants. This paradigm was supported by Creswell (2003) who asserted that qualitative research allows the researcher to gain invaluable detail about the research participants (Creswell, 2003). Typically, qualitative research takes place in the natural settings. For the purposes of this study, natural settings were represented by Torchbearer schools in Alabama. Moreover, in qualitative research investigators seek to understand the world from the viewpoint of those who live in it (Hatch, 2002). Creswell (2003) described qualitative research as the process through which data are collected through open –ended questions, with the primary intent of developing themes from the data. Researchers typically make knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives or advocacy/ participatory perspectives or both (Creswell, 2003). Unlike quantitative research, which is based on the measurement and analysis of causal relationships, the goal of qualitative research is to explore social experiences and the meaning they have for participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Constructivism is qualitative research that emphasizes participant observations and interviews to understand a phenomenon from that perspective of the individuals experiencing it (Hatch, 2002). The term constructivism was coined by Guba and Lincoln in 1994. According to Hatch (2002), “Constructivists assume a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality” (p. 15). This research philosophy recognizes the significance of individual human formation of meaning (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The goal of qualitative inquiry is to understand and reformulate the constructions that the participants and the researcher initially hold. According to Hatch (2002), although members of a social group may share similar experiences and perceptions, each individual holds a unique perspective shaped by personal experiences. This method allows the researcher and participants to engage in the co-construction of reality.

Participants

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of self-efficacy of principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Purposive sampling techniques have also been referred to as non-probability sampling or purposeful sampling or qualitative sampling. Purposive sampling techniques involve selecting certain units or cases “based on a specific purpose rather than randomly” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 713). In contrast, probability sampling is sampling in which each element of a population has an opportunity of being selected for the sample; its purpose is to obtain a sample that is representative of the population and from which generalizations to the population can be made (Teddlie & Yu,

2007). The power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth analysis related to the central issues being studied.

The purposive sampling strategy used for this study was critical case sampling. Critical case sampling was employed to select the participants. This process involved selecting a small number of important cases; cases that "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Patton, 2001, p. 236). With critical case sampling, the researcher selected individuals who represent dramatic examples of or are of critical importance to the phenomenon of interest (Hatch, 2002). Although sampling for one or more critical cases may not yield findings that are broadly generalizable they may allow researchers to develop logical generalizations from the rich evidence produced when studying a few cases in depth.

The researcher made a deliberate effort to select participants who could bring richness and depth to understanding the phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher either sent recruitment letters or made telephone calls to solicit participants for this study. The population of the study consisted of 10 elementary and middle school principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama. These principals were in their respective positions at the time of their schools' Torchbearer designation.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study was guided by a constructivist epistemology. Constructivist epistemology, foundational beliefs that guide behavior (Creswell, 2009), posit that people seek and construct meaning out of their social interactions with the external world (Kegan & Lahey, 1984). These varied and multiple meanings are subjective to each indi-

vidual, causing the researcher to investigate complex relationships rather than reducing meaning to narrow categories. Working from a constructivist worldview, researchers often focus on the participants' views and voices, the participants' multiple realities, to prominently describe the central phenomenon throughout the study. Researchers work to be cognizant of their subjective meanings when designing, analyzing and reporting findings.

The researcher explored the phenomena of self-efficacy of principals of Alabama urban Torchbearer schools by employing the qualitative tradition of a phenomenological study. Phenomenological research is a qualitative approach in which the researcher discovers the essence of human experiences regarding a phenomenon, as expressed by the participants in a study (Creswell, 2003). According to Wolff (2002):

Phenomenological research emphasizes the lived experiences not only of the research participants but also of the researcher. For research participants, the lived experience is that of the phenomenon being studied. (p. 117)

This approach involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2003). Phenomenology enabled the researcher to explore and gather rich descriptions of principals' self-efficacy in Alabama Torchbearer schools from the participants' perspective, using data collected directly from the participants through in-depth interviews, and site observations.

According to Moustakes (1994) phenomenological inquiry seeks to acquire scientific knowledge through "concentrated studies of experience and the reflective powers of the self" (p. 25). It is the philosophy and science of trying to obtain knowledge through the examination of the experience of the participants in combination with the researcher's

consciousness. According to Creswell (2003), a phenomenological approach attempts to identify the human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in the study. This approach attempts to add a sense of “newness” to lived experience by the use of rich and descriptive data (Creswell, 2007). Hatch (2002) asserted that phenomenological researchers view participants as co-constructors of the descriptions and interpretations of their study. Similarly, Moustakas (1994) stated:

In phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflections. In phenomenological science a relationship always exists between the external perception of natural objects and internal perceptions, memories, and judgments (p. 47).

Creswell (2007) identified the major procedures for conducting a phenomenological study as: identify the common experience shared by several individuals, acknowledge the philosophical assumptions of the phenomenological tradition, collect data, analyze the data, and write a report.

Qualitative research methodology covers a varied range of design structures. Creswell (2007) identified five common traditions: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology. Both the case study and phenomenology designs were considered for this study. Because the study of principals’ self-efficacy had not been well represented in the literature, the researcher wanted to include the experiences of principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. Therefore, a phenomenological study design provided the best fit to describe the experiences and contexts of the central phenomenon, self-efficacy beliefs of Torchbearer principals.

Data Collection Procedures

Data Collection

Data were collected primarily through interviews and observations of participants during the summer of 2012. This type of interviewing is often referred to as “phenomenological interviewing” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 113). Phenomenological research typically involves a small number of participants (Boyd, 2001). Boyd (2001) identified 2 to 10 participants for research subjects as sufficient to reach saturation. Creswell (1998) recommended “long interviews with up to 10 people” for a phenomenological study (pp. 65 & 113). For this study, the researcher implored a sample size of 10 principals of Alabama urban Torchbearer schools.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry’s findings are “worth paying attention to” (p. 290). This approach is in contrast to quantitative inquiry, which attempts to show validity, soundness, and significance. The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be increased by maintaining high credibility and objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria that they believe should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a “credible” conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.296). Transferability is the degree to which the findings of this inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project. Dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Conformability is a measure of how well the inquiry’s findings are sup-

ported by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since a qualitative researcher's perspective is naturally biased due to his or her close association with the data, sources, and methods, various audit strategies can be used to confirm findings (Bowen, 2009; Miller, 1997). Therefore, trustworthiness of interpretations and findings are dependent on being able to demonstrate how they were reached (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). To ensure trustworthiness of the study as well as add richness and depth, multiple data sources were used. Face to face in-depth interviews were supported by observations of each site. In addition, Torchbearer school information was obtained about each site from the Alabama State Department of Education.

Each participant gave their explicit permission and the study was in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A) guidelines. Initially, the researcher contacted each principal by telephone and electronic mail or Recruitment Letter (see Appendix B) to request an interview and explain the nature and purpose of the study. To minimize the impact on principals' busy schedules, the researcher offered principals the flexibility of selecting the most convenient time for the interview.

At the start of each structured interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the interview and gave participants an opportunity to ask questions about the study. Additionally, before each interview, the researcher reiterated the measures that were used to protect participants' confidentiality, reviewed the purpose and design of the study and obtained both a signed Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) and completed the Participant Data Sheet (see Appendix D). The researcher used this data sheet to collect pertinent information about the principals' training, their length of time at their perspective schools and their school enrollment. The researcher answered any questions related to the

study, its design and the interview. A tape recorder was placed in a convenient location, turned on and the interview began. Appendix E shows a list of interview questions and their correlation to the research questions of this study. The structured interviews lasted approximately one hour per participant.

At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher again reviewed the purpose of the study. The researcher spent some time observing each site to provide additional context and supporting data. The researcher then thanked the participant for his or her time and support of the study.

Following the completion of the interview, a \$25.00 gift card was mailed to each participant. This was a gesture of appreciation for his or her time and willingness to participate in this study.

Recording Data

Data collected during the interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. Precautions were taken to ensure that the audio tapes were coded to preserve the confidentiality of each participant. Once the interview was concluded, each audio tape was transcribed verbatim in an effort to ensure accuracy. Handwritten notes and photographs were also taken for the purpose of adding depth, clarifying questions and as the researcher's personal notes for further inquiry. As with the audio recordings, the photographs and handwritten notes were coded to preserve the confidentiality of each principal.

The audio tapes, transcriptions, field notes, artifacts, other documents and data collected and related to this study were reviewed as needed during the analysis and interpretation phases of this study. All audio tapes, transcriptions, field notes, artifacts, other

documents and data collected that are related to this study were erased or shredded after the conclusion of the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

Hatch (2002) stated “data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (p. 148). According to Creswell (1998), qualitative data analysis is characterized by inductive information processing that is a “search for patterns of meaning in data so that general statements about phenomena under investigation can be made” (p. 161). Rossman and Raliis (1998) surmised that, “phenomenological analysis requires that the researcher approach the text with an open mind, seeking what meaning and structures emerge” (p. 184). Consistent with qualitative procedure, the processes of data collection occurs at the same time as data analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Data were examined using transcribed interviews and written field notes. This information was either be typed on a laptop computer or handwritten on a legal note pad. These procedures helped to organize the data collected and aided in the job of simultaneous collection and analysis.

Subsequent to reviewing all of the data sources, the material (interview transcripts and follow-up notes, observational notes and any physical artifacts) were manually coded by the researcher. To ensure immersion in the data, the researcher read and re-read the transcripts multiple times (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis drew from identifying patterns and themes. This technique allowed the researcher to determine conceptual explanations of the phenomenon.

Verification Procedures

According to Creswell (2003), trustworthiness is to qualitative research as validity is to quantitative research and is used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the participant and the researcher. According to Maggs-Rapport (2000) a combination of verification procedures is the best way to ensure that data are seen as trustworthy. In an effort to establish credibility and trustworthiness of this study, the researcher employed peer debriefing, audit trails, and member checking.

The researcher also addressed bias. Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers should make clear their potential biases from the start of the study. Researcher bias is a threat to the validity of the results in this study. To be forthcoming and remove any potential for bias, the researcher included an identity memo in Appendix F of this dissertation.

Additionally peer debriefing was employed. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) peer debriefing is: "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). Creswell (2003) asserted that this process involves locating a person (a peer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four purposes of debriefing: (a) through analytical probing a debriefer can help uncover taken for granted biases, perspectives and assumptions on the researcher's part, (b) through this process the researcher can become aware of his/her posture toward data and analysis, (c) this is an opportunity to test and defend emergent themes and see if they seem reasonable and plau-

sible to a disinterested debriefer, and (d) provides the researcher with an opportunity for catharsis. Additionally, peer debriefing may detect whether or not a researcher has over-emphasized a point, or missed a rival legitimate hypothesis, under-emphasized a point, and in general does a careful reading of the data and the final report. Researchers have suggested that peer debriefing enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of a qualitative research project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 1998). The researcher elicited members of the researcher's doctoral cohort to serve as peer debriefer.

An audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These are records that are kept regarding what was done in an investigation. Koch (2006) suggested that a study's trustworthiness may be established if a reader is able to audit the events, influences and actions of the researcher, while Akkerman, Admiral, Brekelmans, and Oost (2008) suggested that audit trails represent a means of assuring quality in qualitative studies. In order to develop a detailed audit trail, a researcher needs to maintain a log of all research activities, develop memos, maintain research journals, and document all data collection and analysis procedures throughout the study (Creswell & Millar, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified six categories of information that need to be collected to inform the audit process:

1. Raw data: including all raw data, written field notes, unobtrusive measures (documents);
2. Data reduction and analysis products: including summaries such as condensed notes, unitized information and quantitative summaries and theoretical notes;

3. Data reconstruction and synthesis products: including structure of categories (themes, definitions, and relationships), findings and conclusions and a final report including connections to existing literatures and an integration of concepts, relationships, and interpretations;

4. Process notes: including methodological notes (procedures, designs, strategies, rationales), trustworthiness notes (relating to credibility, dependability and conformability) and audit trail notes;

5. Materials relating to intentions and dispositions: including inquiry proposal, personal notes (reflexive notes and motivations) and expectations (predictions and intentions);

6. Instrument development information: including pilot forms, preliminary schedules, observation formats.

Through examining these information categories, a researcher can better assess whether the study's findings are grounded in the data, whether inferences are logical and so on. Therefore, the audit trail requires clarification and self-reflection on the part of the researcher (Akkerman et al., 2008). This enables the researcher to reflect on how his study developed. Further, it helps a reader to follow each stage of the process and trace through the research logic and helps other researchers determine whether a study's findings may be relied upon as a platform for further inquiry and as a basis for decision making.

