PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION PROCESS FOR ADMINISTRATORS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ABSTRACT

Research has indicated that the role of the principal as an instructional leader has come to the forefront as the school leader is an influential factor in student achievement and school improvement. Understanding the impact instructional leaders have on student achievement, reform efforts have focused on the preparation of school leaders to effectively transform 21st-century schools into high-performing learning organizations by calling for higher standards for principals and more rigorous means of credentialing principals. In the effort to improve school leadership, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) began implementation of National Board Certification for Education Leaders (NBCEL), a research-based, nationwide advanced certification for principals.

This phenomenological study was undertaken to uncover the perceptions and experiences of principals who participated and completed the pilot for NBCEL. Qualitative methods of in-depth interviewing, on-site observation and artifact collection were used to collect data from 10 principals who comprised this study. An analysis of interview data revealed five themes with corresponding subthemes regarding how principals described their experience of participation in the NBCEL pilot. The five major themes that emerged were (a) motivation, (b) reflection, (c) transformation, (d) validation, and (e) overall experience.
This qualitative phenomenological study provided insight into the perceptions and experiences of NBCEL for administrators. This study was significant to education stakeholders interested in developing a national certifying credential, understanding principals’ reflection and transformational learning, and improving the states’ effectiveness models and current evaluation models for school administrators. The study will aid universities in preparation programs for school administrators. It may also serve as a premise for future support through funding, mentoring, and professional development.

Recommendations of this study included (a) creating additional professional development opportunities that focus on growth for principals in the areas of instructional leadership; (b) developing and expanding course work in principal leadership preparation programs, training, and evaluation to include Standard V, Culture; (c) incorporating the Accomplished Principal Standards in the design of principal effectiveness models; (d) utilizing the surveys from the National Board to strengthen the state’s educator effectiveness model; (e) adding a reflective task performance component to the state’s evaluation process for educational leaders; (f) encouraging participation in programs that allow the entire school faculty to participate in professional learning communities; (g) increasing crucial conversations that center around professional growth and evidence of practice; and (h) establishing benchmarks and observation tools to monitor growth, and strengths and weaknesses.

Keywords: National Board Certification, Principals, Teaching Standards, Education Leaders, Student Achievement
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, R. Connor Knight. You motivate me each day to wake up, give my personal best, and inspire you to do your best. I believe that you have been equipped with the power to learn and to lead. I believe in you! No excuses. No short cuts. No limits. You are my inspiration!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“No one can say for certain how the schools of the new century will differ from those of the past century – but there can be little doubt that these schools will require different forms of leadership.”

—Anonymous Member, Task Force on Reinventing the Principalship

Strong leadership is a significant characteristic in the revitalization of failing schools (Burbach & Butler, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Effective school research has consistently recognized the school leader as a key element in successful school transformation (Council of Chief School Officers, 2014; Joyce, 2004; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009). Effective leadership is second only to instruction in the power of its impact on student learning (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Marzano, McNulty, & Walters, 2005; Robinson, 2007). Twenty-first century schools require a different kind of leadership, instructional leaders who are ready to effectively transform schools into learning organizations with student achievement as the backdrop (Hale & Moorman, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Schlechty, 2009). A Nation at Risk (1983) exposed a need for higher academic standards in schools. In 1987, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA) released, Leaders for America’s Schools (University Council
for Educational Administration [UCEA], 1987), a report that addressed deficiencies in educational leadership preparation. No Child Left Behind’s (2001) use of school-based data revised the role of school-site leadership. As the principal’s role expands in the challenge to meet higher standards, student learning must be the primary objective (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr & Cohen, 2007; Learning Forward, 2012; O’Donnell & White, 2005).

Effective school researchers have recognized the principal as a common characteristic among high-performing schools (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; McEwan, 2009; Perez & Socias, 2008; Williams, Kirst, Haertel, et al., 2005). Understanding the impact instructional leaders have on student achievement and school quality, educational leaders and policymakers have recognized that effective leadership is critical to successful school reform (Wallace Foundation, 2006). Reform efforts are calling for higher standards for principals and more rigorous means of credentialing principals. Recent efforts to improve school leadership inspired the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) to implement National Board Certification for Education Leaders (NBCEL), a research-based, nationwide advanced certification for principals (Maxwell, 2009). Acknowledging the significance of the principal’s role in leading effective schools, the NBCEL identifies standards and assessments that define effective instructional leadership.

Founded in 1987, the 27 year voluntary national credentialing program, NBPTS, was created to raise the level of teaching excellence by developing standards that identify what accomplished teachers should know and demonstrate in 16 different subject areas and recognizing teachers who have met those standards (Offices of Research and
Education Accountability, 2011). NBPTS has certified over 100,000 teachers in all 50 states (NBPTS, 2013). Numerous states and districts award National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) with salary supplements and provide funding for teachers who desire to pursue the National Board certification.

In developing NBCEL, the first national certification program for school-based administrators, the NBPTS validated assessments designed to identify accomplished principals. The NBPTS convened 21 leaders in education to engage in a discussion of what accomplished principals should know and be able to do. The dialogue from this discussion led to the development and creation of the Accomplished Principal Standards. To achieve National Board certification, a principal candidate would provide evidence of mastery of the Accomplished Principal Standards by completing task performances that reflect on individual leadership practice (NBPTS, 2010).

Core Propositions and Accomplished Principal Standards

The National Board certification process for education leaders consisted of standards based on nine Core Propositions (NBPTS, 2010). The Core Propositions for Educational Leaders provide the foundation and combination of knowledge and dispositions that must be displayed in the evidence-based assessments required to certify as a National Board certified principal. Defining the elements of accomplished educational practice, the Core Propositions for accomplished educational leaders describe the skills, applications, and behaviors of principals who perform at the accomplished level (NBPTS, 2010). Accomplished leaders would demonstrate all nine Core Propositions with various selections of skills, applications, and behaviors that apply to
individual learning communities. Reflecting the nine Core Propositions, the Accomplished Principal Standards served as the real-world applications to these propositions by acting as benchmarks for performance at a preeminent level (see Appendices D and E for propositions and standards).

The first core proposition, “Accomplished educational leaders continuously cultivate their understanding of leadership and the change process to meet high levels of performance,” supports Standard I, Leadership for Results. This standard posits that accomplished principals exhibit behaviors that yield positive results for students and adults by measuring performance, sharing and developing leadership, supporting and motivating staff, and valuing collaboration with stakeholders. As the leaders of the learning community, they exhibit a deep understanding of best practices in education and of global educational trends. These principals initiate and facilitate change by articulating a vision that inspires individual commitment that leads to continuous improvement (NBPTS, 2010).

The second core proposition, “Accomplished educational leaders have a clear vision and inspire and engage stakeholders in developing and realizing that mission,” aligns with Standard II, Vision and Mission. In this standard, accomplished principals articulate a collective vision and mission of high levels of achievement and instructional practice. Through collaboration with stakeholders, roles and responsibilities are transformed into action, benchmarks are established, and progress is monitored in the journey toward turning the vision into reality (NBPTS, 2010).

The third core proposition, “Accomplished educational leaders manage and leverage systems and processes to achieve desired adults,” corresponds to Standard VI,
Strategic Management. At this level, accomplished principals develop goals and objectives that align with the overall vision and mission. These leaders are aware of the legal rights and responsibilities of students and staff; demonstrate skill in financial planning to improve instructional goals; and keep the organization focused on the vision, results, and effectiveness through monitoring, regular feedback, and communication (NBPTS, 2010).

Core Proposition four, “Accomplished educational leaders act with a sense of urgency to foster a cohesive culture of learning,” coincides with Standard V, Culture. With the focus on learning for all students, accomplished principals commit to creating a culture of excitement, commitment, and high expectations. Within this culture, trust and character are developed through participative leadership, teamwork, and modeling. These leaders respect and celebrate cultural differences that impact the choices and interests of students and also foster positive relationships with community stakeholders (NBPTS, 2010).

Core Proposition five, “Accomplished educational leaders are committed to student and adult learners and to their development,” concurs with Standard IV, Knowledge of Students and Adults. Accomplished principals apply their knowledge of child development theory and adult learning theory as they value student and adult learners and communicate high expectations for both groups. These leaders anticipate and address the needs of students by acknowledging diverse family dynamics and the challenges students encounter. They readily seek community support to respond to student and family needs. The leaders find ways for parents to feel valued, welcomed, and essential to the learning environment. They recognize students’ accomplishments and
provide ongoing support for student success. In this culture, the accomplished principal will foster relationships, instill personal efficacy among staff, celebrate personal and professional milestones, and provide support in individual circumstances (NBPTS, 2010).

Core Proposition six, “Accomplished educational leaders drive, facilitate, and monitor the teaching and learning process,” parallels Standard III, *Teaching and Learning*. Accomplished principals focus on teaching and learning by ensuring a relevant and substantial instructional program. As instructional leaders, these principals communicate high expectations and establish community resources to maximize organizational capacity. Present in both teaching and professional learning functions, accomplished principals meet regularly with vertical, horizontal, and leadership teams; provide time for teachers to work collaboratively and problem-solve; and are adept in disaggregating and interpreting data and identifying paths to improvement (NBPTS, 2010).

Core Proposition seven, “Accomplished educational leaders model professional, ethical behavior and expect it from others,” supports Standard VIII, *Ethics*. Accomplished principals demonstrate values of integrity, honesty, and fairness. They exercise firmness and flexibility in decision-making. These leaders model professional ethics that build trusting relationships with stakeholders. They adhere to the guidelines of the ethical reporting of funds, test data, and grades. They hold the same expectation for all teachers and students and clearly communicate ethical expectations to these groups (NBPTS, 2010).

Core Proposition eight, “Accomplished educational leaders ensure equitable learning opportunities and high expectations for all,” is connected to Standard IX,
Reflection and Growth. Accomplished principals participate in self-reflection and personal professional growth. Recognized as lifelong learners, they seek ways to improve practice and leadership and participate in learning activities alongside staff. They provide opportunities to self-reflect, participate in group sharing of strengths and weaknesses, and find ways to refresh themselves so to remain fully present in the work (NBPTS, 2010).

Core Proposition nine, “Accomplished educational leaders advocate on behalf of their schools, communities, and profession,” supports Standard VII, Advocacy. In order to advance their vision, mission, and goals, accomplished principals advocate on behalf of students and the adults within the learning community. Accomplished principals engage in dialogue with staff to identify issues facing students and adults in the organization. They lobby against initiatives that offer little benefit to the learning goals set for the learning community. They create networks with community stakeholders to rally funding and political power to give voice to educational causes (NBPTS, 2010).

Designed to recognize and retain quality leaders as well as restore integrity in school leadership, the NBCEL initiative was piloted in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Maine, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Washington. The goals of the pilot test were to validate the value and impartiality of the certification process and scoring procedures and to provide confirmation of the Accomplished Principal Standards. The NBCEL pilot began in August 2010 and continued through July 2012 at no cost to participants. Of the 19 states that participated in the NBCEL pilot, 9 states are members of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). Created in 1948,
the SREB is a non-profit organization that advises and collaborates with state education leaders to improve public education in 16 member states (SREB, 2010). To ensure a diverse sample, both the SREB and the NBPTS selected applicants, each of whom were required to have a minimum of 3 years of experience as a principal, a bachelor’s degree, and a valid state principal license.

The certification process required submission of six portfolios that demonstrated principals’ abilities to

1. develop an effective strategic plans for their school;
2. promote student efficacy, growth, and achievement;
3. improve teacher effectiveness and retention;
4. engage parents and community;
5. create and evaluate a self-improvement plan; and
6. demonstrate continuous accountability (NBPTS, 2010).

Participants meeting the standards for certification would be awarded National Board certification. Participants not meeting the specified criteria would have an additional year to pursue certification. In addition to being awarded National Board certification, participants could benefit from future state incentives for participation, such as the professional learning units required for retaining administrative certification in the state of Alabama (NBPTS, 2011).

This study explored the perceptions of principal candidates, selected from participating SREB states, of the NBCEL certification process. Participants were selected based upon completion of the certification process as they awaited the results of achievement from National Board. The researcher reasoned that exploring the
perceptions of candidates prior to their being informed of their certification results might reduce cognitive dissonance and the chances of skewed responses influenced by attainment of National Board certification (Elser, 1983; Festinger, 1957).

**Statement of the Problem**

During this time of high-stakes accountability, it is necessary for school districts to ensure that students have every advantage toward becoming highly skilled competitors (Fleming, 2004; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). As educational reform efforts continue, school districts strategically plan to confront the pressures of producing increased levels of student achievement. Failure to show improvement by school districts may result in the replacement of the school principal (Rhim, 2012).

Findings from research have indicated that in order for student success and school improvement to be fully realized, there must be effective teachers in the classroom and an effective instructional leader at each school site (Fullan, 2002; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004; Malone & Caddell, 2000; Protheroe, 2005; SREB, 2003; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The principal, serving as instructional leader, is second only to the classroom teacher as a critical factor in increasing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters, 2004). Effective instructional leaders influence the overall operations, as well as the instructional quality of the school. Researchers who studied teacher working conditions discovered that high-quality leadership, more than school size or teacher retention, was the greatest determinant of whether a school made adequate yearly progress (Southeast Center for Teacher Quality, 2006). They concluded, therefore, that schools will continue to
underperform unless attention is focused on the preparation and support of effective school leaders.

National groups have attempted to identify and define the qualities of effective and accomplished leadership by the creation of standards. The Interstate School Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) introduced performance standards for school leaders in 1996 and revised them in 2008. In 2014, the ISLLC Standards were refreshed to reflect changes in the leadership skills and knowledge needed to drive student achievement and meet higher expectations based upon current research of effective leadership and best practice. These standards are designed to guide the work of district and school leaders by providing a common vision for effective instructional leadership. Adoption of the standards is voluntary; however, at least 40 states have adopted these standards or utilized them in the construction of their own standards (Wallace Foundation, 2009). The Council of Chief School Officers (CCSSO) provided a draft of the 2014 refreshed standards to solicit public review and comment. Public feedback will inform the revision and approval of the final standards prior to publishing (CCSSO, 2014).

Waters et al. (2004) identified 21 effective leadership responsibilities of school leaders (see Appendix F). More recently, the NBPTS (2010) has identified nine standards specifying what an accomplished principal should know and be able to do that closely align with other nationally accepted standards, such as those published by the ISLLC. The NBPTS’ Accomplished Principal Standards embody effective leader research and standards from groups including the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (NBPTS, 2010).
The NBPTS standards for accomplished principals represent a professional consensus on the practices that distinguish accomplished principals. The certification program honors the demands and the varying roles of the school principal. The NBCEL would have offered for school leaders the first national credentialing system similar to those in place for other professions. While there have been numerous studies conducted on the National Board Certification process for teachers and on the school leader’s perspective on National Board Certification for teachers, no research literature exists on the NBCEL. This phenomenological study will begin to address this gap in the literature.

The research on National Board certification for teachers has increased understanding of the process that teachers undergo to achieve National Board certification and has resulted in a better understanding of the premise behind National Board certification for principals. After a review of the literature, the researcher was unable to locate any phenomenological studies on the actual lived experiences of principals participating in National Board certification for education leaders. Research is needed on the actual lived experience of principal leader participants as they pursued National Board certification in order to add to the knowledge base of existing certification programs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore principals’ perceptions of the NBCEL based on the experiences and perceptions of 10 school principals, selected from participating SREB states, who completed the NBPTS pilot study. As districts work to increase the effectiveness of their school-based leaders, this
research may increase the effectiveness of leaders, thus serving as an important means of professional development for school principals.

**Research Questions**

This study explored the perceptions of the NBCEL experience on candidates who participated in the pilot study. These candidates completed the certification process and were able to fully reflect on their experience. Candidates’ perceptions of the NBCEL process were obtained in this study prior to acknowledgement from NBPTS to participants regarding their certification achievement status. The central research question for this investigation was: What are principal perceptions of the National Board Certification for Education Leaders? In order to delve more deeply into the experiences of the participants, three sub-questions were used:

1. How do participants in this study describe their experiences of the certification process?
2. How do participating principals describe their roles as instructional leaders after participating in the NBCEL Pilot?
3. How do participating principals describe the certification process as a professional development activity?

**Significance of the Study**

This study of the perceptions and experiences of principals participating in the National Board process for education leaders may be transferable to many stakeholders. District leaders may find the study meaningful as they seek ways to better prepare
principals to lead systemic instructional improvement. It may yield valuable insight for professional development activities and programs for educational leaders. It may also serve as a premise for future support through funding, mentoring, and professional development. Information collected from this study may be meaningful to education stakeholders interested in developing a national certifying credential, as the insights of the principal candidates in this study may help stakeholders and future candidates understand the underpinnings of such a process.

Limitations

The study is a single contribution to the ongoing professional conversation about NBCEL. The study was subject to the following limitations:

1. Participants were limited to 10 principals who completed the NBCEL pilot study in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and Illinois.

2. In qualitative research, limited validity exists with respect to the external application of the study’s findings. Because the study was limited to 10 participants, its small scale limits the generalizability of this study’s findings (Creswell, 2013).

3. As the instrument of data collection for this study, the researcher acknowledged potential personal biases during data collection and analysis of data.

4. In the interest of time, the researcher acknowledges the sample as both purposive and convenience, accepting the first 10 potential participants to volunteer.
Assumptions

The following assumptions were made regarding this research:

1. It is assumed that the 10 principals selected will participate fully in the research process.
2. It is assumed that participants’ responses will reflect honest depictions of their experiences.
3. It is assumed that the participants will verify interview transcripts.

Research Paradigm

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher chooses a set of beliefs or assumptions that further informs the research. Creswell (2009) described four worldviews that guide research practice: post positivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. This study was conducted within a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is based on the assumption that individuals construct knowledge and meaning based on their prior knowledge and experience. Constructivists believe that meaning is 'constructed' based upon interactions with surroundings. These interactions provide the evidence and the opportunities for experimentation with the world and thus construct our realities. Constructivism informs the learning of each individual from childhood to adulthood (Hoover, 2005). Researchers have suggested that professional development for principals should be initiated from a constructivist position (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Peterson, 2002).

There are three main components of a worldview or paradigm: ontology, the inquiry of being and how reality is viewed; epistemology, the origin, nature, methods, and
limits of knowledge; and *methodology*, how we investigate the social world and how we demonstrate that the knowledge generated is valid (Hatch, 2002). Ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality (Blaikie, 2009, p. 8). Ontology questions the nature of reality and the nature of being and seeks to answer the following questions: What is being? What is the nature of reality? Is there a reality? (Oxford, 1997) Constructivists believe that human beings construct their own social realities in relation to one another that multiple realities exist, and that reality is subjective and experiential. Reality might be shared with many other people, but other people could construct the same reality in different ways.

Epistemology pertains to the origin, foundation, limits, and validity of knowledge. Central questions of epistemology include "What is knowledge?" "Where does knowledge come from?" and "How much does the knower contribute to the knowing process?" Constructivists see knowledge as constructed collaboratively between the researcher and the participant. The researcher takes part in the subjective reality throughout the research investigation (Hatch, 2002).

Methodology refers to the manner by which the knowledge will be gained and the demonstration of validity of that knowledge. Constructivists see the researcher as being a part of the study by utilizing naturalist qualitative research methods to interpret the perspectives of the participant. The goal of constructivist research is understanding rather than prediction (Hatch, 2002).
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations that supported this study were those of adult learning theory, reflective theory, and transformative learning theory.

Individuals differ in matters of motivation, interest, values, attitudes, physical and mental abilities, and learning histories (Kennedy, 2003). The acknowledgement of these differences has generated the implementation of adult learning theory in the design and training of adult professionals. Learning Forward, formerly the National Staff Development Council, established standards for staff development that describe high quality professional development. These standards support the idea that professional development should be grounded in the principles of adult learning theory (2001).

Adult learning refers to a set of ideas, theories, and methods for describing the conditions under which the processes of learning are optimized for adults (Merriam, 2001; Trotter, 2006; Yang, 2003). Adult Learning Theory, as developed by Malcolm Knowles, introduced the term andragogy, referring to the art of facilitating adult learning (Kearsley, 2010). Andragogy is used to explain six assumptions of adult learning: (a) self-directedness, (b) readiness to learn, (c) immediate application of new skills and knowledge, (d) relevance of the subject, (e) motivation to learn, and (f) experiential learning (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011; Taylor & Kroth, 2009).

Similarly, Lyons and Pinnell (2001) identified seven characteristics of adult learners: (a) a vast knowledge base, experience, and a wide range of skills; (b) acquired ideas, beliefs, and values; (c) strongly held ideas about learning; (d) a strong goal-oriented perspective in which the adult is focused on solving immediate problems; (e)
high expectations of the professional development experience; (f) multiple commitments and time constraints; and (g) motivation to learn. Brookfield (1986) also developed six principles to effectively facilitate adult learning: (a) voluntary participation, (b) mutual respect, (c) collaboration, (d) praxis, (e) critical reflection, and (f) self-direction.

According to Mezirow (2000), transformational learning is an adult learning theory that is constructivist in nature and explains how adults change the way they interpret the world. While Mezirow first developed the theory, other theorists, such as Boyd, Freire, and Daloz, have expanded it, each providing a point of view for adult learning and development. According to Mezirow, “the transformative process is formed and circumscribed by a frame of reference. Frames of reference are structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual’s tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs and actions” (Merriam, 2008, p. 5). The goal of transformational learning is to change the frame of reference through experience or activity. Transformational learning theory provides an explanation of an educator’s experience of a fundamental change in perspective or frame of reference through engagement in professional development.

In their research, both Brookfield and Mezirow found a connection between adult learning and reflection. Mezirow (1995) found that reflection is the key component in the process of transformational learning. When people begin to critically reflect and examine their predetermined assumptions and beliefs, they become more open, inclusive, reflective, and willing to change (Choy, 2010). Thus, critical reflection is central to transformational learning (Mezirow, 1997). Changes in self-concept, examination of
internalized norms, and new perspectives on past behaviors are likely to occur when adults develop the capacity for reflection (Brookfield, 1986).

Schön (1995) recognized that professional development relies exclusively on formal knowledge that is detached from the real concerns and experiences of practitioners. Schön (1987) described reflection as the integration of theory and practice through a “dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skillful” (p. 31). Schön (1987, 1995) argued that complex problems that extend beyond the technical knowledge and rules of the organization must be analyzed and interpreted.

Schön (1983) described how competent practitioners usually know more than they can say, exhibiting a kind of knowing-in-practice, referred to as tacit knowledge (p. 7). Schön (1987) envisioned the practitioner practicing reflection in and on action to aid in better decision-making. Through reflection, an individual would experience second-order change that could lead to deep transformation or behavioral change. The reflective-inquiry model pushes principals to create knowledge by making reflective, self-critical decisions about their professional practice while engaged in work responsibilities. The objective is to encourage principals to reflect on their values and assumptions about leadership and apply that knowledge in their daily practice (Barth, 1985, 1986; Daresh, 2001; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002).

Although adults learn by doing, constructing, building, talking, and writing, adults also learn by thinking about events, activities, and experiences. The combination of action and reflection creates new knowledge. According to Schön, it is difficult to disconnect one act from the other since most often individuals reflect upon activities while in the midst of performing or experiencing them. Schön further states that
individuals are unaware of newly acquired knowledge until it is called for in recollection. According to Schön, reflection becomes the vehicle for critical analysis, problem-solving, synthesis of opposing ideas, evaluation, identifying patterns, and creating meaning (1995).

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms were identified and defined in this study:

*Accomplished Principal:* An individual who successfully completes the process for national certification as designated by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

*Accomplished Principal Standards:* Standards that represent benchmarks for performance at the highest level for accomplished principals. The standards define and describe accomplished leadership for school principals and exemplify the most important and lasting skills, applications, and dispositions of principals who operate at the accomplished level. The nine standards are (1) Leadership for Results, (2) Vision and Mission, (3) Teaching and Learning, (4) Knowledge of Students and Adults, (5) Culture, (6) Strategic Management, (7) Advocacy, (8) Ethics, (9) Reflection and Growth.

*Accomplished Teacher:* An individual who successfully completes the process for national certification as designated by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

*Core Propositions:* The visions of the educational process that form the foundation for the NBPTS.
**National Board Candidate (NBC):** An individual who voluntarily seeks national certification through the National Board of Professional Standards by application to the NBPTS.

**National Board Certification for Education Leaders (NBCEL):** National Board Certification for Principals, the first national certification program focused on principals that create standards and an assessment process for principals.

**National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT):** A candidate who has passed required assessments and has been certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

**National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS):** A nonprofit, independent organization of teachers and other educational stakeholders working to advance the effectiveness of the teaching profession and improve student learning.

**National Board Standards:** The foundation of what all accomplished educators should know and be able to do. Based on Core Propositions, NBPTS publishes standards of “accomplished teaching” for 25 subject areas and developmental levels for pre-K through 12th grade. Adopted by NBPTS in 2009, nine Core Propositions were established for Accomplished Educational Leaders to define the essential elements of accomplished educational practice. These standards were developed and validated by representative councils of master teachers, disciplinary organizations, and other education experts.

**Principal:** An individual who is certified as an administrator through successful completion of a graduate course of study or certification program and who presently serves as the lead administrator of an elementary, middle, junior high, or high school.
Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an overview of the NBPTS that will provide the background and history of the National Board certification process. In addition, chapter 1 includes a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, limitations, definitions of terms used, assumptions, the role of the researcher, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature providing a discussion of the National Board certification process as well as of the benefits and concerns associated with National Board certification, student achievement, and teacher reflection. In addition, chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature with a focus on the following: effective school leadership, principal certification in Alabama, and professional development for principals. Chapter 3 includes information about the research design and methodology used to gather and analyze the data. Chapter 4 includes a presentation and analysis of the data. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, the limitations of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to this study. It is divided into four sections: (a) National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, (b) Effective School Leadership, (c) Principal Certification in Alabama, and (d) Reflective Practice.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

The finding that public schools were failing was revealed in *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983), a document released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, beleaguered education stakeholders. The negative portrayal sparked widespread dismay and spawned several educational reforms. In response to this report, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy examined how teachers impact the quality of education and released *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Forum, 1986). The task force recommended the creation of a national certification system for teachers that would (a) develop high standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do and (b) develop an assessment system to certify teachers meeting that criteria. Based upon recommendations from that report, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established in 1987.

The certification process is a voluntary demonstration of higher-level teaching knowledge that is measured against standards and assessments in individual fields (1994).
The NBPTS based standards in 25 certificate areas on the following five Core Propositions that function as the premise of accomplished teaching:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning,
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students,
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students’ learning,
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience, and
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

Each candidate for certification is required to have a bachelor’s degree, a minimum of 3 years teaching/counseling experience, and a current teaching/counseling license. Certification is based upon the submission of four portfolio entries comprised of videotaped lessons, student work, archival documentation of leadership, and written analyses of lesson development and delivery. Candidates must further demonstrate knowledge of content by participating in assessment-center exercises based upon the specified certificate area (NBPTS, 2012). Candidates must score 275 points to receive certification, which is renewable after 10 years.

As of 2014, the NBPTS has certified over 100,000 teachers and is recognized by all 50 states. The increasing numbers, publicity, and prestige of becoming a NBCT have led to state-specific monetary incentives for teachers who pursue or attain certification. For example, in Alabama, which ranks 13th in the total number of NBCTs nationwide with 2,202 certified teachers (NBPTS, 2012), the State Department of Education awards NBCTs a $5,000 annual salary supplement.
The goal of National Board in creating an advanced certification system was to impact the quality of teacher education, licensure, professional development, and instructional practices in the classroom. Throughout the 27 years since the inception of the NBPTS, a vast amount of research has been conducted relative to the impact of the certification process on student learning, teacher quality, and improved practice.