Finally, member checking was employed. In the process of member checking, each of the research participants reviewed a summary of the data analysis procedure and a summary of the final results of the research. Participants received only their reported

material to review for accuracy and to insure that the researcher had input their reported experiences in the material. Participants were provided an opportunity to offer comments on whether or not they felt the data were interpreted in a manner congruent with their own experiences. This can be done both formally and informally as opportunities for member checks may arise during the normal course of observation and conversation. According to Creswell (2003) member checking is used to determine the accuracy of qualitative findings by taking the final document of specific descriptions or themes back to the participants and determining whether these participants feel that the information they have provided is accurately represented. Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. The member checking process continued until the participants reported being satisfied with the accuracy of the material.

Ethical Considerations

As compared to the objectivity and distance which characterizes the more positivistic approaches to research, qualitative research brings with it a greater likelihood that ethical issues will arise, such as those associated with informed consent and confidentiality (Holbrook, 1997). According to Hatch, (2002), qualitative research methods are intended to enable the researcher to develop a close relationship with the participants and the aim of the research study. Hatch (2002) asserted, "Qualitative researchers are interested in exploring the world from the perspective of cultural insiders" (p. 65). According to Bernard (1994), several complications may materialize as a result of the high level of rapport which has been developed between the participant and the researcher. The diffi-

culties intrinsic in qualitative research can be lessened by awareness and use of well-established ethical principles, specifically autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

This study was designed to eliminate the possible risk of ethical issues that typically arise in qualitative research. The researcher fully disclosed the purpose of the study, sought voluntary participants, and assured their confidentiality and anonymity. Creswell (2003) stated, "In qualitative research, inquirers use aliases or pseudonyms for individuals and places to protect identities" (p. 66). In this study, pseudonyms were used to help maintain the anonymity of participants. Creswell (2003) contended researchers must respect and may not put participants at risk. Creswell (2003) further stated, "Researchers need to have their research plans reviewed by the IRB on their college and university campuses" (p. 64). All data acquired from participants for this study was collected with their explicit consent and in full compliance with the University of Alabama at Birmingham IRB guidelines.

Ethical Considerations for Scholarly Writing

Whitehead (1953) stated, "The whole point of a university, on its educational side, is to bring the young under the intellectual influence of a band of imaginative scholars" (p. 137). According to Brimble and Stevenson-Clark (2005) graduating students who are not only competent and highly skilled, but also who demonstrate honesty, ethical responsibility as well as commitment to their profession and society are among the most important responsibilities of today's colleges and universities. East and Donnelly (2012) stated, "The concept of academic integrity involves understanding what it means to be

honest in the particular culture of the academic world, and being able to apply the scholarly conventions of acknowledgment” (p. 1). At the turn of the last century Dewey (1909) argued that education should concern itself with being social and moral institutions instead of simply focusing on academics. According to Dewey (1909), “There cannot be two sets of ethical principles, one for life in school, and the other for life outside of the school” (p. 7). Similarly, nearly 100 years later, Schmeklin, Gilbert, Spencer, Pincus, and Silva (2008) asserted, “Academic integrity is one of the fundamental values of higher education” (p. 587). However, Brown, Weible, and Olmosk (2010) contended academic dishonesty among college students has been a problem for many years. Brown et al. (2010) found, in a nearly four decade study, that 100% of the undergraduate students self-reported cheating in 2008 up from 48% in 1988. Similarly, Jones (2011) found that 92% of the students surveyed reported that they or someone they knew had cheated.

Craig, Federici, and Buehler (2010) noted that plagiarism is the most common form of academic dishonesty. Craig et al. (2010) identified the following approaches to help students become successful and minimize the possibility of academic dishonesty:

- (a) Students are required to prepare a written assignment proposal, outline or rough draft, (b) students are given a specific topic or a limited list of topics for an assignment, (c) faculty who use resources in the classroom other than the assigned textbook are encouraged to identify their sources and properly cite authors, modeling the behavior they wish to foster in their students, and (d) regularly review policies, procedures, and penalties regarding academic dishonesty. (p. 54)

Whitehead (1953) asserted that, “The universities are schools of education and schools of research” (p. 130). Further the researcher contended that universities have trained “intellectual pioneers of our civilization” (p. 132). Therefore, it is important that researchers use their own words and unique prospective to their research. Research is an intellectual adventure (Whitehead, 1953). According to Whitehead (1953), “It is the

function of the scholar to evoke into life wisdom and beauty which, apart from his magic, would remain lost in the past” (p. 135).

Role of the Researcher

According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research is interactive and interpretive; the researcher’s worldview, assumptions, and theoretical orientation, affect the overall research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. The researcher is the key instrument in collecting data, examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). The researcher for this study sought to be objective and reflective during of the research process. Hence, it is vital for him to fully divulge all biases, limitations, as well as any possible conflicts of interest.

The researcher’s experience working in high poverty schools was relevant to this study. The researcher has served in many roles in public education. The researcher who conducted this study had experience in high poverty schools as a student, teacher, school and district administrator in the Birmingham School District for more than 17 years. Although the participants and the researcher might have shared similar experiences in working with students of poverty, the researcher attempted to mitigate any biases through a process called “bracketing” which is a part of the epoch process (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

According to Creswell (2003) qualitative research is interpretative research, with the inquirer typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants. The researcher in qualitative research becomes immersed in the study. By encouraging

each participant to be a co-researcher, a robust research environment was created with greater transparency and trustworthiness. Reducing possible bias in this study allowed a “natural attitude” to emerge (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

Summary

Qualitative research design was used to explore the in-depth explore the self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. Chapter 3 contained information on the methodology and rationale for the research design of this phenomenological study. The next chapter will provide a summary of the data collected and a review of the finding and analysis of this phenomenological study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

“If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin.”

- Charles Darwin

This chapter presents the findings of this phenomenological study through the words and expressions of the participants. These data offer insight into the lived experience of the participants who served as principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. To fully explore the context of the principals’ experiences, this study was guided by the following questions to better understand the central phenomenon:

1. How do principals’ self-efficacy beliefs influence their leadership behaviors in Torchbearer schools in Alabama?
2. How do principals describe the challenges of leading high poverty/ high achieving schools?
3. How have the principals’ self-efficacy beliefs for school leadership evolved throughout their careers?
4. What sources contribute most to the principals’ sense of self-efficacy?
5. What sources impede the principals’ sense of self-efficacy?
6. What are the perceptions of principals about their resilience in leading a Torchbearer school?

As previously stated in chapter 3, participants for this study were drawn from those listed as principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. A total of 10 participants were purposefully selected to participate in this study, representing five school districts in five counties in Alabama. This chapter will concern itself with describing the participants selected from 10 schools (9 elementary schools, and 1 middle school); the results of the perceptions given by the participants in response to interview question; and the results of open coding and themes that emerged from the analysis of data collected during the in-depth interviews.

Context

The study was comprised of 10 principals on school campuses across the state of Alabama. Each principal selected was the school leader when his/her school received the Torchbearer designation. The principals in this study represented elementary and middle schools. Each site had varying grade configurations, demographics, and schools were classified as either urban or rural. Because the schools were designated as Torchbearer, they met the following criteria: (a) had a poverty rate of 80% which is measured by the population of students receiving free/reduced meals; (b) 80% of the students scored at least a Level III on both the reading and math portions of the ARMT; and (c) had greater than 50% of the students scoring above the 50th percentile on the SAT-10 (Alabama Education News, 2009). The school population ranged from 250 to 600 students. The schools represented in this study were racially and ethnically diverse. The student populations ranged from predominantly African American, to predominantly Caucasian American, and one school was predominantly Native American.

Participants

The participants in this study were asked to complete a Participant Data Sheet. The information from the individual data sheets was compiled into a single table as shown in Table 1.

The participants in this study were referred to as participant with the number assigned to them. The coding is shown in the first column of Table 1 as a letter and a number. For example, the code for Participant 1 is P1.

All of the participants were employed as public school principals in Alabama at the time of the study. Each participant was the assigned principal of the school that had been designated as an Alabama Torchbearer school. One of the participants was male while nine were female. There were 10 sites involved in this study.

Based on data collected using the Participant Data Sheet, the participants obtained their administrative certification from one of five different universities in the state of Alabama. The greatest number of participants received their administrative certifications from University of South Alabama (6).

The participants' length of teaching and experience in school administration varied. The participant with the least number of years as a teacher had taught for nine years before becoming an administrator. Five participants had taught for more than 20 years before becoming an administrator, one for as long as 25 years.

There was also a significant range of time among the participants as related to serving as principal of their current school. The range for total years as principal in their current school was 2 years to 14 years.

Table 1. *Participant Summary Data*

Participants	Race	Sex	Year Earned Administrative Certification	Teaching Experience	# of years as principal of current school	School Setting	School Configuration	Enrollment	University from which Administrative Certificate was obtained
P1.	African American	Female	2006	25	5	Urban	K-5 Elementary	402	University of South Alabama
P2.	African American	Female	1993	19	9	Urban	Pre K -5 Elementary	300	University of South Alabama
P3.	Caucasian	Female	2000	20	2	Rural	Pre K- 5 Elementary	250	University of South Alabama
P4.	Caucasian	Female	1990	9	9	Urban	Pre K- 5 Elementary	541	University of South Alabama
P5.	African American	Female	2004	11	4	Urban	K-5 Elementary	250	University of South Alabama
P6.	Caucasian	Female	2001	14	9	Rural	K-5 Elementary	600	University of South Alabama
P7.	African American	Female	2003	22	9	Urban	6-8 Middle	325	University of Montevallo
P8.	Caucasian	Male	2006	12	10	Rural	K-5 Elementary	334	University of North Alabama
P9.	African American	Female	1974	22	14	Urban	K-5 Elementary	340	Alabama State University
P10.	Caucasian	Female	1994	20	3	Urban	K-5 Elementary	338	Troy University

Principals from nine elementary schools and one middle school were included in this study. The grade configuration for the elementary schools differed slightly. Three of the elementary schools included Pre-Kindergarten as part of their K-5 program. There were three schools that identified themselves as rural and seven that reported their status as urban. The largest school was reported to have an enrollment of 600 students, while the smallest schools reported an enrollment of 250 students.

Participant 1 is an African American female. She currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. Participant 1 has 25 years of teaching experience and has been principal at her current school for 5 years. As a teacher she worked in several states. She worked in Detroit for 9 years as a lab teacher in a bilingual school where students spoke Arabic and English. She became a National Board Certified teacher 2002 and was a writing coach in her current school before being appointed as principal.

Participant 2 is an African American female. She currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. Participant 2 has 19 years of teaching experience and has been principal at her current school for 9 years. She taught for 6 years in Delaware before coming to Alabama. She was National Board Certified as a teacher. As an assistant principal she divided her time between two schools, one inner city and the other rural. She credits this experience for her preparation as a principal.

Participant 3 is a Caucasian female. She currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. Participant 3 has 20 years of teaching experience and has been principal at her current school for 2 years. She has been a reading coach, writing coach, instructional facilitator and an assistant principal.

Participant 4 is a Caucasian female. She currently holds an Ed.S. degree in Educational Leadership. Participant 4 has 9 years of teaching experience as a special education teacher. She worked as a central office administrator and has been at her current school for 9 years. In her current school was a persistently low performing school. She was recruited to reconstitute the school. She faced pressure from parent and community groups who wanted her to rehire the old staff; however, she hired a new teaching staff. The school is now a perennial member of the state's Torchbearer school list.

Participant 5 is an African American female. She currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. Participant 5 has 11 years of teaching experience and has been principal of her current school for 4 years. She was an administrative intern and an assistant principal. After being an assistant principal for 2 years she was asked to be principal at her current school where she taught for 11 years.

Participant 6 is a Caucasian female. She currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. Participant 6 has 14 years of teaching experience and has been principal at her current school for 9 years. Her school has been consistently recognized as a Torchbearer school.

Participant 7 is an African American female. She currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. Participant 7 has 22 years of middle school teaching experience and has been principal at her current school for 9 years. During her tenure at her current school the school has been the recipient of many outstanding awards, including: Model School Award, Alabama Torchbearer Award and National Title I School of Distinction. Her school is the only middle school represented in this study.