Several studies showed that National Board certification has a positive impact on student achievement (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000; Cantrell, Fullerton, Kane, & Staiger, 2008; Cavalluzzo, 2004; Clotfelter Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004; Humphrey, Koppich, & Hough, 2005; Jacobson, 2004; Phillips, 2008; Smith, Gordon, Colby, & Wang, 2005; Stone, 2002; Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004). Multiple researchers studied the relationship between NBCT status and student performance (Bond et al., 2000; Cavalluzzo, 2004; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007; Smith et al., 2005; Vandevoort et al., 2004).

Bond et al. (2000) compared 31 NBCTs teachers with 34 teachers who previously attempted and failed at National Board certification. The researchers discovered that NBCTs outperformed non-NBCTs on dimensions of teaching excellence and that students of NBCTs displayed more coherent understanding and greater levels of abstraction than students of non-NBCTs.

Goldhaber and Anthony (2004) conducted a study that examined the relationship between National Board certification and student achievement. The researchers compared all of North Carolina’s third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade NBPTS-certified teachers to their colleagues around the state using achievement test data of over 600,000 students taught by more than 16,000 teachers. The researchers concluded that NBPTS-
certified teachers produced significantly higher increases in student achievement than non-certified teachers. Vandevooort et al. (2004) investigated the academic performance of elementary students in the classrooms of 35 NBCTs and non-NBCTs in Arizona. After analyzing standardized test data for third-, fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students, the researchers concluded that NBCTs have greater effects on student achievement than non-NBCTs.

Cavalluzzo (2004) investigated the association between student achievement in ninth and tenth grades and NBCTs in those grades. The researcher observed that students of NBCTs attained statistically higher results than students of teachers who never sought NBC. The study also noted that the students of teachers in pursuit of National Board outperformed those of teachers who never sought National Board certification. Similarly, Jacobson (2004) found that National Board certified teachers were more effective at raising reading and math scores than teachers who participated but did not achieve National Board certification.

A study conducted by Smith et al. (2005) examined the impact on the depth of student learning by NBCTs versus those teachers who failed to achieve National Board certification. The results from the study showed that the students of NBCTs achieved deeper learning outcomes and demonstrated stronger writing skills. The study further demonstrated that NBCTs intentionally fostered deeper student understanding. Cantrell, Fullerton, Kane, and Staiger (2007) analyzed the relationship between NBCTs and student achievement in grades three through five. A significant difference emerged between NBCTs and those who had been unsuccessful at earning National Board certification with NBCTs yielding a higher level of achievement. Likewise, Phillips
(2008) found that high school physical education students of NBCTs demonstrated higher levels of student competencies than students of non-NBCTs.

NBPTS literature affirms that the certification process, in addition to improving student learning, is a powerful professional growth experience (NBPTS 2007). Researchers have lauded the National Board process as high-quality professional development that leads to improved practice and teacher effectiveness (Belden, 2002; Dagenhart, 2002; Griffin, 2006; Hollandsworth, 2006; Lustick & Styles, 2006; Petty, 2002; Ralph, 2003; Sato, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Whitman, 2002).

A study conducted by Sato et al. (2008) suggested that strategies engaged during the National Board certification process may help change teachers’ formative assessment practices and instruction. Hollandsworth (2006) found that NBCTs consistently demonstrated the use of best practices in first- and second-grade classrooms. In their study, Lustick and Sykes (2006) described the experience of National Board candidacy as “transformative professional development,” regardless of the success or failure of attaining certification. Results from surveys of principals regarding teacher effectiveness indicated that NBCTs were consistently identified as being the most effective teachers (Griffin, 2006) and as exhibiting greater confidence than non-NBCTs (Whitman, 2002).

Researchers have also detected that NBCTs exhibit an in-depth knowledge of teaching skills, subject matter, student feedback, and teacher leadership (Dagenhart, 2002; Petty, 2002; Ralph, 2003). Dethlefs et al. (2001) conducted a study on the impact of the National Board process on teachers participating in a pilot study in Iowa. The researchers found that candidates who had undergone the National Board process made significantly greater professional contributions to their schools and district than those
who had not participated. These candidates were more likely to have conducted district and school-wide professional development, modeled teaching strategies, served in a leadership capacity, or collaborated with teachers outside of the district. As a result of participation, these candidates perceived themselves as more reflective in daily practice and recommended the process to colleagues. Principals of candidates reported improvement in curriculum, student engagement, and the incorporation of instructional strategies.

Professional development inherent in the National Board certification process has enhanced reflection on teaching practice by providing the opportunity to engage in professional discourse among teachers and raising the standards for teaching performance by examining one’s individual practice (Park, Oliver, Johnson, Graham, & Oppong, 2007; Unrath, 2007). Educators who demonstrate analytical and reflective practice produce higher learning outcomes (Danielson, 2008). The development of the certification portfolio is a process of deep reflection (Unrath, 2007), and teachers who participate in reflection are more effective teachers (Berliner, 1992).

In a qualitative study by Cooksie and Place (2008), National Board candidates indicated that the certification process resulted in a positive impact on their classroom practice and literacy instruction. In a study of teacher perceptions of the process, Tracz et al. (2005) found teachers who participated in the National Board certification process were more reflective in their teaching practices and used this reflection to meet the individual needs of their students. NBCTs accredit the National Board certification process for improved knowledge of subject matter, curriculum development, appropriate learning goals and objectives, and designing student assessments (Belden, 2002).
NBPTS opponents suggest a lack of evidence to demonstrate a significant correlation between NBCTs and improvement in student achievement (Podgursky, 2001). Critics of National Board refute the findings of past studies and report negative findings relating to National Board and student achievement (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Hakel, Koenig, & Elliot, 2008; McColsky et al., 2005; Sanders et al., 2005; Stephens, 2003; Stone, 2002).

Hakel et al. (2008) used student achievement test data to evaluate the effects of National Board-certified teachers on student test scores with mixed results. Sanders et al. (2005) experienced no significant correlation between student achievement and National Board certification when they examined student performance on end-of-grade reading and math exams for fourth-grade through eighth-grade students.

Similarly, studies conducted by Hess (2004) and Stone (2003) found no increase in student learning in students taught by NBCTs. Stephens (2003) examined the relationship between National Board certification and student achievement of fourth-grade and fifth-grade students in mathematics. No significant differences were encountered in the achievement of fourth-grade and fifth-grade students of National Board certified teachers when compared to equivalent students of non-National Board certified teachers.

Likewise, in a study conducted by Childs (2006), there was no evidence that the achievement gains of students taught by National Board-certified teachers were statistically different from those of students taught by non-Board-certified teachers. Using student math and reading scores of fifth-grade NBCTs, no pattern of effects on student achievement based on certification emerged (McCloskey et al., 2005).
Some studies revealed contradicting results or found a similar outcome in teacher quality and practice among NBCTs and non-NBCTs. Taylor’s (2000) study investigated changes in teacher practices associated with National Board certification and found that non-NBCTs registered greater change in their practices than NBCTs. Harris and Sass (2009) encountered mixed results regarding whether National Board certification served as a reliable indicator of teacher effectiveness. The investigation revealed that National Board certification was a positive indicator of teacher effectiveness in some grades and in some contexts; however, evidence also showed that, in comparing NBCTs, former cohorts were more effective than latter cohorts.

Research on NBCTs has centered on whether the certification process identified highly skilled teachers. Van Driel, Beijaard, and Verloop (2001) conducted a case study on candidates participating in the assessment-center exercises. The researchers discovered the assessment was an indicator of a candidate’s articulation of the NBPTS’ Core Propositions as opposed to the demonstration of those standards (Schutz & Moss, 2004).

Other criticism of National Board certification involves the disparity of passing rates among minorities. Brotherton (2002) noted that 62% of White teachers pass on their initial attempt, compared to 18% of African Americans.

**Effective School Leadership**

Thirty years of research on effective schools has revealed common characteristics found among high-performing schools. These common attributes, referred to as “correlates,” have served as a framework in guiding districts and schools in school
improvement efforts (Brinson, 2004; Burbach & Butler, 2005; Ellis’ et al., 2007; Lezotte & McKee, 2006; McEwan, 2009; Perez & Socias, 2008; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

Research conducted by Edmonds and Lezotte (2001) observed seven correlates in each high-performing school. At the forefront of the seven correlates is instructional leadership. The remaining correlates include: (a) a clear and focused mission, (b) a safe and orderly environment, (c) a climate of high expectations, (d) frequent monitoring of student progress, (e) positive home and school relations, (f) opportunity to learn, and (g) student time on task.

In 2007, Washington State Board of Education conducted a study of best practices found in high-performing schools. The results of this study identified nine characteristics that high-performing schools display: (a) a clear and shared focus, (b) curriculum and instruction aligned with state standards, (c) high expectations for all students, (d) frequent monitoring of learning and teaching, (e) focused professional development, (f) high levels of collaboration and communication, (g) a supportive learning environment, (h) high levels of family and community involvement, and (i) effective school leadership (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007).

After conducting a review of research on effective schools, Perez and Socias (2008) also documented five characteristics of high-performing schools. Comparable to the aforementioned characteristics, each school displayed strong instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, shared goals and professional community, parental involvement, and a positive and academically focused school climate.

A study by McEwan (2009) contributed to the literature on traits mastered by effective schools. Researchers found that, in addition to strong school leadership,
effective schools have highly effective teachers delivering research-based instruction; articulate a clear academic focus by aligning curriculum with assessment and monitoring student progress; and establish a climate of trust, collaboration, and accountability among all stakeholders.

The leadership abilities of the school principal, specifically instructional leadership, and most often emerge as a critical component in relation to student achievement (King, 2002). In order for schools to be effective, an effective leader should be at the helm. Due to an increase in accountability and the impact a principal has on improving teaching and increasing student learning, more research is focusing on school leadership.

Williams et al. (2005), under the direction of EdSource, Stanford University, University of California, Berkeley, and the American Institutes for Research, conducted a large effective-schools research project that collected data from over 5,500 teachers and 257 principals. The research, which focused on California elementary schools serving similar student populations, found the school principal to be a critical element in the school’s success.

The research of Marzano et al.’s (2005) meta-analysis was published in the book, School Leadership that Works. These researchers analyzed the research literature of 69 studies for school leadership factors that were found statistically significant to student achievement. This examination extracted 21 leadership behaviors and practices enacted by school leaders that were significantly associated with student achievement (see Appendix F). A factor analysis conducted on the 21 behaviors revealed two factors that lie behind them: first-order change and second-order change. Similarly, Cotton (2003)
examined principal behavior and identified 25 behaviors and traits of principals that positively relate to student achievement (p. 67).

Commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, a comprehensive quantitative study of effective leadership demonstrated that the behavior and actions of the school administrator are linked to student academic achievement (Louis et al., 2010). The multi-year study utilized survey data from 8,391 teachers and 471 school administrators; interview data from 581 teachers and administrators, 304 district level educators, and 124 state personnel; and observational data from 312 classrooms. Student achievement data for literacy and mathematics in elementary and secondary schools were obtained using scores on state tests designed to measure Adequate Yearly Progress as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002).

The standards set by the ISLLC embody strong school leadership and define what an effective principal should know and be able to do. Developed in 1996, revised in 2008, and refreshed in 2014, the ISLLC standards are the most widely used and accepted set of standards for determining whether or not a principal is effective. While each standard promotes the success of all students, these standards describe school administrators as educational leaders who (a) facilitate the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community; (b) advocate, nurture, and sustain a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth; (c) ensure management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; (d) collaborate with families and community members, respond to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilize community
resources; (e) act with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and (f) understand, respond to, and influence the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (ISLLC, 1996, 2008).

The research on effective leadership reveals that there is no one action but a synthesis of several actions that relate to improved teaching and school improvement. According to the aforementioned research, effective principals set high goals and standards and establish a school-wide vision. High expectations and goal-setting by the instructional leader will result in increased teacher efficacy and increased student achievement (Seashore-Louis et al. 2010). In order to achieve goals and vision, effective principals share leadership with teachers without surrendering power. Effective principals display strong instructional leadership by monitoring instruction, conducting frequent observations, and providing immediate feedback to all teachers. A culture of professional learning, collaboration, and research-based strategies are present within the school of an effective leader.

In her book *10 Traits of Highly Effective Principals*, McEwan (2009) discussed that effective principals, in addition to being an envisioners, culture builders, and educators, are skilled communicators who are able to listen and empathize. McEwan described effective principals as motivators of change who build leadership capacity while maintaining a high degree of integrity and respect.

**Principal Certification in Alabama**

Acknowledging that the process of credentialing school leaders vary by state, the researcher retained the review of Alabama principal certification as an example of one
participating state’s use of and response to leadership standards in this process. In 2004, the Alabama Governor’s Congress on School Leadership (GCSL), comprised of leaders in both education and business, assembled to evaluate the current status of educational leadership in the state. The evaluation concluded with recommendations to the Governor, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), and the state legislature on ways to improve the quality of leadership in education. The recommendations established the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders, which provided the foundation for partnerships that mandated the redesign and approval of university instructional leadership preparation programs by 2008; created the Office of Leadership Development; and built a tiered certification system that rewards leadership excellence (SREB, 2010).

Because education is a state function, each state is responsible for ensuring that individuals are prepared to execute the role of administrator and or school principal. Thus, the state department of education must approve all university preparation programs and state certification requirements. To execute the goal of improving the quality of instructional leadership, the state department of education adopted the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leadership in 2005. The eight standards provided the foundation for partnerships that mandated the redesign and approval of university preparation programs by 2008 (SREB, 2010).

Prior to the adoption of the standards, several institutions of higher education in Alabama provided an 18-hr add-on route to obtain a certificate in administration. This option was eliminated and updated to require a Class A master’s degree in instructional leadership and a 10-day residency (SREB, 2010). Before the ALSDE would issue a Professional Educator Certificate in instructional leadership, the candidate would hold a
valid certificate in educational administration from a state-approved program, have at 
least three full years of educational teaching, and comply with testing and background 
clearance requirements.

Thirteen colleges and universities in Alabama have approved Class A certification 
programs in instructional leadership. These 13 colleges, who previously established class 
AA certification in educational leadership, elected to either eliminate or redesign their 
program by 2010 based on the leadership standards. To obtain a Class AA certificate, the 
candidate would hold a Class A Professional Educator Certificate in Instructional 
Leadership. In addition, the candidate would hold a certificate from a redesigned 
university program in Alabama; be employed as a superintendent, assistant 
superintendent, assistant to the superintendent, principal, assistant principal, supervisor 
administrator of career and technical education, coordinator, or evaluator, or document 
three years of employment in an instructional leadership position for which one of the 
certificates in Rule 290-3-3-.53.01(2)(b) is proper certification according to the current 
edition of the Subject and Personnel Codes of the ALSDE Colleges in Alabama 
reestablished their class AA certification programs in instructional leadership based on 
the criteria and rigor outlined by the standards (SREB, 2010). Effective July 1, 2014, 
Alabama Institutions of Higher Education that have Class A state-approved programs in 
Instructional Leadership will soon have the option to recommend individuals for Class A 
certification based on the completion of at least 18 semester hours of program courses 
approved by the ALSDE. Individuals must hold a valid Alabama Class A Professional 
Educator Certificate, satisfy the requirements for admission to a Class A Instructional 
Leadership program, and meet certification requirements. As of August 26, 2014 six
Alabama universities and colleges have obtained approval to offer the new option (ALSDE, 2014).

**Reflective Practice**

The origin of reflection is grounded in the work of educational philosopher John Dewey (1938) and philosopher Donald Schön (1983). Other theorists who have contributed to the conceptual understanding of reflective thinking include Boud et al. (1985), Mezirow (1990, 2000), and Brookfield (1995, 2000). Dewey’s work serves as the foundation of reflective thinking. According to Dewey, “the demand for the solution of a perplexity is the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection” (1933, p. 14). In Dewey’s view, the reflective process is initiated by the presence of a perplexing problem or situation that requires a solution. Dewey describes reflection as “turning a topic over in various aspects and in various lights so that nothing significant about it shall be overlooked.” During this process a subject is given thoughtful and repeated consideration (1933, p. 3). Dewey shared that reflection extended beyond that of merely pondering and shares other process of what reflection is not.

Dewey’s view of reflective thinking consists of systematically approaching a problem and finding a solution through a sequence of steps. Dewey presents these steps as a model of reflective practice:

1. A felt difficulty. Dewey felt that reflection is initiated by a problem or unsettling situation or dilemma that creates a feeling of doubt or concern. It is the yearning to achieve balance from the unsettling that initiates reflection. In this phase, the identification of the problem situation is determined.
2. Its location and definition. In this phase, the problem is analyzed for
specification. Data and facts that shape the problem are collected in order to
determine conditions and consequences.

3. Suggestions of possible solutions. During this phase, various suggestions and
a hypothesis for resolving the problem are proposed without evaluation.

4. Development by reasoning of the bearings of the suggestion. In this phase,
the hypothesis is refined by comparing it to other hypotheses for value, noting
the advantages and disadvantages of each.

5. Further observation and experiments leading to its acceptance or rejection.
This phase involves the testing of the hypothesis in the situation under
resolve. (p. 72)

Newcomb, McCracken, and Warmbrod later expanded these steps to six (Straquadine &

A vast amount of literature exists on reflective practice in education, specifically
reflection by teachers (Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990; Schön, 1987). Although the use
of reflective practice by school principals is strongly supported, (Leithwood et al., 2004;
McCotter, 2009; Osterman, 1998), scholarly research literature related to principal
reflection is limited (Day, 2000; McCotter, 2009; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Wright,
2008).

Evans (2003) refers to reflection as a complex and deliberate goal-driven process
of thinking about and interpreting experience in order to learn from it. Ashby (2006)
describes reflection as active, purposeful thought applied to an experience to understand
the meaning of that experience for the individual. Reflection is a “process that occurs
before, during and after situations with the purpose of developing greater understanding of both the self and the situation so that future encounters with the situation are informed by previous encounters” (Sandars, 2009, p. 685).

To effectively meet the challenges of educational reform, principals should employ deliberate reflective practice in each facet of their decision-making (Noonan, Walker, & Kutsyuruba, 2008). The practice of reflection will strengthen the quality of decision-making when facing difficult and challenging situations (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Zimmerman (2011) stated that in order to successfully initiate or embrace change in their schools, principals should survey their own behaviors and attributes that could be counterproductive to their school culture by reflecting on their own behavior. Quong and Walker (2010) stated that “Leaders reflect on their personal code of conduct and ethical practice to ensure they are a role model to others” (p. 32).

Brill (2008) stated that principal growth and development is greatly impacted by recurrent reflective practice. Lindstrom and Speck (2004) suggested that principals be engaged in reflection on their own learning and the impact it has on their educational environment. Coleman (2007) stated that “Reflective practitioners…possess the capacity to explore their own approaches and develop strategies that can support their responses to the constantly changing context in which they operate” (p. 481).

Researchers have explored the engagement of reflective practice among school leaders. A study of community college presidents by Stoeckel and Davies (2007) determined that ongoing participation in reflective practice among school leaders leads to an increase in knowledge and effectiveness. Coombs’ (2003) study of the reflective practice of six school principals found that reflection did not occur specifically during the
school day or any other designated time but occurred more naturally and haphazardly in varied relaxed settings, such as professional development sessions when principals can step away from their daily work. Reflective practice and instructional leadership have been linked to school improvement (Spillane, 2004; York Barr et al., 2006). York Barr et al. (2006) stated, “The greatest potential for reflective practice to improve schools lies within the collective inquiry, thinking, learning, understanding, and acting that result from school wide engagement” (p. 20).

Schön (1983) stressed the role of reflection within the learning process. He defined reflective practice as a critical process in refining one’s artistry and craft in a specific discipline (Schön, 1987). The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation that he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him and on the prior understandings that have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment that serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation (Schön 1983, p. 68). Schön stated that reflection can occur at different points in time and identified two types of reflection: reflection-in-action (during the activity) and reflection-on-action (after the activity).

In reflection-on-action, reflection occurs after an experience, phenomenon, or situation. During this time of reflection of a particular situation or event, individuals question their own behavior in retrospect. Questions arise as to why they acted in such a manner or whether they could have acted in a different manner. In professional practice, reflection-on-action involves the act of reflecting on an experience for the purpose of improved practice. Schön describes reflection-in-action as ‘thinking on our feet.’ During reflection-in-action, reflection occurs while the experience, situation, or phenomenon is
occurring, or “action present.” While engaged in professional practice, educators must think about what they are doing while in the midst of doing it by applying the experience of a previously encountered problem to the present situation.

Relatively new to adult learning is the term critical reflection. Reflecting critically allows the learner to reflect on current and past behaviors and self-image; question norms; and alter self-concepts by delving into an experience, allowing for new perspectives (Tate & Sills, 2004). Mezirow’s (1990) theory of adult learning theorizes that adults have assumptions, beliefs, and values that influence the way they interpret the world and their experiences. It is through Mezirow’s transformational leaning that adults become aware of and embark on revising their assumptions based on critical reflection.

Brookfield (1995) suggests that to reflect critically, four “critical lenses” should be applied while reflecting upon practice. These are (1) our own view as a learner (autobiography), (2) perspectives of our students, (3) perspectives of our fellow professionals, and (4) the various theoretical perspectives proposed in educational literature.

In defining reflective practice, Boud et al. (1985) described the analysis of feelings and knowledge, emphasizing the significance of using positive feelings and removing obstructive feelings. The authors proposed four terms to exemplify the process of reflection: association, integration, validation, and appropriation. In the context of learning, they believed reflection is a “generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations” (Boud et al., 1985, p. 23).
Mezirow (1990) identified six hierarchical levels of reflectivity (i.e., discriminant, judgmental, conceptual, psychic, theoretical, and affective). Discriminant reflectivity is assessing the effectiveness of one’s perceptions and being able to identify the reason one is reacting in a particular way and which relationships affect one’s actions. Judgmental reflectivity is realizing that all individuals value judgments about perceptions. Conceptual reflectivity is the ability to critique one’s own actions, and psychic reflectivity is acknowledging that one judges people based on limited information. Recognizing the forces that influence the way one thinks and acts, theoretical reflectivity involves changing one’s underlying assumptions, resulting in perspective transformation. Finally, affective reflectivity is becoming aware of how one feels about oneself and recognizing how one thinks and acts.
Chapter 3 presents the research methods for this study. This chapter includes qualitative research approach, phenomenological research, participants, data collection, data analysis, credibility and reliability, ethical considerations, and role of the researcher. This study focused on the experiences and perceptions of school principals who underwent NBCEL. The research design, according to Burnes and Grove (2009), must be selected based on the appropriateness with the research topic under investigation and must enable the researcher to best answer the questions posed in the study. The researcher was interested in uncovering the personal perspectives of individual participants regarding their experience of participating in NBCEL.

### Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research is an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world that allows for exploration within natural settings and which attempts to understand or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). This approach offers greater insight into participants’ lived experiences in new areas of research where little literature exists on a topic (Leedy & Ormond, 2005). The researcher was interested in discovering the personal perspectives of participants regarding their experience of participating in the NBCEL and selected qualitative inquiry as the most appropriate method to examine, comprehend, and describe their experiences.
and perceptions (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Characteristic of qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2002), the researcher sought to explore the phenomenon as experienced by the participants in their natural setting and, based upon the exploration, to interpret and describe those results.

**Phenomenological Research**

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that focuses on generating a deeper understanding of the essence or meaning of a particular shared phenomenon from the perspective of the participants who experienced it (Creswell, 2013). In phenomenological research, the goal is to construct and explicate accurate descriptions of the essence and meaning of an unexplored concept or phenomenon for a person or a group of individuals (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2010; Langdridge, 2007). The purpose of this study was to explore principals’ perceptions of being a principal candidate participating in the NBCEL. A phenomenological approach of this study translated narrative data into accurate depictions of the common or shared experiences of participants who pursued NBCEL.

Literature identifies several types of phenomenology: transcendental, existential, hermeneutic, heuristic, which is viewed as a philosophy, theoretical framework, and methodology. Although variations exist, each approach seeks to discover and describe the meanings of experienced phenomena as depicted by participants. Phenomenology is not concerned with generating concepts, hypotheses or theories; rather it suspends presumptions, seeks meaning and essences of experience, and is committed to the description of those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In-depth interviewing and open-
ended questions are used to describe the deep-lived meaning of a phenomenon that multiple individuals experienced (Seidman, 2006).

Although early contributions and concepts of phenomenology can be linked to Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel, whose theories on phenomena in relation to the human experience greatly influenced the later field of phenomenology (Redding, 2014), the work of Edmund Husserl serves as the groundwork of this approach. Husserl, a German philosopher and mathematician, discussed phenomenology as a philosophy known as transcendental phenomenology. Concerned with the discovery and meanings and essences in knowledge, Husserl disputed the belief that objects in the external world existed independently, instead positing that certainty exists in the appearance or presentation of things in a person’s consciousness. Husserl conceived the idea of “returning to the things themselves,” which described the notion of focusing on the phenomena themselves and allowing them to be described, as things themselves, as they appear to consciousness.

According to Husserl, in order for the essence of the phenomenon to speak for itself, the removal of suppositions, referred to as epoché, is necessary. The Greek word epoché involves the suspending of beliefs, prejudgments, and bias in order to fully gain an understanding of the phenomenon. To accurately describe the lived experiences of the participants, phenomenological researchers put aside personal experiences and everyday ways of perceiving things in order to fully absorb those of the participants. This concept requires researchers to “become aware of their assumptions, feelings, and preconceptions, and strive to put them aside or ‘bracket’ them in order to be receptive to what they are trying to understand” (Hatch, 2002).
Martin Heidegger’s was a student of Husserl whose view of phenomenology diverged from that of his teacher, resulting in the development of his own branch of phenomenology. Heidegger criticized Husserl’s idea of phenomenological reduction and rejected the idea of the transcendental ego. He disagreed with Husserl that prior conceptions and preconceived notions should and could be suspended. Heidegger created a shift from Husserl’s epistemological view toward understanding the nature of existence as ontological.

The two common types of phenomenology that prevail today are hermeneutical and transcendental. The work of Max Van Manen (1990) combined hermeneutics with phenomenology. This branch of phenomenology focuses on lived experiences and interpreting the texts of life with a focus on language and communication through textual data. Hermeneutic phenomenology incorporates an interpretive aspect from the researcher of participants’ lived experiences that participants may have difficulty in communicating. In contrast, transcendental phenomenology is less concerned with the researcher’s explanation and more on the description of participants’ experiences. Credited to Clark Moustakas, transcendental phenomenology utilizes an individual’s experience of a phenomenon to form rich descriptions that serve as the basis for analysis to understand the essence of the experience. Creswell (2013) explained,

In transcendental phenomenology the researcher…analyzes the data by reducing their information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes. From these themes the researcher develops a textural description…what the participants experienced and a structural description…how
they experienced it in terms of conditions, situations or context. The combination of which “conveys an overall essence of the experience” (p. 60).

For the purposes of exploring the perceptions of principal candidates who participated in the NBCEL, the researcher followed the transcendental approach in order to understand the meaning of the phenomenon for those individuals.

**Participants**

This phenomenological study focused on a sample of 10 principals who were selected by the SREB and the NBPTS to participate in a NBCEL pilot study from August 2010 – July 2012. These participants’ direct participation in the NBCEL pilot study yielded the best understanding of the phenomenon under study. Their months of interactive study, portfolio submissions, and active participation generated the greatest resource for understanding the lived experiences of the NBPEL. The direct exposure and completion of the NBCEL provided valuable insight needed to answer the research questions posed in this study.

The intent of the NBCEL pilot was to validate the certification process and scoring by determining that it was accessible, fair, and meaningful for participants; analyzing that the content was representative of the fundamental elements of the NBPTS Accomplished Principal Standards; and ensuring that the tasks could be completed in a realistic time frame without additional inconvenience to principals. Principal candidates would be awarded National Board certification if their submissions met certification standards.