Participant 8 is a Caucasian male. He currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. He has 12 years of teaching experience and has been principal at his current school for 10 years. He served as a special education teacher in the school where he is currently the principal.

Participant 9 is an African American female. She currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. Participant 9 has 22 years of teaching experience and has been principal at her current school for 14 years. She prides herself on the fact that her students call her “mama.”

Participant 10 is a Caucasian female. She currently holds an Ed.S. Degree in Educational Leadership. She has 20 years of teaching experience and has been principal at her current school for 3 years. She was assistant principal in her current school.

On-site Observations

The school sites were located in various communities throughout the state of Alabama. Although the school sites varied in age and construction styles, all appeared orderly, welcoming and well-maintained. Since all but one of the site visits were conducted during the summer the researcher did not have the opportunity to observe interactions between the school site principals and their staff or students. All of the participants interviewed were warm, professional, and accommodating to the researcher. Upon entering these schools, the researcher immediately noticed the focus on student achievement and evidence of academic success. In all schools, there were data walls or data bulletin boards. These walls/boards displayed not only this year’s test data but also displayed previous years’ school data. Participant 5 said, “It is important to show where we came from.”

Additionally, several schools were multiple year Torchbearer award winners. In these sites the Torchbearer banners were prominently displayed at the school's entrance. Some schools displayed various other academic awards that the school had received (i.e., Distinguished Title 1 School, Clas Banner School, Blue Ribbon, etc.).

In one site that was observed during the school year, students move through the halls in an orderly manner. Student work was prominently displayed throughout the building. In the classrooms the researcher observed a variety of classroom configurations. In addition both whole group and small group instruction was observed. In all sites, the researcher identified evidence of student recognition. One site displayed a framed student-written letter to President Obama with the president's reply letter.

The site principals provided the researcher with a tour of their respective buildings. Some of the buildings were quite old while others were recently constructed. All sites were clean and child-centered. The communities visited were also wide-ranging some were rural while others were more urban and inner city. Since most of the visits took place during the summer months there were few or no students in the buildings. However, several sites had teachers present. These teachers were either working in their classrooms preparing for the upcoming school year or engaged in curriculum planning. The custodial staffs at each school the researcher visited were diligently working to prepare each school for students. Each school principal displayed respect for all staff members observed and received respect from these staff members in-kind.

Themes

According to Ryan and Bernard (2010a), the identification of themes is an essential responsibility in qualitative research. Themes come from the fundamental sense of the word data, datum, meaning something given, or granted or admitted by the participants themselves (Bermen, 1994; Mish, 2002). Bernard and Ryan (2010b) stated, “To us, themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that link not only expressions found in texts but also expressions found in images, sounds, and objects” (p. 87). The authors added, “Themes come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach)” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010b, p. 88). Following the completion of each interview, the researcher had the tapes transcribed. Smith and Osborn (2003) noted that it is important in the first stage of the analysis to read and reread the transcript closely in order to become as familiar as possible with the account. Each reading has the potential to provide the researcher with new insights. This review process helped immerse the researcher in the data and helped the researcher to reflect deeply and critically about what the interviewees conveyed during their interview and the extent of feeling in which they responded to and elaborated on the questions asked by the researcher. The researcher read the transcript several times while listening to the corresponding audio tape to ensure accuracy of the transcribed tape and to come to a better overall understanding of each participant’s experience. This form of analysis was iterative and involved a close interaction between the reader and the text.

The specific approach used to uncover the thematic aspects of the experiences of Torchbearer principals was the selective or highlighting approach outlined by Van Manen

(1990). In the selective reading approach, the text was read several times and statements that appeared to be revealing about the phenomenon were highlighted. Themes were identified by using multi-colored highlighters to highlight material in the interview text that represented every participant's individual experience. Next, the researcher selected each of these identified phrases or sentences and tried to grasp as best possible what significance the highlighted material conveyed.

As a researcher, one is drawing on one's interpretative resources to make sense of what the participant is saying, but at the same time one is constantly checking one's own perspective against what the person actually said. Bracketing, the self-reflection performed by the researcher to examine personal beliefs regarding the experience of principals of Torchbearer schools, was done at several points in the data collection process. The researcher completed personal notes prior to, during, and after data collection to ensure any presumptions or biases did not influence or alter data collection or interpretation. In addition, the investigator continually reviewed his thoughts and biases with a colleague who was also involved in phenomenological research. With the themes identified, the researcher then began the process of writing the themes and describing how they were interrelated. Rewriting continued until the researcher felt the sub-themes and the relationship between the themes captured as accurately as possible the experiences of principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools.

Table 2

Summary of Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation/Leadership Roles as a Teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Specialist Degrees • Teacher Leadership Roles • Internships • Became Principal of a School where Served as AP or Teacher.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach to Leadership / Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Vision • Teacher Leadership/Empowerment • Shared Responsibilities/Team Work • Lead by Example • Passion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics (Central Office & Community) • Funding • Parental Involvement/Education • Negative Perceptions of Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sources of Efficacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childhood Upbringing (Poor or Modest) • Personal Educational Experiences • Personality/Disposition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophical Beliefs about Student Achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Expectations for All • No Excuses • Nurturing/Teaching the Whole Child (Academic, Social, and Emotional) • Accountability

After analyzing all the data collected, five themes with corresponding sub-themes emerged. The five major themes that emerged were (a) leadership preparation, (b) approach to leadership and collaboration, (c) approach to school related obstacles, (d) sources of efficacy, and (e) philosophical beliefs about student achievement are shown with their sub-themes in Table 2.

Preparation/Leadership Roles as a Teacher

The formal education of participants in this study varied. Two participants attended historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), while others attended larger public Division I universities and one participant attended a small private college. However, all participants reported to have an educational specialist degree (Ed.S).

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) stated, “When given opportunities to lead, teachers can influence school reform efforts. Waking this sleeping giant of teacher leadership has unlimited potential in making a real difference in the pace and depth of school change” (p. 102). The theme of preparation for school leadership and leadership roles as a teacher emerged from the participants. Although teacher leadership does not have to be a stepping stone to administration, many of the participants in this study reported that they served in various leadership roles in their careers before becoming a principal. Several of the roles identified were as reading or writing coaches, special education teachers, administrative interns, National Board Certified teachers, and central office curriculum teachers. Some participants reported severing as a teacher, assistant principal or a curriculum coach in the Torchbearer school where they currently serve as principal.

Participant 10 discussed the issue of becoming the principal of the school where she had served as the assistant principal:

I am walking in the footsteps of a six-and-a-half-foot black male because he was the principal here before me. We have a strong relationship, and I worked with him back in 1995 before this school was built and he brought me over as assistant principal. We have a bond and the bond that we built also reflected into the community. Then when he left everybody said I had to fill his shoes, and I could not do that. I knew that. I would not try to. I cannot fill [his] shoes. From that point I had to make it my own and be genuine.

This sentiment was also reflected by Participant 1 when she described her journey of moving from writing coach to assistant principal then to principal all in the same school.

She said this about her experience as a writing coach:

I came aboard they had never had a writing coach so I had to build it from the ground up and one of the pieces is you [the teacher] have to come with your class. I have to do this in a way not to insult you [the teacher]. I asked can you [the principal] make it possible for teachers to come along and they will be participating as well.

She continued by describing her transition from assistant principal to principal:

When I moved into the AP slot it changed a little bit because I had to become more formal and the way I dealt with them [teacher] had to change and that was a little stiff but they understood my teachings were good so when it was time to apply for the principalship, they were glad. It's like we are so glad you get to stay with us again. It was a good fit at that point.

Other participants described their ascension in less colorful but equally descriptive ways.

Participant 3 spoke of the benefit of her internship:

It [internship] was good because you got to learn the ropes without that fear factor there, you know. They had where you had to go through these different activities and presentations and sit through all these sessions with every different department, you know, so it was good. It was good training. Plus you built up a lot of relationships with other people going through it.

Participant 5 became a principal in a school where she was a teacher. She explained her transition like this, "It was kind of awkward but it worked out. I think that I had the re-

spect of the teachers when I was there. It was not as difficult as I thought when making the transition.” Similarly, Participant 8 also served as a teacher in the school where he is currently the principal. He explained:

That [the principalship] was a difficult change for the first few years because I came from a peer to the boss and for some that was a little hard. That's difficult but it also gave me a lot of advantages.

Teaching in the school where he later became principal gave him insights into the teachers and their work behaviors and personalities. He spoke passionately about working to change some of the negative attitudes that teachers had about special needs students. He stated that the attitude of many of his teachers was that special needs students were the sole responsibility of the special education teacher not the school as a whole. According to Participant 8:

Whenever a child got tested in Special Ed. the teacher said good, little Johnny, little Jane, they're yours [the special education teacher] now. The philosophy that yours, not ours is one of the first things I had to really focus on and I started with my Special Ed. [teachers] and then my focus came up on the struggling students and also looking at what do we do for the advanced students. That's what we have to do. Education these days it's not just I teach. In the old days teachers taught, they taught real hard and did a good job. Now not only did you say you taught it but you have to show that the child learned something in the process.

Participants said that they all felt their work experiences prepared them to be a principal of a high poverty school. The participants who later became principals in the same school in which they either taught or worked as assistant principal saw this as a positive situation rather than a negative one.

Approach to Leadership/ Collaboration

The second theme that emerged from this study was the participants' approach to leadership/collaboration. For the Torchbearer schools in this study, collaboration, shared

vision, teacher leadership/empowerment, and team work all appeared to be the cornerstones of their culture. Participant 6 discussed the use of professional development in empowering teachers. She stated:

First and foremost, teachers must believe their students are capable. However, it is not enough to simply believe in the children. Teachers must possess the knowledge to meet the students' instructional needs. As intense professional development began in the summer of 2003, teachers began to feel empowered by the knowledge they were gaining realizing that the grant would provide the instructional skills necessary to teach all of our students to read at or above grade level.

She continued, "Through Reading First and other professional development activities, our teachers have been empowered as educators." Participant 10 was straight-forward about her expectations for teacher leadership and a shared vision. She asserted:

I want all the teachers to be educational leaders. Not just me. I want them to have the leadership qualities and the foundation of [shared leadership] that is building the culture in the school. They have the same belief system that I have about the children and where we all want to go.

Participant 6 described how this belief has evolved over her career. She said, "I knew when I started [as principal] that I wanted to influence children." She shared how she has now included influencing teachers in her practice as principal. She went on to say, "Now my vision is the same but it's transformed a little bit. I want them [teachers] to be true leaders." Participant 5 also reported growth over her career in her ability to bring teachers on board with the school's goals. She said, "I think that I am able to know that I have more experience to get teachers on board with my beliefs now than I probably would have in the beginning of my career." Similarly, Participant 2 spoke of her evolution as principal in supporting her teachers when she remarked:

I feel like I have evolved into a principal to try to keep the teacher's personal needs healthy and keep them professionally developed so that they believe they can continue to do this difficult work [working in a high poverty school] that other schools know nothing about.

Teacher leadership was also cited by Participant 7 when she described how solutions to school site problems were addressed. She said, “So it's [solving problems] the same with the teachers as a team. If we have one problem, we [teacher leaders] have to come up with a way to solve that problem.” With regards to her team approach, Participant 7 stated:

If you still have Johnny [student] that doesn't know what to do, but he has to take the test. So whatever it is, you have to sit there and figure out what it is and then you have to find a way to override [solve] it. That's what we try to do!

The response to teacher leadership was nearly the same for Participant 8. He discussed how teachers in his school came together to solve a school-wide problem. According to Participant 8, the school had many students coming late to class after breakfast. Participant 8 said:

We [leadership team] talked about it. They [teachers] would come in 15 minutes early, unload the buses for breakfast and they [students] would have time to sit there and eat breakfast. [He acknowledged the leadership of his teachers in addressing this problem when he noted] I'm going to give the teachers that credit. As with teacher leadership, teacher buy-in to the school's vision and collaboration

were responses commonly given by participants as a reason for their schools' academic achievements. Participant 4 explained:

I think we do it as a faculty. It's not, I have the vision but I think it's all of us together. I think something that makes maybe a little bit different is we do visit our vision and make sure we're all on the same page for our kids.