Creswell (2013) presented multiple strategies for participant selection. In qualitative research, samples are drawn based upon the direct exposure individuals have
to the phenomenon under study (Fossey et al., 2002). Frequently utilized in qualitative research, nonprobability or purposive sampling involves the researcher selecting individuals who will provide a comprehensive portrayal of that phenomenon (Mapp, 2008; Patton, 2002). The researcher used purposive sampling to identify and select participants who could share their knowledge about their experiences with the phenomenon and inform the research questions (Burns & Grove, 2001).

The smaller samples characteristic of qualitative research improve the rapport between the researcher and the participant, yielding more genuine responses (Munhall, 2007) and allowing for the richer, deeper exploration that is applicable in phenomenological research (Armour et al., 2009; Fossey et al., 2002). For phenomenological studies, Creswell (2013) suggests up to 10 participants for a sample.

The sample for this study consisted of 10 principals who were selected to participate in the NBPTS pilot study. The researcher made multiple inquires via email and telephone to the offices of the ALSDE, Southern Regional Education Board, and the NBPTS to request a list of individuals who participated in the pilot studies during the years of 2010-2012. Originally, the researcher proposed a sample of participants within the state of Alabama; however, there were an insufficient number of participants who completed the NBCEL pilot in the state.

NBPTS provided the researcher with a list of 41 candidates who completed the NBCEL pilot in the states of North Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Illinois. The researcher emailed each of the 41 potential participants an invitation to participate in the study with an attached letter of informed consent. At this stage, in the interest of time, convenience sampling was utilized in that the first 10 respondents who accepted the
invitation were included in the sample. Upon the return of the confirmed consent, the researcher asked each participant to complete and return the Participant Data Sheet (see Appendix B), which provided the researcher with additional information about the participant and demographics of the participant’s school site.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative inquiry seeks authentic descriptions of situations, events, interactions, and behaviors from participants (Labuschangne, 2003). The researcher collected the data for this phenomenological study through one-on-one interviews in order to obtain the thick, rich data employed in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). “Phenomenological interviewing” as described by Marshall and Rossman (1999) focuses on “the deep, lived meanings that events have for individuals” (p. 113). The qualitative interview has been described as a guided conversation between the researcher and the participant, requiring the researcher to focus on understanding the meaning expressed by the participant (Warren, 2002). Qualitative interviews allow the researcher to obtain from participants layers of information that will later be analyzed for patterns and meaning (Johnson, 2002).

As the instrument of data collection and analysis, the researcher prepared an interview guide and a semi-structured interview protocol to ensure that the same general areas of information were collected from each participant and to allow flexibility in acquiring information in each interview (McNamara, 2009; Patton, 2002). Interviews were conducted at the principal’s school, audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Process consent was utilized throughout the interviewing process to allow for
unexpected accounts or experiences disclosed by participants (Polit & Beck, 2006).

Process consent involves occasional confirmation to determine if the participant is comfortable proceeding with an interview or desires to terminate it.

The data collected from the interviews consisted of direct quotations from participants that conveyed their experiences, feelings, and knowledge as National Board candidates. The researcher stored electronic data on password-protected computers and physical data in a locked metal file cabinet for the duration of the study. The researcher will destroy audio files, transcriptions, notes, and data collected in relation to the study after the completion of the study.

This study also included the use of observations, field notes, and documents to collect data. Merriam (2009) shared that observation data is appropriate “when it is systematic, addresses specific research questions, and is subject to checks and balances in producing trustworthy results” (p.118). Merriam further explained that observations allow for the documentation of behaviors as they occur in the natural setting and, when triangulated with interviews and document analysis, prove to authenticate findings (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) proposed that, while conducting observations, the researcher should attend to the following: the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors, and the researcher’s own behavior.

Creswell (2009) stated, “Qualitative research is conducted in natural settings as the home or office of the participant to allow the researcher to develop a level of detail and become highly involved in the participants’ experience.” The researcher assumed the role of a non-participant observer during the observations of the work environment, having little interaction with those being observed. Detailed and reflective field notes
were used to record observation data (Creswell, 2012). The school sites were located in various regions throughout the states of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and Illinois. Several of the site visits were conducted during the summer, which resulted in little opportunity to observe interaction of the school principal with teachers and students. Some of the principals were in the midst of transitioning to other administrative positions which did not allow for on-site observations at three of the 10 sites.

The researcher generated descriptive field notes while performing observations throughout the study. The reflections from the field notes included the researcher’s perceptions, feelings, reactions, initial analysis, and speculations. The field notes will aid the researcher in the description of the settings that will enrich the reader’s understanding of the context (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research acknowledges the use of descriptive data in forms of transcripts, videos, and photographs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Documents utilized by the researcher as data for this study consisted of photographs, brochures, letters and electronic correspondence, certificates, drafts of portfolio submissions, and agendas. These documents allowed the researcher to reflect on details not yielded through the interviews.

**Data Analysis**

The intent of qualitative analysis is to summarize the experiences of the participants using their responses and accounts. Creswell (2013) stated that phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings. The researcher needs to set aside all prejudgments, bracketing his or her experiences. Upon
completion of transcribing the audio-recorded interviews, the researcher used the process of member checking, giving participants copies of the transcribed interviews to review and edit in order to verify data and to share analyses and additional perceptions with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The researcher conducted follow-up interviews with participants by telephone to share additional information or clarify information presented.

The researcher utilized the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method for phenomenological data analysis as described by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas described the stages for analysis using this method, which applies phenomenological reduction consisting of bracketing, horizontalizing, organizing meanings and themes, and developing textural descriptions (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Following data collection, the researcher gathered the transcribed interviews and highlighted noteworthy sentences, statements, and quotes that provided an understanding of the phenomenon for the participant (Creswell, 2013). Additionally the researcher incorporated the strategy of memoing, used between data collection and coding, to record thoughts, questions, and connections made while engaged in the text (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008).

According to Merriam (2009), phenomenological reduction results in the understanding of the meaning of the experiences for participants when the researcher remains centered on the phenomenon under study. The researcher proceeded to bracket the focus of the study to understand the perceptions and meanings participants had for NBCEL. This resulted in the researcher focusing entirely on the research topic and questions in the study. Horizontalization of the data commenced with the researcher giving equal consideration to significant statements that related to the topic or research
question. The researcher utilized the coding process to identify similar phrases and ideas by closely examining the data (Kvale, 2007). The coding process led to the development of themes that was used for within and cross-case analysis and interpretation. The list of statements or horizons was grouped into themes or categories that would be used to develop textual descriptions of the experience. The individual textual descriptions provided the foundation for the composite textual description that provided the collective understanding of participants’ experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

**Credibility and Reliability**

An issue of concern in qualitative inquiry is credibility and reliability (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stenbacka, 2001). To increase the rigor and credibility of this study, the researcher incorporated several strategies: member checks, reflexivity, triangulation, and an audit trail.

To establish validity for a study, researchers have suggested the use of an audit trail during the qualitative research process (Akerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2006; Koch, 2006). The use of an audit trail, which originated with the research of Lincoln and Guba (1985), allows an outside party to follow the stages of the research and confirm the decisions made by the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe six types of data to be gathered for an audit: (1) raw data, (2) data reduction and analysis notes, (3) data reconstruction and synthesis products, (4) process notes, (5) material related to intentions and dispositions, and (6) preliminary development information. The researcher maintained an audit trail throughout this study to reflect on the logic of the research.
According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the core of credibility is verifying the data collected with the participants who furnished it. As suggested by Creswell (2013), during the interviews, the researcher summarized information in order for the participants to confirm that the summaries accurately reflected their views, feelings, and experiences accurately. The researcher used the process of member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) to improve the validity of the study by allowing the participants the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the analysis at the conclusion of the study (Barbour, 2001; Byrne, 2001; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Doyle, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2012). After the completion of the study, the findings were shared with each participant to reduce the occurrence of invalid data (Creswell 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Due to the researcher’s role as instrument, multiple researchers view reflexivity as an integral part of data collection and analysis (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Russell & Kelly, 2002; Stake, 1995). In the attempt to preserve the objectivity of the phenomenon, accurately describe the lived experiences of the participants, and improve the rigor of the study (Holloway & Wheeler, 2006), phenomenological researchers put aside personal experiences in order to fully absorb those of the participants (Maggs-Rapport 2001). Acknowledging a researcher’s a priori assumptions enhances the confidence in interpretative research (Murphy et al., 1998). This concept, referred to as epoché or bracketing, requires the researcher to “become aware of personal assumptions, feelings, and preconceptions, and strive to put them aside or ‘bracket’ them in order to understand and be receptive of the participants’ account of the experience or phenomenon (Carpenter, 2007; Dowling, 2007; Gearing, 2004; Hatch, 2002). The researcher examined
and acknowledged personal bias by recording reflections throughout the data collection and analysis.

Triangulation is another strategy used in qualitative research to verify the accuracy of the findings in a study (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation of data collection and analysis was used in this study to reduce bias and increase internal validity (Creswell, 2013; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The use of multiple data sources in this study provided an additional depth and breadth to the phenomenon under study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing as “the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind” (p. 308). The peer debriefing process conducted in this study provided an external check of the research by incorporating the assistance of a knowledgeable colleague to question and challenge various aspects of the research data, resulting in a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study (Polit & Beck, 2012).

**Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the human instrument of data collection (Patton, 2002, p. 14). According to Patton (2002), it is the researcher who conducts the interviews, interprets responses, observes participants, takes field notes, and reviews the documents that pertain to a study while maintaining neutrality during data collection (Creswell, 2009). The researcher was accountable for the collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting of data, findings, and conclusions from this study. During data collection, the researcher’s goal was to extract the personal experiences from
participants’ stories by establishing an atmosphere of trust to encourage participants to disclose, as much as possible, their experiences, deep personal accounts, and knowledge about the research topic (Guillemin & Heggen 2009; Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009).

The researcher sought to address the ethical issues inherent in qualitative research. She requested and obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix H) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham to conduct the study and, prior to conducting the research, received the informed consent of participants and permission to access the research site (AERA, 2000 section II.B.1; Burns & Grove, 1999). Due to voluntary participation in the study, the risk to participants was minimal.

Qualitative researchers are ethically bound to maintain in confidence the identity and information disclosed by the study participants (Ryen, 2004). The measures taken to maintain the confidentiality of the data shared during data collection and analysis were articulated to the participants prior to participation in the study. The names of the participants and the schools they administered were given pseudonyms for anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were given autonomy, which afforded them the option to withdraw from the study at any point (Beauchamp & Childress, 2009). Process consent, which involves the occasional confirmation from the participant to determine if they are comfortable with proceeding with an interview or desire to terminate it, was utilized throughout the interviewing process to allow for unexpected accounts or experiences disclosed by participants (Polit & Beck, 2006). Field notes, audio recordings, transcripts, and artifacts collected during the interviews were labeled and manually coded with pseudonyms rather than actual participant names.
Researchers recommend the full disclosure of the researchers’ role to participants in the effort to illuminate biases that could potentially influence the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The researcher currently serves as a professional learning director in an urban school district. The researcher acknowledged familiarity with National Board certification for teachers while maintaining acceptance of participant experiences and meanings they constructed with NBCEL.

**Researcher Role**

The researcher of this study is an African American female with an enthusiasm for professional learning. The researcher has worked for 21 years in education while rendering the following services: third-grade teacher, fifth-grade teacher, middle-school gifted and alternative math teacher in an urban setting; central office reading support teacher; curriculum program specialist; professional development program specialist; and director of professional learning. The researcher also served at a local university as an adjunct instructor of curriculum and instruction with a focus on transitioning into the teaching profession. The researcher earned a Bachelor and Master of Elementary Education degree, an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Leadership, and certification in School Administration from a 4-year southeastern university.

The researcher’s role in the study was that of an interviewer and observer in order to gain an in-depth understanding of principals’ perceptions and experiences of being candidates participating in the NBCEL pilot. The researcher of this study was obligated to acknowledge values, interests, and personal biases. The researcher acknowledged her role as director of professional learning, which may have presented some biases relative
to describing principals’ perceptions of their experiences. Past experiences in education have influenced the researcher’s interest in this study.

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the human instrument of data collection (Patton, 2002, p. 14). According to Patton (2002), it is the researcher who conducts the interviews, interprets responses, observes participants, takes field notes, and reviews the documents that pertain to a study while maintaining neutrality during data collection (Creswell, 2009). The researcher was accountable for the collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting of data, findings, and conclusions from this study.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter 4 will present the findings for this qualitative phenomenological study. The purpose of conducting this study will be restated. A description of participants and their schools, based on the information from the Participant Data Sheet, as well as a description of participant responses, will follow. The researcher will detail onsite observations and describe artifacts collected as ancillary data. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the research questions and themes that emerged during data analysis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore principals’ perceptions of the NBCEL based on the experiences and perceptions of school principals who completed the NBPTS pilot study. It was anticipated that the knowledge gained from the interpretation and meaning of the lived experiences shared by the principal participants would provide insight regarding the effectiveness of school-based leaders, instructional leadership, and principal certification. Implications for preparation programs and professional development for school principals, as well as a framework for common standards outlining expectations for effective practice, emerged from the data analysis. Such insight could contribute to increased effectiveness of school leaders.
Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological design was selected in order to understand how principals experienced the phenomenon of participating in NBCEL. The researcher sought to produce a detailed description of the lived experience from the perspective of the participants in the study. Qualitative data collection methods of one-to-one in-depth interviews, observations, and document collection were conducted in the natural setting of each principal’s school. As described in chapter 3, the sample consisted of principals who participated in the NBCEL pilot from 2010-2013. A total of 10 participants consented to participate and completed the study.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study ensued after obtaining consent from the Instructional Review Board at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (see Appendix H). The researcher contacted the ALSDE, Southern Regional Education Board, and the NBPTS for a list of principals who completed the NBCEL pilot. NBPTS provided the researcher with a list of 41 candidates who completed the NBCEL pilot in the states of North Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Illinois. The researcher contacted the 41 principals to participate in the study via email and attached a letter of informed consent (see Appendix A). In addition, within two weeks, the researcher continued the invitation of participation with personal phone calls. Respondents who declined indicated prior commitments, overwhelming schedules, or litigation involvement as reasons that prevented participation. The first 10 respondents who consented were included in the sample, satisfying the intention for data collection proposed by the researcher. Upon
notice of consent to participate, each participant was provided a Participant Data Sheet (see Appendix B) to collect demographic information. The information obtained from the Participant Data Sheet consisted of each principal’s current position, years as a school principal, prior administrative experiences, year and location of administrative certification, teaching experience, and demographic profile information of the school that each principal led while participating in the NBCEL. Prior to conducting the one-to-one interview, the researcher provided each participant a copy of the semi-structured interview protocol containing instructions for the procedure of the interview and a list of the open-ended questions to be used during the interview (Creswell, 2005). The researcher allowed each participant to contribute additional comments to aid in understanding of the NBCEL pilot. Each interview was conducted at the school where the participant served as principal. Interviews, which were completed within a one-hour time span, were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.

After the transcription of each interview, the researcher conducted a follow-up interview as a member check to validate the responses of the participant. Employing the verification procedure, the researcher provided each participant a transcript of the interview to affirm that the transcript data accurately reflected the participant’s views and experiences. Participants also confirmed the information provided as accurate.

The researcher stored interview recordings and transcripts on a password-protected computer and used pseudonyms throughout the data collection for anonymity and confidentially of the participants. Prior to, during, and following the participant interviews, the researcher prepared field notes to aid in the recall of behaviors, setting, and thoughts. As a token of appreciation, the researcher provided each participant a
$25.00 gift card for granting time to be interviewed and observed and for sharing artifacts.

**Participant Profiles and Data Sheet Results**

Each participant in the study was asked to complete a Participant Data Sheet to provide information regarding educational experience, professional experience, school demographics, accomplishments, and recognitions. Responses from the individual data sheets were organized into Table 1. Biographical narratives for each participant in the study were compiled by the researcher. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher will refer to each participant as Participant and a corresponding number coded, for example, as Participant 1 or P1.

### Table 1

**Participant Summary Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>#Years Teaching</th>
<th>#Years Principal</th>
<th>#Other Admin Positions</th>
<th>School Setting</th>
<th>School Configuration</th>
<th>School Enrollment</th>
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<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>K-5 Elem</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Asst. Prin</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6-8 Middle</td>
<td>840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>College Admin</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Asst. Prin</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>K-6 Elem</td>
<td>998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Asst. Prin</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>K-6 Elem</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Asst. Superintendent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Asst. Prin</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>6-8 Middle</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Rural</td>
<td>9-12 High</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Director of Elementary Instruction</td>
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<td>Asst. Prin</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>PreK-3 Elem</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
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<td>Principal</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each principal completed all requirements for the NBCEL pilot conducted by the NBPTS. At the time of the study, seven of the 10 participants were employed as public school principals. Three of the participating principals had assumed new positions, two at the central office and one in higher education. The mean length of time as a principal was 12 years. Four principals had served as principal at another school location. Included in the study were five elementary school principals, two middle school principals, and two high school principals. The largest school reported an enrollment of 1,701 students, and the smallest school reported 150. Four of the participants were male and six were female. This phenomenological study was a multisite study that involved 10 sites. Each site was the current or former school of the participating principal. Five sites were located in Alabama, two in Georgia, and two in North Carolina, and one in Illinois.

Participant 1, a Caucasian male, is principal of an urban elementary school in Alabama. He has held the position of principal for 15 years. He holds a doctorate in educational leadership. He has held former positions of assistant principal and teacher of special education and has served the State’s education association as chair and member of the council for leadership development. He leads a Kindergarten-Five elementary school of approximately 860 students, with a staff of 60 including 40 classroom instructional teachers 11 of whom are National Board certified. The school has been recognized as a CLAS Banner School, awarded the National Excellence in Urban Education Award from the Center for Urban School Transformation, and acknowledged as a showcase school at a State-sponsored conference.

Participant 2, a Caucasian female, is principal of an urban middle school in Alabama. She has served as principal at the same school for 14 years. Participant 2 has
served as an assistant principal and both an elementary and middle-school teacher. The middle school is comprised of approximately 840 students in grades 6 through 8 and 60 staff members. The school is the recipient of the National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence award and was recognized as one of the top 50 middle schools in the nation.

Following retirement as a school principal, Participant 3 is an African American female who currently serves as program coordinator and associate professor in the educational leadership department at a 4-year university in Alabama. In addition, she serves as trainer and mentor for the National Association of Principals. She holds a doctorate in instructional leadership. She held the position of principal for 18 years between two schools. Additionally, she has held the position of assistant principal and elementary school teacher. During the pilot study, she served as leader of a suburban elementary school comprised of approximately 1,000 students in grades K through 6 with a faculty and staff of 85. As principal, she served as principal mentor in the state’s Fellows program and as president of a state association for administrators and principals. She received the award of National Elementary Distinguished Principal and completed the state’s Superintendents’ Academy.

Participant 4, an African American female, is principal of a rural elementary school in Alabama. She has served as principal of the same school for 7 years. Formerly an assistant principal and first-grade teacher, she holds a doctorate in educational leadership. A recipient of the National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence award, the Kindergarten through grade 6 school composed approximately 150 students and eight instructional classroom teachers.
Participant 5, a Caucasian male, is an assistant superintendent in a district in North Carolina. He holds a doctorate in educational administration. He has formerly held positions as school principal for 6 years, assistant principal, and high school classroom teacher. At the time of participation in the NBCEL pilot, he served as leader of a middle school, supervising a faculty of 55 serving approximately 450 students in grades 6 through 8. Under his leadership, the school was awarded the National Spotlight for Writing, Top 25 Schools to Watch in the State, and Outstanding RTI School. He also served as regional President-Elect of the state association for principals and assistant principals.

Participant 6, an African American male, is principal of an urban high school in Georgia. He has served as principal for 11 years and served earlier as assistant principal and high school math teacher. Participant 6 leads a faculty and staff of 150, and together they educate over 1,700 students in grades 9 through 12. He had a previous affiliation with the NBPTS, serving as an assessor for National Board as a classroom teacher. Following his participation in the NBCEL pilot, he became a doctoral candidate in an educational leadership program at a four-year university in Georgia. A member of the first graduating class of the school he currently leads, he is also a resident of the neighborhood where the school is located. Recognitions of success are numerous for Participant 6 and the school. Recent awards bestowed upon this participant are District Principal of the Year, Foolish Dreamer Foundation Award of Excellence, Hall of Fame Award, Concerned Clergy Community Award, and Exceptional Community Leader Award. The school has been recognized as one of the Best High Schools by the U.S.
News and World Report, received the state’s High School Musical Award, and was recognized as the Best High School for the Arts, and as a National Achievement Finalist.

Participant 7, an African American male, is principal of a rural high school in Georgia. He holds a doctorate in educational administration. He has been a principal at the same high school for 12 years. Prior to becoming principal, he was an assistant principal for 7 years and a high school science teacher for 4 years. As principal, he leads a staff of 35 in the education of 515 students in grades 9 through 12. During both the 2013 and 2014 academic years, the school was recognized as a Title I High School Progress Reward School.

Participant 8, an African American female, is currently a director of Pre-K and elementary instruction in a district in North Carolina. She held the position of principal in the urban school setting for 13 years. Prior to becoming a principal, she formerly held the position of assistant principal and was an elementary school teacher for 12 years. Participant 8 is a doctoral candidate at a 4 year university in North Carolina. During participation in the NBCEL, she served as the instructional leader of an elementary school with approximately 500 student enrollment in Pre-K through fourth grade and supervised a faculty and instructional staff of 30. While serving as principal, she was recognized by the state as Principal of the Year.

Participant 9, an African American female, is the principal of an urban elementary school in Alabama. Prior to her 12 years as a school principal, she held the positions of middle-school principal and assistant principal. Prior to becoming an administrator, Participant 9 was an elementary teacher of grades 3 through 5 for 3 years. She currently supervises a staff of 35, and together they oversee the instructional program for 345
students in grades Pre-K through fifth grade. The school was recognized with an award from the city’s beautification board.

Participant 10, a Caucasian female, is the principal of rural elementary school in Illinois. She holds a doctorate in educational administration. A principal for 18 years, she held district positions of Bilingual Coordinator, Early Childhood Coordinator, and Language Arts Chair. Prior to moving to central office, she was a teacher for 25 years in Pre-K, Kindergarten, third grade, and high School Mathematics. She leads a team of 36 faculty and staff members who guide the instructional program for 240 students in grades Pre-K through third grade, the current State’s Teacher of the Year is part of the teaching staff. The school is the recipient of the Let’s Move Active Schools award and the state’s Gold Circle of Quality award.

Results of Interview Data

Data for the study were collected through the use of in-depth, one-to-one interviews based on the perception of principals who participated in the NBCEL. The central research question for this investigation was as follows: What are principal perceptions of National Board Certification for Education Leaders? In order to delve more deeply into the experiences of the participants, the following sub-questions were used.

1. How do participants in this study describe their experiences of the certification process?

2. How do participating principals view their role as instructional leader after participating in the NBCEL Pilot?
3. How do participating principals view the certification process as a professional development activity?

To guide each of the participant interviews, a set of interview questions (see Appendix C) was used to obtain data that could answer specified research questions. The first six interview questions were aligned to research question 1. Those interview questions were as follows:

1. What motivated you to pursue National Board Certification?
2. What are the components of the NBCEL pilot study?
3. What activities were parts of the NBCEL pilot study?
4. Describe potential changes that occurred socially while participating in the NBCEL process. Was there a normal execution of operations or was there a deviation from the norm?
5. Describe potential personal changes that occurred while participating in the NBCEL process. Was there a normal execution of operations or was there a deviation from the norm?
6. Describe potential changes that affected your work that occurred while participating in the NBCEL process. Was there a normal execution of operations social or was there a deviation from the norm?

Interview questions 7 through 11 supported research question 2. Those questions were as follows:

7. Describe the role of reflection in your effort to complete the certification process.
8. How did participation in the NBCEL pilot study impact your *skills* as an instructional leader?

9. How did participation in the NBCEL pilot study impact your *knowledge* as an instructional leader?

10. How did participation in the NBCEL pilot study impact your *attributes* as an instructional leader?

11. How did participation in the NBCEL pilot study impact your *practice* as an instructional leader?

The last four questions were intended to provide data to answer the third research question. The last questions were as follows:

12. How would you characterize your experience in participating in the NBCEL process?

13. How would you describe the experience in terms of its value as a professional development experience?
   a. In what way did the tasks themselves contribute to the value of the process?
   b. How does the experience of participation in the NBCEL compare with other professional development experiences you had?
   c. What parts of the process would you recommend for future professional development of other principals?

14. What types of mentoring/support were available throughout the process?

15. What are the next steps regarding certification?
Themes

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore principals’ perceptions and lived experiences of National Board certification for principals. Following data collection, the researcher organized into themes the data that surfaced from the one-to-one interview sessions. During the data analysis, which included an intensive examination of the interview transcript data, six themes and multiple subthemes emerged. The six identified themes were (a) motivation, (b) accomplished principal standards, (c) reflection, (d) transformation, (e) validation, and (f) experience. These six categories were consistently and repeatedly communicated by the participants in the study during the one-to-one interviews. Each participant referenced these themes when asked to describe the thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions associated with NBCEL.

Qualitative research data are reported using words with the goal of providing a “thick, rich depiction” to engage the interest of the reader. In order to convey a story whereby the reader could see and hear the voice of the participants, the researcher largely incorporated direct interview quotations relevant to the experience and the understanding of the phenomenon. Each of the themes and subthemes described below is supported with descriptive statements from the participant interviews (Table 2).
Table 2

Summary of Candidate Themes and Sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Accomplished Principal Standards</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
<th>Validation</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior Knowledge and Experience</td>
<td>Guiding Framework</td>
<td>Reflection-in-Action</td>
<td>Leadership Transformation</td>
<td>Confirmation of Leadership Practice Validation from NBPTS</td>
<td>Emotions Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Growth</td>
<td>Standard V, Culture</td>
<td>Reflection-on-Action</td>
<td>School Transformation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Goal/Challenge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection and Transformation</td>
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Motivation

Mirroring the firmly established NBCPT, participation in the NBCEL pilot study was voluntary. Participants disclosed various vehicles of how the information regarding the pilot was disseminated and obtained. Participants reported that national and state level groups like NAESP, NASSP, and CLAS, elicited participation through the use of announcements in membership communications. The district superintendent was cited as one who directly approached principals and encouraged them to participate in the pilot study. Additionally, 4-year universities recruited principals enrolled in educational leadership courses.

Understanding the premise behind the motivation to voluntarily participate in a program of this nature was important to the researcher. After making application and meeting requirements, approximately 650 candidates were accepted to participate with approximately 125 completing the NBCEL Pilot. During the in-depth interviews, each participant shared primary motives for taking part in the pilot activity. These included the
reputation and experience of National Board certification for teachers, professional growth, and the challenge of reaching a personal goal.

**Prior Knowledge and Experience.** Participants in the study acknowledged having some prior knowledge of the NBPTS. The prior knowledge originated from the familiarity with the 27-year program established by the National Board that recognizes accomplished teachers with a national credential. Participants disclosed having National Board certified teachers among their instructional staffs. As principals provided support to teachers participating in the certification process, they became aware of the tenet undergirding National Board certification. This awareness led to the interest in the program and served as motivation to participate in NBCEL, as stated by Participant 1, who shared,

I had been interested in National Board by seeing teachers go through the process, by listening to the teachers and helping them through the process with what they were asked to do, and by the reputation of National Board.