She continued passionately by saying:

I think it goes back to your staff and even your kids. You know, you see your effectiveness in your product. You see your effectiveness in your teacher retention and the shared leadership model and you see when your whole staff comes together as one and that's probably because of everybody takes ownership in the building. There's not one. I don't have to stand up here and say I'm the principal, you know, they know and respect that. We have a pretty good leadership team. We have grown our own building experts. We work on being a very collaborative environment.

Participant 9 answered virtually the same in her response to teacher leadership, teacher buy-in to the vision and collaboration by saying:

I believe what I believe -- My belief has just trickled down to people that I hire to work in the building because we have to be on the same page, so we have to establish that we all believe in the same thing.

Participant 9 explained how she elicits buy-in from her staff:

Even though I am a visional person, I visualize what I think is best for the school, teachers and me, but I also like their input. I want their input in what I see and believe. We have that line of communication. I have built that line of trust with my staff. If I come up with something, they will hear it. I try to get all the keys before bringing it to them, so I don't just say -- I just don't say this is going to happen. I want some conversation and dialogue.

Participant 1 credited her teaching experience in a magnet school for the formation of the vision for her school. She wanted her teachers to teach as if they were teaching in one of the district's magnet school programs. She said:

I ask them to do academy teaching. If you're getting them [students] ready for college, that's how you should be teaching all the time, not having that false pitch because you're just damaging children. We have bright kids here and you're going to teach like it and we're going to change our name to _____Academy and they're looking like oh yeah, it's coming.

There have been numerous school closings in the school district in which Participant 3 works. As a result of these closings, teachers were moved to different schools in a process called "mandatory transfer." Participant 3 received several of these mandatory transfers and lost some non-tenured teachers in her school. She shared her challenges of focusing her staff, both new and old, around a common goal:

If we didn't have goals, everybody would be doing their own thing and I try to keep us [new and returning teachers] all focused and on point to exactly what we're doing, why we're doing it and the little steps. This is our goal right now and then we build on that. When I came, there had been some friction so we had to build a relationship again and everybody had to get back on track. Everybody's little area was their own world and I had to get us back to this is who we are, what

we're about, and it's not about math scores and about cultural program. It's about our whole school.

In a collaborative culture, members of the school community work together effectively and are guided by a common purpose. All members of the school community, teachers, administrators, students and their families share a common vision of what the school should be like. All of the participants in the study expressed a concrete appreciation for the complexity of leading a high achieving, high poverty school. These principals recognized that faculty members working together, discussing important issues relevant to their role as professionals, and taking a significant role in the school's decision-making process provided the foundation for developing a collaborative culture and therefore supporting total school success.

Challenges

The third theme to emerge in this study was the participants' approach to school-related challenges. Principals face a myriad of problems and obstacles as they carry out their daily duties and responsibilities. The participants in this study reported being faced with the challenges of politics, funding, parent involvement, and negative perceptions of high-poverty students. However, they did not see these challenges as insurmountable. The participants shared how they addressed the daily challenges of leading a high poverty/high achieving school. All of the participants spoke in detail about the challenges of parent involvement in high poverty schools. Participant 9 spoke about addressing parental involvement in vibrant terms. She leaned forward and talked about how she worked with the parents of her students. She said pointedly:

My biggest challenge is having parents to buy into what their children can do. Sometimes high poverty parents feel like we're high poverty so since that we can't do this. We're looking for a check here check there and everywhere. We can't do it. I have high self-esteem for my children. Some of them are from the projects and some of them are neighbor's kids. I believe in them.

With regards to what she tells parents about low expectations for their children, Participant 9 pointed her finger and looked straight at the researcher and said:

I am a very straight-forward person...I lived in the Bessemer Alabama with seven children and my mother raising me by herself. So I can tell you [parents] how we start out because you see my clothes and my BMW or Lexus, I came from where you came from. I decided to go in this direction. You decide to go in that direction. –Then most people that know me in this community know my story. I am not ashamed to tell my story. I go way back. I worked my way out of poverty. I had to work as a child. I worked my way. I don't owe anybody anything.

With her voice clear and direct Participant 9 continued:

The parents know my story, so I don't ...I will deal with them. They know my story but I have to use it and bring in the people that come in and then I have to retell the story. I tell you what's so -- a lot of us will sit around and act like we were born with a silver spoon in our mouths. Sometimes we really do, do that. I ask my kids, I tell them my story and how I slept in a bed with my mom until I was a teenager and that I did not have food to eat and wore wet socks to the store and shoes that my grandmother gave me. So when I tell my children, the children it's like okay. It's like clicking. So that's what I do... I built relationships. Not only with the parents, but I built them with my students. When you build relationships and once you build one with a child, you have the parents.

Similarly Participant 10 spoke passionately about the challenges of parental involvement when she remarked:

Parents do not understand how to reach their children at home. –The biggest problem that we have is getting parents to come in and trying to get that communication barrier broken down. They don't want to open up to you. Typically they don't.

To address this issue, Participant 10 said:

I think that I have an outgoing personality [which] makes a difference and it's genuine and the parents know it. I am a white principal at a primarily black school. You don't find that often and a female on top of that. –You have to build a relationship. They have to know that they can come in and talk with you and

that you have their child's best interest at heart, bottom line. First, their safety and second is education, and after that is emotional and everything needed.

This theme was echoed by Participant 8 when he stated, “You have great parents and you have some that do not value education, do not trust education. Maybe they had a bad experience in the past.” He touted motivating students as a way to address this. According to Participant 8:

Whatever the situation is, but I think it's the motivation, kind of like being a classroom teacher. When you see a light come on in that child and you're trying to teach something, and as a principal you walk up and kids are showing you things that they learn, that's the most motivational aspect I can think of, just seeing them progress.

Participant 7 noted, “Educating parents is very important.” Participant 5 also addressed parental involvement in her interview. She said, “It's getting them [parents] to see the importance of them being a part of their child's education.” Unlike many of the other participants, Participant 5 talked about bringing in the community to mitigate the lack of parent involvement. She remarked:

We do have a strong base of community support from the partners in education, so they come in and read to the children and tutor and provide any services that we need in addition to what we're doing. We just have to make it work.

Politics and funding also emerged as obstacles. Participant 1 eloquently laid out her struggles with school district politics:

It's [the principalship] been interesting. It's been a really challenging ride. A lot of politics that I had to learn which is a part of being a principal and I think they don't even prepare you for it when you're earning these certifications and pieces of paper, so that I think has been one of the hardest lessons for me. I think the instruction to lead the part was a great fit. I hit it, I got it but the politics of what you do and where you do it will make or break you. That, I think is the hardest to get under my belt and understand how to navigate and so still doing it but not so hard now. It's something to get used to.

Participant 4 described community politics this way:

As a principal now days, if you get a job as a principal and we all want to have public relations but if you make, if you discipline the wrong child of somebody important, you could be on the edge of that plank sliding off.

She went on to say of dealing with politics, “I look at it first of all and I know I'm going to do what's right for a child.”

The challenge of school funding was a reoccurring issue among the participants.

The following statements best captured this sentiment. Participant 4 discussed a severe budget cut:

I think we had a huge financial cut back this year. We had to take a part of the counselor's salary. We funded half of the accounts from our title budget because we only got a half from the allocation. This year we couldn't do that. We lost \$40,000.

She continued:

That was half the counselor's salary and I feel we're a pretty high needs school and now we'll have a half-time counselor. Those are hard decisions but there was no other way to do it so that you could still fund the other things that were important to student achievement.

Similarly, Participant 3 addressed budget cuts and the loss of staff when she reported, “Not having enough staff in general, [as a result of] the budget cuts. I think I've counted probably in the past five years I think we're down about 17 [staff members].” She provided some examples of staff members cut when she noted, “We had just the two years before I was here, I had an ARI [Alabama Reading Initiative] coach, a Title 1 teacher and an assistant principal.” Participant 5 said, “Feeling that I don't have the resources to do what I need to do and using that. To me it's an excuse.” The following quote by Participant 4 captured the essence of participants' responses to addressing budget cuts. She explained, “Well, I mean it just means that we'll all [leadership team] take on a part of a

counselor role. All of us on leadership will take on a part of that role. We just pick it [counseling duties] up.”

Low expectations for students by staff, parents, and even the students themselves were identified as a challenge. When asked about the challenges of working in a high poverty school, Participant 10 simply said, “Negative teachers.” Participant 5 shared her issue with teacher expectations when she reported:

One of the big things that I had to overcome when I first came here was getting the teachers to get past where they [students] are. So in any of the meetings you [teachers] cannot tell me anything about the parents don't do this or what they don't have.

Similarly, Participant 9 discussed teacher expectations of high poverty students. She asserted, “My biggest challenge is having [teachers] to buy into what the children can do.”

Participant 7 explained the challenges of losing teachers who understand the high expectations of working in her school and gaining teachers who do not understand these expectations. The following quote captures her thoughts:

Well, I guess obstacles is when you have people [transferred teachers] coming into the program [school] and everybody else [current staff] you have gotten them to that point where they are working and supposed to do and then you get two or three to come in [transferred teachers] that don't want to work. Now you have to retrain and you have to try to prove to them that you're for the children and not for yourself.

Participant 8 related a story about a student who had low expectations of himself:

I'll never forget I had a young man and I was trying to encourage him to learn to read, he could not read and he looked at me and said my mom and my dad cannot read. They make a good living. It's just not important for me to learn to read. Of course, that opened the conversation up about why it is important and that's what I said.

The Torchbearer principals of the high poverty elementary and middle schools in this study all had to deal with common challenges while confronting the seemingly overwhelming problems associated with their students' economic circumstances.

Sources of Efficacy

The fourth theme to emerge from this study was the sources of efficacy cited by the participants. As presented in the review of the literature, Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) identified four sources of self-efficacy expectations: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Throughout the interviews, participants shared stories of their childhood as well as their careers in education. From this process, three common sub-themes emerged from sources of self-efficacy which described how self-efficacy was developed in the study participants. Subthemes included childhood upbringing, personal educational experiences and personality/disposition.

Childhood experiences were cited most by participants as the primary source of their self-efficacy. Participant 1 talked about her childhood and when asked about the source of her self-efficacy she said without hesitation, "My upbringing". Through a combination of vicarious experience and verbal persuasion this participant attributed her self-efficacy to the lessons she learned from her mother. The experience of Participant 1 was captured by the following quote:

I came from a home where my father died when I was 11. My mom was a school teacher. She taught third grade for 34 years, I don't know how she did it. But she was just a stickler and she just did not hedge off of that. Get to school, get your work, that social stuff will be there, you need to open that book. I didn't hear anything else coming up and I didn't know anything else so as I began to get interested in various things like special ed. and the fine arts, music, we all played piano, took it for 11 years, we all appreciated art. I have three other siblings. Every one of us got the same thing.

Similarly, Participant 10 attributed self-efficacy to experiences in her childhood. When asked about where she believed the source of her self-efficacy came from she stated,

“What I experienced growing up.” She then remarked:

I don't remember much about the school but I had two passionate teachers and at the time they seemed elderly but they are still living today. I loved them. -- said that I wanted to make a difference in children's life so they would enjoy school.

She continued by talking about the influence of her mother, “My mother encouraged me because I had a passion for it. I became a principal and received my Ed. S. in 1995 and just kind of went forward from there.” Participant 6 also credited her mother for her strong self-efficacy. She noted:

Basically, my beliefs about self-efficacy have not changed as these beliefs were “ingrained” in me as a child. My mother was a teacher, and I observed her behaviors toward the students she taught while also observing her intense quest for knowledge to meet the needs of her students. She always exhibited confidence in the students’ abilities in order to ensure they were confident in themselves. –She maintained confidence in her capacity to meet her students’ needs as she continually sought and mastered instructional strategies aligned to their needs.

Participant 2 attributed her vicarious self-efficacy to her personality. She described it like this:

I think that was my personality. I don't know, some people have a certain personality. As a child I was quiet. Nobody believes that now, but I was quiet and I observed everything around me. I began to make my perceptions and my opinions. I didn't share them but I knew what I would do and wouldn't do and I knew what was not going to happen and what wouldn't go well with me, so I developed this personality when I was young.