Other participants shared their experience in the Take One! program offered by National Board. Take One! is a professional development model available to individual teachers, entire school faculty, and districts that engages teachers in one part of the reflective, standards-based process of National Board certification. A modified version of the National Board process for teachers, individuals or entire school faculty participating in Take One! can sample the National Board process while improving practice and embark on the path to National Board candidacy if desired. Rather than the four entries required for National Board certification, Take One! candidates submit one video entry
and one written commentary to support the video. If a candidate decides to pursue full board candidacy, the work completed in Take One! would be accepted. Principals whose faculty teams participated in Take One! indicated significant gains in student achievement, engagement, and staff professionalism (NBPTS, 2009). Participant 4 shared that participation in the Take One! program at their school led to the discovery of the alignment of her personal philosophy with those found in the Core Propositions of the National Board. Participant 4 discussed how the familiarity with the Take One! requirements influenced her decision to participate:

As a school, we were involved in the Take One! process with National Board with our teachers, and that piqued my interest. I was approached with the idea of using the opportunity as a springboard, you might say, for my dissertation for the doctoral program at the University.

As a professional development opportunity, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards invited teachers to become assessors. Trained by the National Board, assessors scored candidates’ responses and searched for evidence based on the standards. Assessors received an honorarium and a fee waiver in pursuit of future candidacy for National Board. In addition to participation in Take One! Participant 6 had experienced being an assessor for National Board. It was these experiences that provoked reflection of his practice as a classroom teacher. He shared,

Together, we had gone through a small pilot of National Board certification for teachers called Take One! I completed an entry at that time alongside them at the middle school. I went back to my time when I worked for National Board as an
assessor. I learned so much about good practice and will never forget those five Core Propositions.

He passionately explained that those prior experiences resulted in the confidence and excitement that the leader program would mirror the same opportunities for reflection and growth:

I was going to pursue National Board but went into leadership and did not pursue it. I was eager to do it. In growing as a leader, I felt it was a great opportunity for me to undergird my talent and knowledge in that area. Because of the reputation of National Board, I knew the investment of time would be well spent. I knew it would valuable because I had been immersed in it as a teacher. I felt that at the leader’s level there should be some good reflection and opportunities for growth, so when the opportunity came about regarding the certification for principals, I jumped on it. I believed in what NBPTS could do for professional practice.

Prior knowledge and experience of National Board certification for teachers served as one of primary motivators for participation in the NBCEL. The familiarity and understanding of the teacher program provided a basis for participants by experiencing the Take One program alongside faculty, supporting teachers on staff while seeking certification, or serving as assessors for NBPTS.

**Professional Growth.** When asked to provide the underlying motivation for volunteering to participate in the NBCEL pilot, each participant mentioned a form of personal growth as a basis for participation and believed in the National Board’s program
as a vehicle. Growing professionally dominated as the rationale, as revealed by Participant 2:

Self-improvement weighed in quite a bit in the decision to participate. I wanted to see where I stood in regard to instructional leadership. I am all about improving. For me, knowing that there would be principals around the nation that I would be compared to motivated me. I am all about comparing nationally. It’s fine right here in Alabama, but how will I stack up across the nation with other leaders and principals? Can I grow from where I currently am now?

In preparation to grow professionally, participants opted for National Board over other vehicles based on personal impressions of the program tenet as discussed by Participant 9:

I was so impressed by the proponents of this program and the possibility of what it could do. I wanted to validate what I was doing as a leader and school principal to see if it was on the same par with others across the country since it was national, not just local school district…..to take the skills that I would acquire and use them in my practice. The only way I knew that this could be done was a program of this nature.

Multiple participants disclosed that they were at the stage where they were considering enrolling in a doctoral program. The announcement of the NBCEL pilot resulted in candidates opting to participate in the pilot rather than in a formal doctoral program. Participant 8 spoke of this decision and how participation in a doctoral study remained in the backdrop: “I wanted to grow professionally. I considered a doctoral program and this process and opted for National Board certification and have now enrolled in an Ed.
Leadership program.” Participant 8 had recently completed a formal doctoral program and elected to pursue candidacy through the NBCEL pilot. He explained, “When presented to me, I had just finished the doctoral program, I was tired but I wanted to continue to grow, instructionally that is.”

In addition to professional growth, participants 1 and 5 expressed the added goal of school improvement. Participant 5 recounted,

As a leader I felt my responsibility was to seek out the best training that I could get, and that was also my reason for sticking with the National Board process. The idea behind it was to take some of the things we were going to be doing, reflect on them, and begin to transform the school. That was my motivation, to move the school forward.

Participant 1 affirmed those thoughts and contributed,

It was an opportunity for personal reflection and to look at growth personally through the school in regard to what we were doing at the school, so it was exciting to be a part of it.

Professional growth was cited by participants as the main motivator for choosing to take part in the NBCEL pilot. Based on the reputation of the NBPTS, participants favored the NBCEL pilot over other professional development opportunities, believing that the program would provide a high degree of professional criteria that would advance them in the area of instructional leadership.
**Personal Goal/Challenge.** Another layer that was revealed as inspiration to participate in the NBCEL was the idea of potentially becoming the first group of principals to certify nationally. The Accomplished Principal Standards served as the indication of what accomplished principals should know and be able to demonstrate. The recognition of reaching those standards served as an impetus of participation, as explained by Participant 1: “It was the prestige in some aspects to see if you could meet those standards.”

Participants 2 and 5 shared similar thoughts. Participant 2 commented,

> It was perfect timing, it all fit, and again it was a personal thing to see if I could accomplish it. That was my main reason for doing it, to see if I could accomplish it, how difficult it would be to accomplish it, and of course the end result of being in the first group. I wanted to achieve it as a personal goal.

Resembling the thoughts of Participant 2, Participant 5 also shared,

> National Board was saying, “Here are steps toward instructional leadership.” I wanted to be that kind of principal….I liked the challenge.

Results from the participant data indicated that many of the principals held advanced degrees and/or their school sites had achieved national distinctions and awards. The National Board certification would be an additional benchmark of achievement for some of the participants. Participant 3, for example, responded,

> My primary motivation to seek National Board was to become a model for the teachers. They would speak of how much work it consists of, so I embarked on the certification myself, in hopes of inspiring them to do it.
Participant 3 went on to add that she has reached many professional goals in education, at both local and national levels. National Board certification would add credibility to her already exhaustive resume of documented success. Participant 3 added,

This (*National Board certification*) is the only distinction I don’t have. The achievement of National Board certification would mean that I would have achieved everything at the national level, serving as a catalyst in the achievement of other educational pursuits and goals.

Participant 3 was especially confident in the sustainability of the NBCEL program that she felt motivated and compelled to attempt to change the state law pertaining to compensation for National Board certified teachers to include principals. During the site observation, Participant 3 was able to share the letter she scribed to the state senators during her participation in NBCEL in the effort to recall the action of annual monetary payments to National Board certified teachers in the state to additionally include compensation for school principals. Successful in the attempt, she also shared the letter of response from the Governor granting the action. As explained by Participant 3, “I wrote a letter to Alabama senators to change the Alabama law to state that principals could receive the same compensation as teachers for National Board. It was approved by the governor and written in the law.”

The participants in the study considered the attainment of the national credential a personal goal and a chief reason for participation. The opportunity to be ranked with colleagues at a national level and the potential of being in the first group of principals to potentially receive the distinction was enticing for the participating principals.
Accomplished Principal Standards

The National Board certification process for principals required candidates to demonstrate the application of effective practice by completing and submitting multiple evidence-based entries that align with the Core Propositions and Accomplished Principal Standards. It was evident from the responses of the participants that the Accomplished Principal Standards served as the guiding framework for the pilot. Participant 4 shared,

The nine standards that we had to examine led us through the process of looking at leadership: your vision and mission, teaching and learning, a lot of in-depth knowledge of teachers and students, the culture of your school, the strategic plan and management, ethics involved with being a school principal, of course reflection and growth in the process, which was a huge part of it.

Participants expressed a familiarity with the Accomplished Principal Standards, appreciating the structured framework they provide and likening them to other standards, such as those developed by ISSLIC, NAESP, and other professional groups. Participant 6 expressed,

There was a guiding framework, the Accomplished Principal Standards, which were aligned closely to the ISSLIC standards. The standards were sound and made sense by embodying the most important things about instructional leadership practice: vision mission, teaching and learning, etc. I knew with the guidance of the standards, the end result would be great.

Participant 3 judged the Accomplished Principal Standards as credible due to their close alignment with other national standards:
The Accomplished Principal Standards mirrored exactly what a principal should know and be able to do. The National Board followed standards similar to those from the NAESP, not in wording but in essence the same.

Of the nine Accomplished Principal Standards, Standard V, Culture, especially resonated with several participants. This standard guides principals to respect the culture of the students, adults, and larger community, while exhibiting respect for diversity and ensuring equity. A task performance during the NBCEL process required surveys to be distributed to students, faculty, teachers, and other stakeholders. The results from the survey data were provided to participants. Based on this post-survey data, participants made revelations regarding this standard. Participant 1 discussed his understanding of this standard and how his plan of action led to a meaningful result, encompassing the school, stakeholders, and greater community:

Through this process, we looked at parents and community in regard to how you engage parents and the community as a whole in your school and how you sustain and enhance partnerships. This standard made me look at what I was doing with regard to all the stakeholder groups (teachers, students, parents, community). My big project included parents and the community in getting the outdoor classroom built. When I started this process with National Board, I envisioned the idea of the garden….and so as we were doing what we were doing with the community, I was able to document it. It provided me the opportunity to reflect on outreach efforts, how they were progressing, and if they were successful or not. Looking at students, parents, teachers and community and how we were working this
together, it obviously worked since the garden is complete, ever expanding, it is massive.

Evident during the observation visit at the school of Participant 1, a variety of enrichment programs involving university partnerships were in session. A bevy of teachers who serve on the school’s leadership team were preparing for faculty interviews and engaged in other committee tasks. Although it was summer break, students, teachers, parents, and community were on site as volunteers to manage the city-block-length garden of plants, vegetables, outdoor classrooms, fish ponds, and green houses.

Additionally, Participant 4 shared her discovery:

From that process, I came to realize that we were not reaching all of them (community, parents, teachers, students). Communication was a big issue. We could do better with reaching out to everyone in the community and in how we were communicating with them.

Participant 4 further explained the immediate change in processes within the school that were made as a result of the feedback from the survey data:

It (the process) sharpened my focus in that area. It became important to me that I was communicating that to them. We had to come up with various ways to improve communication at the school. We began by updating the school cast information, student parent handbook, and the schools website.

Participant 7 also discovered multiple unrealized gaps within the school’s culture:

The perception data showed a gap in what I perceived I was achieving in building the culture of the school. I had to close the gap to ensure that the culture I envisioned resonated to the stakeholders.
In addition, he made some discoveries regarding acquiring resources from community stakeholders. He shared,

The results from the survey activity revealed a need for me to connect to the community at a deeper level by creating better advocacy for students at the school by driving deeper in order to locate more resources for both students and teachers.

Through site observations, the researcher determined that while the age of construction of the school sites varied, the presence of new technology was evident at each site. Additional resources for teachers, parents, and students were apparent with the presence of I-pads, Kindles, promethean technology, computer labs, and wireless computer labs observed during the visits.

Participant 5 shared that standard five provided exposure to some hidden realities about the community in which his students reside:

That standard helped you understand the diversity in the community. A lot of times poverty is hidden; for example, Section Eight housing. I had no idea there was Section Eight housing in the community. It gave me an idea of the degree of poverty. The data revealed the educational level of the community which impacted the amount of support you get from parents. That information about poverty was an eye-opener, being higher than I expected. The caveat then was to use that data to improve the involvement of parents at the school.

Following the exercise for this standard, Participant 2 came to realize the untapped resource potential of the school’s surrounding community:
One piece of the puzzle was Standard V; it talks about the stakeholders. We have an awesome PTA and a few business partners, but we don’t have as many as we could have, need, or even could have. There are organizations out there that we could reach out to, and that part of the puzzle was not where it needs to be. The National Board process made me aware of that.

As a result of experiencing Standard V, principals internalized the information shared from the survey results and began the process of applying the information into their instructional practice. Participant 4 shared how doing so has greatly impacted the school and community:

As a result of National Board participation, we now host a collective school holiday party. Due to limited classroom space, many could not attend. The resolve was to host a collective party where the entire community could attend. We feature the children and celebrate as a community. On a continuous basis, the mayor and his wife conduct the student-of-the-month recognition for the students. At the end of the year, the entire school, families, and the community participate in a celebration as well. The town hall sponsored breakfast and lunch for the entire staff at the opening of school year and throughout. It has really brought the school and community together. A big improvement overall.

Similarly, Participant 5 shared how his school embarked on a mission of bridging the gap between the parents, school, and community by introducing parents to services that might have been unfamiliar to them while simultaneously informing them about their children:

As a result, we host a seminar for our parents four times a year. To encourage participation, we enter the community and publicly advertise door-to-door with
students aiding in the dissemination of fliers. As incentive, a meal is provided and we arranged for a limo service to pick up parents. This event provides speakers and presents information on services that parents were not aware of. We feature student performances and projects to engage the community. We did everything to partner with parents to advocate for their children.

Participants held a favorable view of the Accomplished Principal Standards developed by NBPTS. They were able to associate them with both national and local leadership standards. Participants expressed that the Accomplished Principal Standards provided the landscape of what instructional leaders should know and demonstrate at a high level. Participants especially related and reacted to Standard V, Culture. The participants realized a gap in practice from the task performances for Standard V. The experience resulted in the immediate application of knowledge gained from interaction with the standard that led to a deep transformation currently in practice.

**Reflection**

Principal candidates participating in the NBCEL commonly reported that the process presented them with the opportunity to closely examine their instructional practice at multiple levels. The portfolio process was developed around a structured set of entries that required the principal candidate to demonstrate and provide evidence. According to the participants in the study, reflection was an ever-present component of the process. Participant 8 shared,

The reflection piece was the most powerful. Often, as leaders we choose a course of action, pursue it, and check the results at the end. This process of reflection
facilitated thoughtfulness at all stages—pre planning, planning, implementation, and revision.