Other participants attributed their self-efficacy to their past experience. Participant 5 credited her self-efficacy to her career experience. She stated, “That's just who I am and what I believe. It's probably my experiences working with children of high poverty and seeing this and that. They can achieve that and often times they surprise you.” When asked about the source of her self-efficacy Participant 8 said simply, “I think a variety of

places.” He continued, “Experience first, second education”. Participant 9 also cited experience as well as her personal disposition as the sources of her self-efficacy. She explained:

I am a black woman from a single parent home that had to raise seven children. It's just when you have to go, you have to go. You just can't sit. When you're in a situation like you're in like poverty, you can't just sit back and think that somebody is going to bring it to you. You have to have the aspirations that I am not going to be like my mom. I am going to keep it moving. Like I told my daughters.....one is in high school; one is an assistant principal; one a Pharmaceutical Rep, and [Participant 9 said of self-efficacy] I am like you have to keep it moving. We won't repeat anything. We want to keep it moving. And so that's it. I am my own self-motivator. Nobody has to motivate me. When you have been there -- when you have been there and know what it's like of being there. If you get stuck in the trap then you're just stuck there.

According to Bandura (1997), mastery experience is the primary source of self-efficacy development. There are many experiences that have been identified as being important for principals to master in order to meet the demands of leading a high-poverty, high-achieving school. Mastering the skills and experiences such as, implementing policies and procedures, school safety, student discipline, budgets, accurately completing reports and scheduling are all essential responsibilities of all school administrators, regardless of school demographics. However, only one of the study participants directly attributed job related mastery experience to his/her self-efficacy.

Philosophical Beliefs about Student Achievement

The fifth and final theme to emerge from this study was the participants' philosophical beliefs about student achievement. Although public schools are accountable for educating all students, schools historically have had more success educating middle-to-upper income and Caucasian students than success in educating poor and minority stu-

dents (Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpshman, 2005). Leadership styles varied greatly at the schools, but all of the participants shared common philosophical beliefs about student achievement. The subthemes identified within this theme included: high expectations for all, no excuses, nurturing, and accountability.

All of the participants had high expectations for members of their school community, teachers, students, parents, and most importantly themselves. There was a strong belief that all students could succeed academically and that faculty and staff were capable of making this happen. Participant 1 captured the essence of her belief about expectations for student achievement with the following quote, “I ask them [teachers] to do ‘academy teaching’. If you're getting them [students] ready for college, that's how you should be teaching all the time, not having that false teaching because you're just damaging children.” Participant 10 passionately talked about the expectations she holds for student achievement. She asserted, “I am just passionate about what I do. The bottom line is the children are first.” Later in the interview she noted:

I believe that every minute of the day counts in a child's life. The one word or act of kindness can completely change a child's future, and I have seen it happen. It happened to me. – I am that bull in a china shop. I am bound and determined that I am not going to give up on a child. [as a teacher] I always wanted to have special ed. children in my class room. Let me tell you this not only are we a high-poverty school but a high number of students that are –here have medical needs. Thirty-three percent of the population.

Participant 5 said plainly, “I think the major factor is, believing that all of my students can learn and I think that –I know that they have that same belief.” Later in the interview she went back to this point by saying, “They [students] can succeed and often times, like I said, they will go beyond what you expect them to, so you have to have those high ex-

expectations to set the goals and help them to feel that I can.” Participant 6 conveyed the expectations shared by the teachers at her school this way:

Teachers at _____ Elementary embrace the ethical responsibility to ensure academic achievement for all children. They are positive and energetic, but there is an underlying seriousness as they work together to address students’ needs. They are confident in their students’ abilities, set high expectations for them and then work diligently every moment of the school year to enable the students to meet the expectations. We are not seeking a ‘status.’ We are doing our job to educate the children of this nation.

Participant 3 spoke of preparing her elementary student for high school graduation. She noted, “We all meet and everybody supports one another and that way we share the common goal of getting our kids to high school and getting them graduated.” Participant 2 shared her expectations of herself. She asserted:

So when you give me a difficult situation. I like looking at all the variables. That's when I do my best work. When other people say tell me one, two, three, four how to do it, I'm not one of those people. Let me do it myself and I can come up with an answer. I would say self-efficacy is one of the number one things that I'm driven by. That's me.

The subtheme of teaching the whole child and creating a nurturing environment was cited in the interviews as vitally important to their responsibility as principal. The caring, nurturing atmosphere in each of the schools related closely to high expectations. Respectful relationships were cited by the participants to exist among adults, between adults and students, and among students. With regards to nurturing and teaching the whole child, Participant 10 said:

We're all family here and with that being said, what we're trying to do with the special needs population and general needs population is that we brought them together as far as academics, but bringing them together when it comes to physical, social, emotional. We have done that.

Participant 7 spoke of the need for school-based psychologists to help her student work through their problems:

My goal is to have a psychologist here at all times to help with the children that have the problems during the day. I really can't help, but we do the best that we can. The personal and having the right people in place other than your faculty to help with those kids that have a problem and you don't get the resources.

Participant 8 related a story of an encounter with a new student to his school. He saw the student walking in the hallway with another student. He went over and had a conversation with the students. Participant 8 remarked:

I overheard a comment a child [new student] made as I walked away. He looked at his buddy and said wow, the principal talks to you. I thought about that as I walked off and I said I want every child to know that I'm interested in them as a child. Even when I discipline a child, I don't like your behavior but I love you.

Participant 9 noted, "I build relationships. Not only with the parents but I build them with my students. When you build relationships and once you build one with a child you have the parents." Later in the interview she added,

I love my children and they love me. I love what I do. I have a passion for what I do. I enjoy what I do. I wake up in the morning and I help someone with my staff and it's so exciting.

The subtheme of accountability was noted by most participants. The following are examples of responses provided by the study participants. Participant 1 shared her thoughts about holding teachers accountable. She remarked, "You don't want to hurt feelings, you don't want to affect somebody's ability to earn a living, but you're messing with my kid's chances. I pick them [students] over you [teachers] and I've had to kind of cross that line." Participant 2 talked about holding her staff accountable when she first came to her current school. She reflected:

There were some things not taking place that should have been taken place. You know, the instruction was not explicit. It's amazing what just showing up and monitoring will do for you. When I start to listen, I listen and I look, I listen and I looked [conducted school and classroom observations]. That in itself, kind of made some people uncomfortable and when they knew they weren't doing the

right thing and didn't have any intentions of doing the right thing, we had to part company. We parted company [they were terminated].

She added later in the interview, "If this person is toxic to children, you got to put your foot down. --A person with true efficacy will not give in."

In summary, the participants shared their perceptions of their self-efficacy beliefs as principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. In the schools studied, the researcher saw high expectations exhibited in concrete ways; they were not just a rhetorical device. Principals held high expectations for faculty and staff which, in turn, held high expectations for themselves and the students. There was a strong belief that all students could succeed academically and that faculty and staff were capable of making this happen.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided a detailed summary of the findings of principals' perspectives of leading a high-poverty, high-achieving school that had been identified as an Alabama Torchbearer school. From participant interviews, the five major themes that emerged were (a) preparation/leadership roles as a teacher, (b) approach to leadership / collaboration, (c) challenges (d) sources of efficacy, and (e) philosophical beliefs about student achievement. Using thick, rich description, along with direct quotes from participants, the researcher was able to create a depiction of the participants' perspectives towards their role in leading a high-poverty, high-achieving schools. In the next chapter, a summary and discussion of these findings and implications for future studies principal self-efficacy and Torchbearer schools is presented.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

A new word is like a fresh seed sown on the ground of the discussion.

-Ludwig Wittgenstein

Introduction

According to Mattingly, Bean, and Schaefer (2012) over 16 million American children lived in poverty in 2011. The majority of those children lived in the South, and over 300 thousand lived in Alabama. Educating children of poverty presents unique challenges. Hernandez (2011) reported that children of poverty were more likely to read below grade level and have a higher high school dropout rate. Additionally, poor children often live in homes that lack essential resources. These children often have weaker academic skills and experience less academic success. Black and Hispanic are more likely to live in poverty and attend low-performing high-poverty schools (Hernandez, 2011). These children need an education grounded in the philosophy of high standards and high expectations for all. For poor children, a good education is often the only means of breaking the cycle of poverty. Without a quality education, poor children will face a grim future. As a result, creating high-achieving schools for the poor is a moral imperative.

As stated in chapter 1, the essential role of the school principal, as the leader of instructional improvement, has been a central focus of school improvement efforts since the effective schools movement of the 1970s (May & Supovitz, 2011). Evidence from the research suggests that the school principal is key component to student achievement

efforts (Finnigan & Steward, 2009). This finding is similar to studies conducted by Davis et al. (2005). Davis asserted that principals play a key role in setting the course for successful schools. Likewise, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) argued that schools cannot succeed without principals' leadership. Moreover, principal leadership appears to have greater impact on underperforming schools which are typically high-poverty (Leithwood et al., 2004). As presented in chapter 2, Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009) provided additional support to the assertion that principal leadership is important, particularly in high-poverty schools.

A review of the literature on self-efficacy appears show that it is one of the few characteristics that has been consistently related to student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Barr, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001; Tucker et al., 2005). It has been noted in the literature that teacher self-efficacy has been demonstrated to have had a positive effect on achievement among minorities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Woolfolk-Hoy & Hoy, 1998). The study of self-efficacy in principals is a promising, yet largely unexplored, avenue to understanding principals' motivation and behavior (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). A principal's sense of efficacy has been defined as a judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy has been associated with setting higher goals, exerting greater effort, and persisting longer in the face of difficulties or adversities (Hoy et al., 2008). Principals with high efficacy may have a positive effect on student achievement and increase the academic emphasis in their schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) argued that principals' sense of self-efficacy plays a vital role in meeting the expectations and demands of the position of principal.

In February 2005, the ASDOE began recognizing high-poverty, high-achieving public schools and their principals. These schools were identified as Torchbearer schools (Alabama Education News, 2005). Officials from the ASDOE began to site the success of these schools to the leadership behaviors of their principals. Dr. Angela Mangum, Director of the Torchbearer Schools Program, said that principals of Torchbearer schools, "exhibit exemplary leadership" and they, "overcome adversity in student achievement" (Alabama Education News, 2009, p. 3). Principal leadership is especially important to the success of high-poverty, high-achieving schools. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama.

This final chapter of the study first presents a summary of the research problem, methods used to conduct the study and results of the study followed by the researcher's conclusions, an explanation of the significance of the study, implications for future research and practice, and limitations of the study.

Summary of Major Findings

Through this study, the researcher explored self-efficacy beliefs of principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. A thorough description of this phenomenon was gathered through interviews and site observations. Interviews provided information about how participants viewed their roles as leaders of high-poverty, high-achieving schools. Site observations provided additional perspectives of the ways in which participants executed

their roles as principal. Additionally, site visits provided the researcher with an opportunity to identify areas of comparison and variation across school sites.

Qualitative research methods were used to conduct this phenomenological study. This phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to explore and gather rich descriptions of principals' self-efficacy in Alabama Torchbearer schools from the participants' perspectives. The researcher made a deliberate effort to select participants who could bring richness and depth to understanding the phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher sent either recruitment letters or made telephone calls to solicit participants for this study. The population of the study consisted of nine elementary principals and one middle school principal of Torchbearer schools in Alabama. These principals were in their respective positions at the time of their schools' Torchbearer designation. From the analysis of all collected data, 5 themes and 20 sub-themes emerged. A summary of the themes and subthemes can be found in Table 2.

Research Questions

Data were collected in this study to answer the research questions. The 10 face-to-face interviews were all conducted using standardized and semi-structured questions (see Appendix E). Interviews were conducted to collect detailed data from the principals of Torchbearer schools to address the research questions. These principals reported their perceptions from their own lived experiences in their schools.

The research questions for this study included the following:

1. How do principals' self-efficacy beliefs influence their leadership behaviors in urban Torchbearer schools in central Alabama?

2. How do principals' describe the challenges of leading high poverty/ high achieving schools?
3. How have principals' self-efficacy beliefs for school leadership evolved throughout their careers?
4. What sources contribute most to the principals' sense of self-efficacy?
5. What sources impede principals' sense of self-efficacy?
6. What are the perceptions of principals' about their resilience in leading a Torchbearer school?

Research Questions Answered

Research Question 1

The first question asked how principals' self-efficacy beliefs influence their leadership behaviors in Torchbearer schools in Alabama. The researcher found that the participants in the study had a variety of responses to the influence of self-efficacy on their leadership behaviors. Based on previous research by Bandura (1986), a principal's self-efficacy beliefs have a significant influence on his or her level of aspiration and goal setting, effort, adaptability, and persistence.

Participant 7 reported that she lead by example. This finding confirmed Lyons and Murphy (1994) who discovered that high efficacy principals lead by example. Participant 7 elaborated:

One thing that I found out as a principal is that you can't ask anybody to do anything that you [as principal] want do. Okay. And you have to be an example. So when I first became principal I did not go in demanding or telling people what to do. First thing I did is ask them what you want me to do.

Other participants talked about how their self-efficacy influenced them. The researcher found that three of the 10 participants answered this question by directly attributing the influence of their self-efficacy beliefs to their commitment to student academic success. This was consistent with research by Hillman (1986) which determined that a strong sense of self-efficacy in principals had been linked to higher student achievement. Participant 5 said, "I think the major factor [influence of efficacy] is, believing that all of my students can learn and I think that... I know that they have that same belief." Later in her response, she said, "Really there are no excuses and high expectations." Participant 9 also cited belief as an influence of her self-efficacy. She reported:

I believe what I [believe] ...what I have done is my belief [it] has just trickled down to the people that I hire to work in the building because we have to be on the same page, so we have to establish that we all believe in the same thing.

Participant 2 also shared her belief about the influence of her self-efficacy on her leadership. She spoke about her childhood disposition, which continues today and her early years as a teacher with few resources. She shared the following:

I think even when I was young, even as I was a fifth grader. I always thought I could do anything that I wanted to do. I don't know where it came from, but I know that was the way I was ...I never thought anything was out of my reach. That's my perception. In college, I was the same way. I thought that if it could be done, I could do it. Of course, when I went into the classroom [teacher] and became an administrator, I had the same philosophy.

The researchers also found that two participants talked about being self-aware.

Participant 4 noted, "I think that probably you have to know yourself, what you want or what is important for you and your children and go for it." Similarly, Participant 2 discussed being self-aware. She stated:

I always thought I could do anything that I wanted to do. I don't know where it came from but I know that was the way I was ...I never thought this was going to be difficult. I never thought anything was out of my reach. That's my perception.

The researcher found that the remaining participants highlighted focusing on goals, empowering teachers and not taking things personally in describing how their sense of self-efficacy influenced their leadership behaviors. This was consistent with research by Osterman and Sullivan (1996) which found that principals who were highly efficacious were more flexible and adaptable, more likely to use collaboration in the change process, and more persistent in pursuit of their goals (Osterman & Sullivan, 1996). Participant 3 spoke of goals, “If we didn't have goals everybody would be doing their own thing and I try to keep us all focused and on point to exactly what we're doing, why we're doing it and we take little steps.”

Participant 3 also reported that her self-efficacy influenced the way she empowered students and teachers. This confirmed research by Nettles and Harrington (2007) which found that effective principals distribute leadership throughout the school. Additionally, research by Osterman and Sullivan (1996) found that principals who were highly efficacious were more likely to use collaboration. Similarly, Aderhold (2005) showed principals with a sense of self-efficacy engaged their staff in shared decision making. Participant 3 said, “I believe that the self-efficacy of both students and staff is critical to school success.” Participant 3 also noted, “Through Reading First [reading program] and other professional development activities, our teachers have been empowered as educators.”

Finally, Participant 10 cited that her self-efficacy influenced her by giving her the ability to not take things personally. This confirmed a study by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) which found that highly-efficacious principals persisted in the face of diffi-

culties. Participant 10 said, “First of all, I don't wear my feelings on my shoulders. I learned that you cannot do that and be successful. I really don't take things personal.”

Research Question 2

The second question asked principals to describe the challenges of leading high poverty/ high achieving schools. The study participants were almost unanimous in their responses. As schools face federal, state and local demands for increased student performance, this daunting task is particularly problematic for schools with high poverty levels. Participants in this study described the challenges they faced in leading a high poverty/high achieving school. The researcher found that seven participants cited parental involvement as chief among the challenges they faced. This finding was supported by previous research by Duke et al. (2007) which found that the perception that inadequate parental involvement was a factor in high-poverty schools. In this study Participant 5 best summarized this statement by saying:

...think that it's [challenge] the parental involvement. It's getting them to see that the importance of them being a part of their child's education. Although it's ...I don't want to say that it's the obstacle but, you know, we do have a pretty good base of parents that are involved, but for the most part they are not...

Other participants reported similar responses. Participant 10 noted:

Parents not understanding how to reach their children at home. I really do want... parents participating in school, and it goes back to the same thing that I was saying a while ago. The biggest problem that we have is getting parents to come in and I am trying to get that communication barrier broken down.

Participant 7 reported:

We have challenges of parents that won't get involved the way that it should. If I could get parents themselves more involved and see the importance of their children getting the best education, I think that we could see a big difference.

Participant 9 said, "My biggest challenge is having parents to buy into what the children can do. Sometimes high poverty parents feel like we're high poverty so since that we can't do this." With regards to the social issues associated with her community Participant 3 said:

We do have some drug problems. Our parents, we do have some of that because it is poverty. They don't have jobs but things are looking up around here with the Dollar Tree coming in. Our parents take a lot [Deal with a lot].

The researcher of this inquiry found that other challenges identified by participants were politics and low expectations for students. Research by Duke et al. (2007) similarly found these perceived challenges as conditions associated with high poverty schools. Participant 8 talked about parental expectations, "Challenges that personally, I think, is trying to overcome the perception that education is not valued at home as much, in some homes." Regarding school district politics Participant 1 said:

It's [principalship] been interesting. It's been a really challenging ride. A lot of politics that I had to learn which is a part of being a principal and I think they don't even prepare you for it when you're earning these certifications and pieces of paper. So that I think has been one of the hardest lessons for me. I think the instruction to lead the part was a great fit. I hit it, I got it but the politics of what you do and where you do it will make or break you.

Previous researchers have asserted that student poverty affects educational outcomes (Hernandez, 2011; Jamar & Pitts, 2005). Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009) contended that principal leadership is particularly important in high poverty schools.

Research Question 3

The third question focused on how principals' self-efficacy beliefs for school leadership evolved throughout their careers. The researcher found that all of the participants reported that their self-efficacy beliefs have remained the same throughout their careers. This finding is consistent with research by Bandura (1997) which found that once self-efficacy beliefs have been established over time they are unlikely to change. Participant 1 described the origins of her self-efficacy, "I don't think it's changed." Similar to most participants, she added about the role of principal, "I do now understand that I have to grow." Although all participants said their self-efficacy levels were unchanged throughout their careers most reported, as Participant 1, that their skills and expertise as a principal had evolved. This was illustrated by the reply of Participant 2, "I don't think it's changed. I think that I still have the same efficacy. I think I've learned a lot more. I had to go step by step." Similarly, Participant 5 said:

I think that it's basically the same. I have always had the same belief. I have always taught in the inner city schools. That's always been my belief. I think that I am able to now that I have more experience to get teachers on board with my belief now than I probably would have in the beginning of my career.

Participant 10 stated "My goal [self-efficacy] is still the same to reach as many children as I can. I have a different ...I little different insight because I have been evolving ever since I became a principal."

Participant 6 noted:

Basically, my beliefs about self-efficacy have not changed as these beliefs were ingrained in me as a child. My mother was a teacher, and I observed her behaviors toward the students she taught while also observing her intense quest for knowledge to meet the needs of her students. She always exhibited confidence in the students' abilities in order to ensure they were confident in themselves. Further, she maintained confidence in her capacity to meet her students' needs as she continually sought and mastered instructional strategies aligned to their needs.

Research Question 4

The fourth question focused on sources that contribute most to the principals' sense of self-efficacy. The researcher found that the study participants identified life experiences/upbringing, job effectiveness, personality and support from colleagues/ supervisors as common responses to what contributes to their self-efficacy. As stated in chapter 2, Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) asserted four sources of self-efficacy expectations: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. The researcher found that experience and/or upbringing were cited most by participants when asked what contributes most to self-efficacy. This finding is consistent with earlier research by Bandura (1997) which found that mastery experience or performance accomplishment is the most essential source of self-efficacy. Participant 10 answered, "What I experienced growing up. My personal and educational background and the fact that [as a child] I did not like school. I was an only child and growing up was hard. I can relate to a lot of these kids." Participant 9 also attributed her level of self-efficacy to life experiences:

I am a black woman from a single parent home that had to raise seven children. It's just when you have to go, you have to go. You just can't sit. When you're in a situation like you're in like poverty, you can't just sit back and think that somebody is going to bring it to you. You have to have the aspirations that I am not going to be like my mom. I am going to keep it moving.

Participant 8 cited his experience as a principal and his education. With regards to his self-efficacy, he noted, "I think a variety of places. Experience first, second, education."

Participant 4 also cited her experience as a principal:

I think it goes back to your staff and even your kids. You know, you see you're effectiveness and your product [student achievement]. You see your effectiveness and your teacher retention and the shared leadership model and you see when

your whole staff comes together as one and that's probably because of everybody takes ownership in the building.

Participant 6 cited her effectiveness in her role as a principal as well. She reported:

Distributed leadership ...utilizing all strengths, knowledge, and skill sets in the building efficiently and effectively and two Maintaining confidence as an instructional leader by ensuring that I maintain knowledge to effectively serve as this instructional leader...being a continual learner who feels she will never arrive.

In addition to her personality, Participant 5 cited her experience in working with high poverty students:

That's just who I am and what I believe. Probably my experience working with children of high poverty and seeing this and that, they can achieve that and often times they surprise you. They can succeed and often times, like I said, they will go beyond what you expect them to, so you have to have those high expectations to set the goals and help them to feel that I can.

Participant 1 spoke of the lessons learned from observing her mother as the source of her self-efficacy. This finding confirmed the research by Usher and Pajares (2008) which found that increased self-efficacy can be achieved through vicariously observing others. Although less effective than masterly experience, it still significantly influences self-efficacy. Participant 1 described her self-efficacy today:

It came from a home where my father died when I was 11, my mom was a schoolteacher. Third grade for 34 years, I don't know how she did it. But she was just a stickler and she just did not hedge off of that, get to school, get your work, that social stuff will be there, you need to open that book.

Participant 2 and 5 both cited their personality and disposition as contributing factors to their sense of self-efficacy. The researcher contended that this represented Bandura's fourth source of self-efficacy, emotional arousal. This refers to the positive feelings an individual gets from accomplishing a task or the negative feelings when an individual fails at a task. Participant 2 stated:

I think that was my personality. I don't know, some people have a certain personality. I absorbed everything around me. I began to make my perceptions and my opinions. I didn't share them but I knew what I would do and wouldn't do and I knew what was not going to happen and what wouldn't go well with me so I developed this personality when I was young ...I just had that personality. I think my family has a strong personality period.

In addition to her personality, Participant 5 cited her experience in working with high poverty students:

That's just who I am and what I believe. Probably my experience working with children of high poverty and seeing this and that, they can achieve that and often times they surprise you. They can succeed and often times, like I said, they will go beyond what you expect them to, so you have to have those high expectations to set the goals and help them to feel that I can.

Participant 3 was the only individual who identified support from her colleagues and central office as contributing factors to sense of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997), this refers to this source of self-efficacy as verbal or social persuasion. This involves leading a person to believe that he/she can successfully accomplish a task through the power of suggestion. Bandura found Verbal persuasion is most effective when the individual has confidence in the knowledge and skills the persuader possesses (Bandura, 1997). Participant 3 noted, "The central office. They support you in everything. Anyone in curriculum [central office department] will come up. You get a lot of support from the central office and other principals."

Research Question 5

The fifth question asked about sources that impede the principals' sense of self-efficacy. The researcher found based on the participants' responses, that there were a number of items that might impede self-efficacy, including: central office bureaucracy, funding and budget cuts, and mediocre teachers. All of the participants reported these ob-

stacles begrudgingly. However, they made it clear that despite any impediment they were committed to student achievement and made no excuses. This was consistent with previous research conducted by Bandura (1994). Bandura found that people with high self-efficacy approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered, not as situations to be avoided. Similarly, Wagner (2008) found that self-efficacy plays a role in the approach people take to obtain goals, complete tasks and overcome obstacles. This was illustrated by the response of Participant 2 when she talked about bureaucracy:

I think that they're definitely various and things that you face that sometimes I feel that will break me or I feel like it's, it could break me, bureaucracy, things not getting done. There are a lot of things in that realm I feel chisel away at you. I think that's the difference between a person with self-efficacy and the average person...

She later remarked, "A person with true efficacy will not give in." When asked this question, Participant 4 gave a two word answer, "central office." When asked of clarification, she said, "You close your door and do what's right for kids." Many of the participants saw the central office as a bureaucracy that impeded the work of principals rather than supporting it. Participant 1 spoke of implementing an unpopular central office mandate, "I do see that there are some things [mandates] on the horizon that might put a bump there. It's not going to stop it short of me getting fired. [I] Do what you [I] need to do."

The response of Participant 9 also referred to mandates:

If the state requires you to do certain things, you have to do it. A lot of times I don't worry about what people are asking me to do it, but I just do. I mean, it has to be done. If I keep dragging around and saying I have to get that report done but I don't know why then I am just frustrating myself. When you frustrate yourself then you do it to the people around you. Even those people can be your resources to help you. Sometimes as principals we feel that we're up here and afraid to say that I need your help.

The lack of funding was reported by many participants. In Alabama over the past 10 years school districts have been affected by multiple years of prorated budgets. This has caused superintendents in local school districts to make tough decisions about spending priorities. Participant 3 shared her frustrations, “Not having enough staff in general, [and] the budget cuts.” Participant 10 gave a one word response, “funding” after further questioning she added, “I really don't know that there's anything that” she paused and said, “...negative teachers.” She continued, “There's something that gets in the way. It's an obstacle, but I don't let it stop me. It can be an obstacle but it doesn't stop me.” This finding was consistent with the conclusions of Tschannen-Morgan and Gareis (2004). They stated, “Principals efficacy beliefs influence the level of effort and persistence they put forth in their daily work, as well as their resilience in the face of setbacks” (p. 582). Participant 5 reported, “I think that sometimes as administrators those are short falls and losing good teachers and teachers that are mediocre and those things to prey on you.” Like the other participants she declared, “To me it's an excuse.” Similarly, Participant 7 reported that losing good teachers and having mediocre teachers may impede self-efficacy:

Well, I guess obstacles is when you have people [teachers] coming into the program [school] and everybody else you have gotten them to that point where they are working and supposed to do and then you get two or three [mediocre teachers] to come in that don't want to work.

Research Question 6

The sixth question focused on the perceptions of principals about their resilience in leading a Torchbearer school. As noted by Patterson (2007), “What separates resilient from less resilient principals begins with how leaders interpret adversity when it strikes,”

(p. 17). In this study, responses to question six were presented by the participants in varied ways. However, the researcher found that all participants talked about their ability to bounce back and move forward. Research by Smith et al. (2006) established highly efficacious principals were more likely to preserve longer and more quickly bounce back from failure. Similarly, Bandura (1988) found that positive well-being and accomplishments require an optimistic and resilient sense of personal efficacy. In the present study, Participant 10 spoke of her resiliency, “The fact that I do keep bouncing back, the children can see that. I am a role model [to students and] the teachers.” She indicated that her resilient spirit could be attributed to her mother, “I am just passionate about what I do. The bottom line is the children are first.” She concluded by saying, “So with that being said I think that's probably...why I am that bull in a China shop.” The theme of pushing forward despite setbacks was expressed by all of the participants. As demonstrated in research by Wagner (2008) which found that self-efficacy plays a substantial role in how individuals approach obstacles. In a matter-of-fact way, Participant 7 stated, “We have set backs all the time...So whatever it is, you have to sit there and figure out what it is and then you have to find a way to override it. That's what we try to do.” Participant 5 described her response to her school's lower test scores:

You have to be able to bounce back. I mentioned that our scores slipped just a little this school year. At first it was a little but I know that my teachers work hard. I know that there were some factors that may have caused that. Some scores were good and I am going to separate that and not as seeing that the job was not done as well as before. You definitely have to take those, you know, as the things that kind of knock you down and use those as steppingstones to know what you need to do and improve to be better next time. It's encouraging.

Participant 9 extended the theme of overcoming obstacles by working with a team of people:

Like I said I go with it head on. If it's something to be done, then I am going to figure out a way to get it done. I am going to get people to buy in to help me get it done...So just working together as a team.

Participant 1 also reported bringing in others to help her with her resiliency. She spoke of a problem of her students not having supplies:

I think one of the key pieces is you have to bring the community in and then feed off them and [the community] bringing energy and it's a different kind of energy and they're acknowledging what you're trying to do and they begin to assist. This past year, especially, from food and backpacks to uniforms to school supplies to people tutoring, we actually got the whole thing last year...we were able to be resilient.

The researcher found that Participant 3 said that her resiliency came from her students' commitment to their larger community. Support for this assertion was found in research by Milstein and Hendry (2008). Milstein and Hendry identified developing relationships among stake holder groups as one of the resiliency characteristics of school principals. Participant 3 said, "They're not just representing themselves. They are representing this community, not the school, this community." She shared a quote she had heard from her previous supervisor, "My principal that I grew up under, she would always say she doesn't care how you ice the cake, just ice the cake."

The researcher found that Participant 2 was the only principal to identify professional development as a way to improve her resiliency. This is supported by research by Nettles and Harrington (2007) which found that principals of higher performing schools both promoted and participated in professional learning opportunities. Participant 2 reported:

You have to be resilient. There are times where I think that this is it, I think I'm broken because it's tiring and exhausting work. It's late hour work, it's weekend work and then on a daily basis it's fast pace, a lot of issues that come your way that you have to make the decision on at the spur of the moment and sometimes I think I feel like I want to give up. I think that self-efficacy is part of your make

up and the thing that I was saying about the professional development...In order for me to be resilient, I look for new ideas, new ways, school-wide focuses that we all can latch on to. I read the hall, I read the school, I read the personalities and I say this is coming up. So part of that research and professional development is to keep me strong because when I read something and I get excited about it then I'm able to share that with teachers and make them feel the same way.

Summary of Questions Answered

This qualitative study provided valuable information in addressing the self-efficacy perceptions of principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. The researcher discovered that principals' self-efficacy beliefs were influenced by their personal disposition, their willingness to empower teachers and their unwavering belief in their students. The participants overwhelmingly identified the lack of parental support, in addition to funding, politics, and low expectations for students as challenges of leading a high poverty, high achieving schools. Participants indicated that their self-efficacy beliefs have remained constant throughout their careers; however, they acknowledged that their experiences in the role of principal have caused them to grow and evolve. Participants credited their experience as helping them implement their self-efficacy beliefs and cited their upbringing, experiences in education, and personal disposition as sources of their self-efficacy. Participants reluctantly identified funding, mediocre teachers, and central office bureaucracy as sources that could impede their self-efficacy. Participants were quick to remark that they did not allow these impediments to deter them. Participants also indicated that their resiliency came from their determination, lessons from their parents and belief in the greater good for students.

Lessons Learned

Many lessons were learned through the process of conducting this phenomenological study. One lesson learned was that the principals of the Torchbearer schools in this study served in leadership roles either in their districts or in their current schools before being appointed principal. Participants reported being teachers, academic coaches, and /or assistant principals in the school that they currently serve as principal.

Another lesson learned was that principals in this investigation approached leadership from the standpoint of collaboration, shared leadership, and leading by example. The participants in this study recognized the importance of being a proactive leaders and actively supporting their staffs.

A third lesson learned involved resiliency. According to Patterson (2007), “What separates resilient from less resilient principals begins with how leaders interpret adversity when it strikes” (p. 17). Consistent with this research, principals of the Torchbearer schools in the study were driven and did not see obstacles as stumbling blocks but as stepping stones.

The final lesson learned was that principals of the Torchbearer schools in the study had high expectations for teachers, students and most importantly themselves. These principals also had an unwavering commitment to student achievement.

Limitations of the Study

The focus of this multisite phenomenological study was focused on self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. There were several limitations to the study. First, the study was conducted with only principals of Alabama Torchbearer

schools. Although this addressed the gap in the literature, given that the majority of research exploring self-efficacy beliefs has been conducted with teachers, the population of this study limits its transferability. Second, all of the participants were leaders of high poverty, high achieving, Torchbearer schools, which also limits the transferability of the findings. Third, the sample size of 10 participants is rather small but typical of qualitative studies. In qualitative studies, the recruiting process continues until saturation or no new information is revealed (Creswell, 1998). However, this limits the transferability of the study. Finally, in qualitative studies, researcher bias is part of the methodology and cannot be completely eliminated. The researcher took steps to decrease bias such as bracketing, peer debriefing, and member checking. These processes were helpful in decreasing the influence of the researcher's biases in the study. Despite these techniques, qualitative research is always affected by the researcher's own characteristics and experiences. Therefore, the conclusions drawn in this study can be open to other interpretations and analysis.

Implications of the Study

Principals serve an important role in developing high performing schools, however, the research literature on the types of knowledge, skills, and abilities principals need to be successful is not well developed (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). As noted in the literature, principals of high poverty schools have had difficulty meeting their NCLB goals (Guin, 2004; Orr et al., 2008). According to Haycock (2001), among the numerous problems faced by high poverty schools are, the shortage of qualified staff, low expectations, and a lack of a rigorous curriculum. As a result of high principal turnover, these schools

are more likely to be led by principals who have limited or no experience (Branch et al., 2009). The role of the principal is essential in changing deeply ingrained beliefs and attitudes about the inevitability of low achievement in high poverty schools (Linda & Christine, 2004). A principal's self-efficacy is a personal assessment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads (Bandura, 1997). McCollum and Kajs (2009) determined that efficacious principals will be successful as school leaders. A principal's self-efficacy belief has a significant impact on his or her level of aspiration and goal setting, effort, adaptability, and persistence (Bandura, 1986). The researcher has worked in a high-poverty school district for his entire career. The researcher is keenly aware of the challenges that educating students in high-poverty schools present. Findings from each study question provided the researcher the impetus for developing implications related to the study of perceptions of principals' self-efficacy beliefs in Alabama Torchbearer schools. The major findings of this phenomenological study are related to the themes that emerged. These themes were: (a) preparation/leadership roles as a teacher, (b) approach to leadership / collaboration, (c) challenges (d) sources of efficacy, and (e) philosophical beliefs about student achievement.

Preparation/Leadership Roles as a Teacher

Participants in this study reported working in leadership roles prior to becoming a principal. The majority of the principals studied were either reading or writing coaches, National Board Certified teachers, special education teachers and or curriculum teachers. Additionally, participants reported serving as a teacher or an assistant principal in the

same school were they were later served as principal. The researcher found that this provided the participants with insights into teachers, students and community. It is recommended that schools and districts actively support and foster leadership in teachers who serve in a variety of capacities.

In addition it is recommended that school districts support leadership mentoring programs within schools. It is also recommended that districts identify exemplary school administrators to serve as mentors. Teacher leaders then could be identified and paired with a qualified mentor. Having qualified mentors and district level support for current and aspiring principals would allow these principals and aspiring principals to develop the sense of self-efficacy needed to become effective in leading a high-poverty, high-achieving school.

Approach to Leadership/Collaboration

Participants in this study reported similar approaches to collaboration, teacher empowerment and implementing a shared vision. Principals fully understood the complexities of leading high-poverty, high-achieving schools. Principals provided opportunities for collaboration for their teachers through common planning times. These principals recognized the necessity of developing teacher leaders and empowering them to address school-wide issues. It is recommended that districts provide professional development to aspiring and new principals on ways to develop building based leadership teams. The goal of this development is to provide principals with skills in effective school decision making processes which in turn will support a collaborative school culture.

Challenges

In general principals in public education often work in turbulent environments. Principals of high-poverty schools face a myriad of challenges as they carry out their daily duties. Principals in this study identified politics, inadequate funding, poor parent involvement and negative perceptions of high-poverty students as challenges of leading their schools. It is recommended that professional development for principals give specific attention to the challenges identified. The goal of this professional development would be to prepare principals to be successful in high poverty school environments.

Sources of Efficacy

Participants in this study reported that they attributed their self-efficacy to experience, education, and lessons from others. Principals who are highly-efficacious have been tied to successful school leadership. Additionally, principal's self-efficacy belief impacts goal setting, effort, adaptability, and persistence. These principals do not give up when they face of the challenges of leading high-poverty schools. It is recommended that professional development opportunities provide principals with authentic experiences that provide real world applications. Since vicarious experience and verbal persuasion have been found to increase self-efficacy, principals and aspiring principals should be mentored by a highly effective principal.

Philosophical Beliefs about Student Achievement

Participants in this study reported high expectations for student achievement. Their high expectations were not limited to their students. These principals had high ex-

pectations for all stakeholder groups their teachers, parents, and most importantly themselves. These principals focused their energies on student learning and school improvement. Principals held themselves accountable for student achievement. It is recommend that school districts support principals by ensuring that schools have necessary resources. Additionally, school districts should ensure that schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty are adequately staffed with highly qualified teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative study was limited to 10 Torchbearer principals throughout the state of Alabama; however, the findings of this investigation may provide keen insights and guidance for future research. Although gender was not a determining factor in the selection of participants, 9 of the 10 principals in this study were female. In a previous research study, Smith et al. (2006) reported that female principals spent more time on instructional leadership issues and had significantly higher levels of self-efficacy for instructional leadership as compared to their male counterparts. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the self-efficacy beliefs of female principals of high poverty, high achieving schools. Participants in this study overwhelmingly cited school districts' central offices as an impediment to self-efficacy. Further research is needed to explore the relationship between central office administration and principal self-efficacy. Four of the 10 principals in this study served as a teacher, academic coach, and/or assistant principal in the school where they currently serve as principal. Future researchers may wish to examine ascension of principals of high poverty, high achieving schools. Finally, it may be

beneficial for individuals to examine the role of a collaborative school culture as related to principals' sense of self-efficacy.

Conclusion

Over the past 3 decades, the available literature on leadership in education has provided numerous theories about which school factors influence students' academic achievement (May & Supovitz, 2011). The leadership of principals is vital in meeting school challenges of high poverty schools. Principals of schools with high concentrations of students who are living in poverty often struggle to meet local, state and federal requirements (Guin, 2004; Orr et al., 2008). Particular attention has been paid to the quality of leadership of the school principal in determining school success (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Research examining principals' self-efficacy beliefs has been largely unexplored. According to Bandura (1986), principals with high levels of self-efficacy are more able to persist in the face of difficulty, overcome obstacles and perform at a higher level than those with lower levels of self-efficacy. Additionally, McCollum, and Kajs (2009) concluded highly efficacious principals set higher goals for themselves and their schools and will influence the motivation and commitment of followers.

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the self-efficacy beliefs of 10 principals of Torchbearer schools in Alabama. The researcher established that principals' self-efficacy beliefs were influenced by their personal disposition, their willingness to empower teachers, their high expectations for all, and an unwavering belief in their students. These findings may influence the future leadership preparation programs and sup-

port offered by school districts' central offices. Additionally, the findings of this research provide recommendations for future investigations of school leadership. The results of this investigation are intended to help researchers and practitioners develop a better understanding of principals' self-efficacy beliefs in high poverty, high achieving schools.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM



Institutional Review Board for Human Use

Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is FWA00005960 and it expires on January 24, 2017. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: SULLIVAN, MARK A

Co-Investigator(s):

Protocol Number: **X120423006**

Protocol Title: *A Phenomenological Study of Principal's Self-Efficacy Beliefs in Alabama Torchbearer Schools*

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 5-11-12. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 5-11-12

Date IRB Approval Issued: 5-11-12

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

470 Administration Building
701 20th Street South
205.934.3789
Fax 205.934.1301
irb@uab.edu

The University of
Alabama at Birmingham
Mailing Address:
AB 470
1530 3RD AVE S
BIRMINGHAM AL 35294-0104

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Recruitment Letter

Date:

Address:

Dear _____:

I am writing to invite you to voluntarily participate in a doctoral research project I am conducting. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the self-efficacy beliefs of 11 principals in Alabama Torchbearer schools.

You have purposefully been selected to be one of eleven participants in this project based on the fact that you meet the criteria of being Principal of an urban Torchbearer school at the time that the school received this designation. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of self-efficacy of urban Alabama principals of Torchbearer schools utilizing a qualitative method of investigation.

The time frame for this project is June 2012 through May 2013. Because your self-efficacy beliefs will be the focus of this study, your involvement will not necessarily be extensive. I anticipate conducting one face-to-face audio-recorded interview with you.

Prior to conducting any interview with you, I will provide you an outline of questions I want to ask in order to give you time to think about your responses. Throughout these interviews you might also be asked some clarifying questions to elicit additional details and examples from your responses. I will take all precautions to ensure your confidentiality. You would have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. I am totally appreciative to you for your participation in my research study and assisting me with my professional endeavors. The data from this research will be used in partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree and will be published in my dissertation. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if there is any additional information I can provide you. I look forward to hearing from you by June 15, 2012. If you agree to participate, I may be reached at (205) 243-7357 or by email at msullivan@bhm.k12.al.us.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Sullivan

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Informed Consent Document

TITLE OF RESEARCH: A Phenomenological Study of Principals' Self-efficacy Beliefs in Alabama Torchbearer Schools.

IRB PROTOCOL: X120423006

INVESTIGATOR: Mark A. Sullivan

SPONSOR: The University of Alabama at Birmingham
Department of Human Studies

Explanation of Procedures

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research study. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore self-efficacy beliefs of principals of Alabama Torchbearer schools. If you agree to participate, you will take part in two (60 minute each) face-to-face audio-recorded interviews. You may be asked to clarify statements made in the initial interview. The follow-up questions or third interview (no longer than 45 minutes) may be by phone, by email, or in person. The time frame for this project is June, 2012 through May, 2013.

Prior to conducting any interview with you, I will provide you with an outline of questions I want to ask in order to give you time to think about your responses. Throughout these interviews you might also be asked some clarifying questions to elicit additional details and examples from your responses. I will take all precautions to ensure your confidentiality. You will have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. The data from this research will be used in partial fulfillment of the Investigator's doctoral thesis degree requirement.

Risks and Discomforts

The risks and discomforts involved in this study are no greater than the risks and discomforts of day-to-day living. Your identity will be kept confidential. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Benefits

You may not benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, this study may help us better understand the impact of a principal's self-efficacy beliefs on student achievement in high poverty, high achieving schools.

UAB IRB

Date of Approval 5/11/12 Participant's Initials _____
Not Valid On 5/11/13

Confidentiality

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. Data will be stored in a locked metal cabinet in the investigator's school office and audio tapes will be destroyed five years after the completion of the project. Electronic data will be stored on password protected computers. The data from this research will be used in partial fulfillment of doctoral thesis degree requirements. You should, however, be aware that we might choose to publish the findings of this study at a later date. However, your identity will not be revealed. The Investigator will take precautions to ensure confidentiality, using a pseudonym. Research information that identifies you may be shared with the UAB Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research, including the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty

Your taking part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time and you may choose not to answer any question. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with this institution.

Cost of Participation

There will be no cost to you for taking part in this study.

Payment for Participation in Research

Your participation in this study is on a volunteer basis.

Alternatives

Your alternative is to not participate in this study.

Questions

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact: Mark A. Sullivan. I will be glad to answer any of your questions. My number is 205- 243-7357. I may also be reached by email @ msulli007@gmail.com.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll-

free number, press the option for "all other calls" or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

Legal Rights

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document.

Signatures

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed document.

Signature of Participant Date

Signature of Investigator Date

Signature of Witness Date

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT DATA SHEET

Participant Data Sheet

Participant Information

1. Participant's Name _____
2. Position _____
3. How many years have you been the principal of this school? _____
4. Where have you served the most time as a school principal?
 - a. Urban schools _____
 - b. Suburban schools _____
 - c. Rural schools _____
5. At which university did you obtain your principal's certification? _____
6. What year? _____
7. How many years were you a teacher? _____
8. What grade(s) did you teach? _____

School Information

9. Name of School _____
10. School Address _____
11. School Phone _____
12. School Fax _____
13. Number of staff members _____
14. Student Enrollment _____
15. Number of sections/classes at each grade level

K _____	1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____
5 _____	6 _____	7 _____	8 _____	

Researcher's Notes

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| _____ Informed Consent Form Signed | Date _____ |
| _____ Interview Completed | Date _____ |
| _____ Observation Completed | Date _____ |
| _____ Artifacts Collected | Date _____ |
| _____ Study Codes Assigned | Code _____ |
| _____ Gift Certificate Sent | Date Mailed _____ |

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Name: _____ Organization: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to share and express your thoughts. I will be asking you many questions and recording your responses verbatim. After the transcription of your thoughts and feelings, I will ask for your review of what I interpreted. It is important for the transcription to be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase something you've said with an incorrect interpretation.

What I am interested in exploring in this study are the perceptions of self-efficacy of urban Alabama principals of Torchbearer schools.” You've had a chance to review the questions I am going to ask you. Please express your thoughts and feelings as freely as you like. I really want to know your perspective concerning your experiences overcoming the odds and leading an urban Torchbearer school. I may ask you some additional questions that you have not reviewed as we go along in order to clarify for me what you mean. Do you consent to have our interview to be tape recorded? Are you ready to start?

Interview Questions:

1. Discuss your educational background, including your degrees, subjects taught, etc.
2. How long have you been a principal?
3. How do your self-efficacy beliefs influence your leadership behaviors in urban Torchbearer schools in central Alabama?
4. How do you describe the challenges of leading high poverty/ high achieving urban schools?
5. How have your self-efficacy beliefs for school leadership evolved throughout your career?
6. What sources contribute most to your sense of efficacy?
7. What sources impede your sense of efficacy?
8. How has resilience played a role in your school attaining Torchbearer status?

APPENDIX F
PERSONAL INTEREST

Personal Interest

As a researcher one must acknowledge that background and experiences may influence how one might perceive participants and data to be collected in this study. The researcher is an African American male from a low socioeconomic background. He was born a Navy brat in Portsmouth, Virginia however the researcher was raised in Alabama and educated in an urban school district Alabama. The researcher believes his experiences give him a unique perspective on urban education.

The researcher is a 17-year career educator in an urban school district in central Alabama. He brings to the study a myriad of perceptions, that of a former teacher, principal, director, and assistant superintendent. As a veteran administrator in an urban school system, the researcher has served as the principal of a school with nearly 100% of the student population qualifying for the free/reduced lunch program. In addition the researcher served as principal of a Title 1 school with 20% ELL population as well as having variety of experiences with many of the schools and principals in this study. Consistent with qualitative work, perceptions of the research will be an integral part of constructing meaning with participants as well as the interpretation of resulting data. Biases of the researcher will be acknowledged.

APPENDIX G
SAMPLE INTERVIEW JOURNAL SHEET

Sample Interview Journal Sheet

Questions	Participants' Responses	Additional notes
1. Discuss your educational background, including your degrees, subjects taught, etc.		
2. How long have you been a principal?		
3. How do principals' self-efficacy beliefs influence their leadership behaviors in urban Torchbearer schools in central Alabama?		
4. How do principals describe the challenges of leading high poverty/ high achieving urban schools?		
5. How have the principals' self-efficacy beliefs for school leadership evolved throughout their careers?		
6. What sources contribute most to the principals' sense of efficacy?		
7. What sources impede the principals' sense of efficacy?		

APPENDIX H
RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Recruitment Email

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student working under the direction of Dr. Loucrecia Collins, in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

I am conducting a research study to examine the self-efficacy beliefs of 11 principals in Alabama Torchbearer schools.

I obtained your name from the 2011 list of Alabama Torchbearer schools provided by the Alabama State Department of Education and your address from the Alabama Education Directory.

I am asking you to participate by agreeing to a 60 minute interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

I will take precautions to ensure your confidentiality. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if there is any additional information I can provide you. If you agree to participate, I may be reached at (205) 243-7357 or by email at msullivan@bhm.k12.al.us. I look forward to hearing from you by June 15, 2012.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Sullivan

APPENDIX I
RECRUITMENT TELEPHONE SCRIPT

Recruitment Telephone Script

Hello,

My name is Mark Sullivan and I am a graduate student working under the direction of Dr. Loucrecia Collins, in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

I am calling you because I am conducting a research study to examine the self-efficacy beliefs of 11 principals in Alabama Torchbearer schools.

I obtained your name from the 2011 list of Alabama Torchbearer schools provided by the Alabama State Department of Education and your address from the Alabama Education Directory.

I am asking you to participate by agreeing to a 60 minute interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

I will take precautions to ensure your confidentiality. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if there is any additional information I can provide you. If you agree to participate, I may be reached at (205) 243-7357 or by email at msullivan@bhm.k12.al.us. I look forward to hearing from you by June 15, 2012.

Thank you Goodbye