Similarly, Participant 6 stated, “It (reflection) was the biggest weigh-in, talking about and documenting what you are or ought to be doing. The process gave me the opportunity to reflect upon all of my practices.” He continued to share that the combination of writing and documenting resulted in, “constant reflection” so much that “when I wasn’t writing, I was coming to work and thinking reflectively about what was going on every single day. It became one of those daily spurs of reflection.”

Participant 2 shared those thoughts of continuous reflective practice during the process:

The process provoked reflection all the time, regularly, several times a day, this went well…next time….I would jot notes on various things: what worked, new plan of action, and next steps. With National Board, everything we had to submit, there was reflection built into it. It came almost was naturally and necessary in order to improve.

Participants reported that participation in the NBCEL pilot helped them grow by allowing for deeper reflection of instructional practices, as shared by participant 7:

The components of the program itself allowed for deep reflection. There were deep probing questions that pushed you to a different level of self-reflection on your practices.

Participants discussed how engaging in reflective practice resulted in the examination of current beliefs and practices, which ultimately improves teaching and learning.
**Reflection-in-Action.** Principals reported that the process of reflection occurred in the midst of the work, which allowed for the restructuring of a solution in the present. Feedback from the data and the construction of the entries provoked the conscious activity of Reflection-in-action. Participant 1 described the process this way:

The process was all about ongoing reflection. It’s all about choosing something that you want to implement and then, not only when it’s over but also as you go, reflecting on the practice that made it happen.” You formatively assessed what you were doing in many ways, through the opinions of others, hard data, observation. Those reflections caused you to see that you needed to rethink something, or confirm a great decision and move on.

Participants 3 and 5 each shared revelations about data following reflections with their instructional teams. According to Participant 5:

I was reflecting on a video to be submitted for an exercise and it appeared that we were not doing a great job of disaggregating data, or superficially doing it, so that was a good reflective piece.

Similarly, Participant 3 shared how reflection provoked a change in her leadership practice:

The activity of writing promoted reflection and allowed me to see the gaps in the data. Reflections resulted in immediate changes. Reflecting on the standards caused me to remember the need for teachers to understand data, take ownership, and disaggregate it.
Engaging in reflection-in-action allowed participants the opportunity to monitor and adjust decision-making in the midst of the event to immediately impact the outcome of a current situation.

**Reflection-on-Action.** Participants described that they are often engaged in reflective practices after completing the activity in question. They reporting thinking about what occurred, what was done, the success of the result, and any potential changes if any, to be made. This type of reflection-on-action was evident as shared by Participant 5, who shared, “As a principal, reflection became a part of what you were doing and typically the reflection followed a task.”

Participant 4 agreed and added that the work completed during the pilot resulted in a product by which she could refer to in the future:

All of the activities were hands-on. When I finished with what I was asked to do, I had a product that encouraged reflection. Everything was written so that I could review, reference, and re-read. The ole saying “Tell them, they forget: teach them, they remember; do it, they understand” applies here. We went through the process (literally) and it was all meaningful. The videos, surveys, information from parents, working alongside the teachers, we reflected on all of those things.

Participant 6 shared that although the pilot ended, the process of reflection is still present in his current leadership practice:

I recall while completing a writing exercise sitting back and thinking, “How did we come about the mission?” Additionally, how important it was it for me to have a process. It felt good to be able to write it but it additionally felt good to think
about how impactful that process was and, looking back now, how impactful it continues to be.

Principals reported experiences of reflection-on-action following the completion of a task performance. The evaluation of the success or failure of past experiences resulted in alternate actions and strategies taken in future actions.

**Reflection and Transformation.** Participants conveyed that the reflective processes exercised during the pilot ultimately changed their frames of reference. By consciously and critically reflecting, their practices were redefined, which impacted present instructional decisions and plans as evidenced by Participants 4’s explanation:

One of my reflections every year that I keep in the forefront is building capacity within the community and how you work with the community. I ensure that the community is involved and included; they are in and out of the building all the time assisting with various things.

Similarly, Participant 7 shared this view of reflection and added, “When the pilot ended, it did not stop the reflection process. Even now I reflect on current issues within the school; for example, “What can I do to improve our math scores?” Each participant expressed embarking on some level of reflection throughout the course of the experience and noted the NBCEL as one of the few activities for principals that provoked that type of thinking. Participant 9 explained,

Reflection played a dominant role as the basis your written submissions. The way you had to construct your task was based on your reflection of your day-to-day role as an administrator, how it impacted your relationship with your stakeholders, and the success or failure of your school. The powerful part was the
reflection and if I had not participated in this pilot, my reflection would not have been as significant in pursuit of my goal of being a good leader.

Reflection was a major theme for participants. Principals reported that the task performances completed throughout the NBCEL process provoked ongoing levels of reflection during the examination of instructional practice. Reflection was determined to have occurred both during and following the completion of a task performance and ever-present throughout the NBCEL process. Participants shared that the NBCEL experience presented one of the few opportunities encouraging deep reflection of practice, which led to a transformation of practice.

**Transformation**

Transformation was another theme emerging from the data analysis. The type of transformation reported by principals in the study involved a change in their assumptions, leading to a new lens on instructional leadership practice.

Participant 4 described the change in instructional practice resulting from involvement in the NBCEL.

Instructionally I have changed by increasing benchmarks and letting the data drive instruction, knowing where students are today, not a month from today; realizing that we can no longer wait after two or three weeks of struggling. I attribute that to my participation in the National Board process.

Participants attributed the transformation to the completion of the exercises and the reflection that followed the tasks themselves, resulting in a lasting commitment to critical reflection toward progress monitoring. Participant 8 shared,
Pulling together all the artifacts helped me to realize and focus on looking at every individual student. I’ve known that but since the process, it has resulted in me zeroing in on that awareness that it is not set on a timetable, but set around student’s needs.

Participant 1 explained that the process gave him a better understanding of the importance of the community to the school’s culture:

I think it sharpened my focus in understanding that community does play a great part in what we do and that those resources are many times under-used by schools. There are people out there who want to be a part in educating kids and enhancing the educational experience. We must open our minds to getting out there and finding them.

Participants also understood the important rudiments of good instructional practice and the need to move away from traditional managerial principal role, as communicated by Participant 5, who stated, “Before the program I was like every other principal running around doing discipline, etc. The National Board process helped me to reflect on grading practices and understand the cultural shift about grading.” He added that the experience led to a deeper transformation of thinking that expanded to the community, resulting in some major changes for the school:

It (National Board process) helped my practice ….it made me reflect on my audience…that whole first National Board piece that we spent weeks on…..helped you learn your audience. If you have never faced poverty or grown up poor … you can’t take things disrespectfully due to the culture ….my definition has changed. My staff had to get out of the white square Baptist box to
move the school forward. One teacher never got on board, and unfortunately she had to leave the school.

Participants reported gaining a greater understanding of how the standards all linked together toward the improvement of student achievement, as expressed by Participant 2:

The process showed me how the organizational piece of it all fits together……the daily operations of the school……how it links together……and it all has to link in order for it to increase student success.

Participants reported having an embedded structural shift as a result of participation in NBCEL that continues to influence their decision-making. Participant 8, “I am more conscious of what I do. I reflect before and after a directive, and I empower teachers in a more effective way. My actions are deliberate and are always attached to that reflective planning.”

Participant 4 supported this statement by adding:

I have not seen any other programs like it. A good principal needs to be an instructional leader, servant leader, etc. How does one become that? A process like the NBCEL is going to do that. At the end of it, I felt that I was a better instructional leader……better at being a transformational leader.

Principals in the study reported multiple levels of transformation. They experienced a transformation of instructional leadership practice was experienced as a result of reflection on previously held beliefs and assumptions about instruction.
School Transformation. Another layer of transformation reported by principals following participation in NBCEL was school transformation. Participant 5 shared,

50% of the kids who came to me in 6th grade had failed 5th grade, but by the end of the 6th grade 85% were on grade level. That took a lot of work….great team…… we were at 82% proficiency and closed the major gaps.

Similarly, student achievement was increased, as reported by Participant 1, who shared, “During the last year that we used the Stanford achievement test, we were under the 50th percentile, which is average. I wanted to see if we could grow there and we did; we went above the 50th percentile.” This was quite evident during the on-site observations which occurred during the summer months when students had been dismissed for the summer. Schools displayed a welcoming student-centered atmosphere of pride with an ample display of student work and creativity and current displays of school progress and benchmark data.

Participants in the study revealed that all of the NBCEL process components led to the discovery of implications that influenced their practice and ultimately impacted the school’s culture. Participant 6 passionately shared how the overall components worked together in concert to yield a powerful and lasting transformation that resulted in positive change for his school:

It was good to reflect. The survey helped me understand the perception of how the school is operating and how impactful we are being. Most shocking was the view of communication from the inner campus. The biggest Aha! of communication was that teachers shared that there was a lack of focus, despite me feeling the
opposite. It was not being communicated to the teaching staff effectively so that they understood fully what we were focused on.

As a result of this knowledge, Participant 6, as indicated below, made the steps toward promoting discovery learning through collaboration with staff. Participant 6 aimed for peer collaboration to invoke critical reflection, which is now embedded in the school’s culture:

Every year since, we conduct a leadership assessment for stakeholders, in order to inform us of how we are doing. We use the information to render changes as needed. Last year was a big overhaul year of my leadership team, which after some consideration resulted in some persons being retained on the team and some replaced. In addition, I’ve started conducting teacher empowerment sessions with teachers, surrendering a day to meet with every teacher in the building. This is where I communicate with teachers and also give them input. During last year’s empowerment sessions, teachers were able to outline their weaknesses and, based on the weaknesses, formed mixed groups of other staff, to come up with a product or project pursuant to what the weakness was. Some of the most amazing work came from this…We took about 5-6 of those exemplary projects and embedded them as the bedrock of the school.

Participant 6 closed by sharing a profound statement regarding the end result of the discourse and the assumptions that underlie their current practice. He summarized, “The work that we are doing is teacher-generated and owned, which has been good. We climbed the mountain together…all of this is to build solidarity …humanity of schooling.”
The display of like-mindedness and cohesion was evident during the site observations. At sites where schools were in session, current data were prominently displayed throughout the building. The researcher was able to observe the interaction between the office staff and parents and students. Children moved fluidly throughout the school and frequently stopped to address the principal in some way. The interactions between the principal and students were non-threatening and friendly. The students, both elementary and secondary, appeared relaxed and happy, not rushed or stressed as they moved about. Both levels found students working creatively and interactively inside and outside of the walls of the classrooms in whole-group, small-group and peer-to-peer interactions.

Participants described the presence of shared leadership that surfaced with the staff following participation in the pilot. Participant 7 reported a collaborative culture of which critical discussions are held regarding student and school improvement:

The process drove us toward a deeper exploration of teaching and learning. For example, although the semester ended, we realized that some students need an additional 10 days, so we extended the semester by adding those additional days. Participation also forced us to develop interventions and strategies and examine how we put our assessments together. The faculty developed a rubric….to gauge high school readiness. We now take quicker snapshots of the learning using formative assessments……all to better serve these students.

After the pilot ended, participants expressed incorporating some of the exercises encountered during the NBCEL as professional development with their own faculty and staff to build shared leadership, as demonstrated by Participant 5: “I used those exercises
with my staff as professional development even today…..they are good.” While conducting on-site observations, the researcher was able to examine agendas from leadership team meetings and professional development as evidence of shared leadership.

Validation

Validation was coded during data analysis due to frequent references from participants during the interviews. The concept of validation, however, held two meanings for participants: (1) confirmation of current instructional leadership practice and (2) lack of validation from the NBPTS. At the time of data collection, the NBPTS had officially announced the decision to not move forward with launching the new program for principals. What began as a 2-year pilot for participants resulted in an additional year-and-a-half of awaiting certification results and the fate of the NBCEL program. Participant 5 expressed his thoughts regarding the NBPTS’s decision not to score the work submitted by the participants:

They cited that they experienced difficulty in the validation and scoring of the entries submitted. Participants did not receive feedback in regard to the body of work submitted. The National Board’s program elements for me stamped that I was heading in the right direction after all.

Participants who cited professional growth as their primary motivation for seeking National Board certification were left with a deficit regarding where they ranked professionally, as shared by Participant 2, who declared, “This was a way for me to discover areas of weakness and areas I needed to grow in. I had an idea but, again, I sought validation as to what kind of instructional leader I am.”
Participants were left to surmise that, instructionally, they were on course with their current practices. Participant 2 continued to say:

     When I read through everything required, I was proud to say, ‘We’re doing this already.’ National Board was a personal gratification, but now I know that we were on track with doing what was right for kids. Our blue ribbon served as validation for the school.

This validation was observed by the researcher in seven of the 10 schools. Most of the school principals and sites were the recipient of at least one accolade for demonstrated excellence. This was evident in the learning environment throughout the schools. Banners announcing the school’s vision and mission were displayed in hallways and entrances and embedded into the culture of the schools. Most schools displayed a banner of some type on the exterior of the building. The banner message was always positive and at most sites presented the school’s status of Banner School, state ranking, Blue Ribbon, or other distinction.

     Participants in the study shared that communication between NBCEL candidates and NBPTS ceased following the final submission. They found difficulty in communicating with anyone from the National Board regarding certification status or the fate of the program. Long after the specified period of notice of achievement status, two years later, participants received an email concerning the program’s non-continued (see Appendix G) status and were forwarded a certificate in the mail. Participants expressed a void regarding their work and participation, as expressed by Participant 4:

     I received a certificate just days ago that basically broke down what we did, the components and such. It was generic and did not tell me anything nor inform my
level of practice. We were under the impression that we would be nationally
certified principals.

Similarly, Participant 9 shared her thoughts of receiving the certificate: “I got a
participation certificate…. like a special education participation diploma for being there
for four years…just showing up! This came in July 2014 and I started in 2010. Two years
past the original date of notification.” Participant 8 also recalls receipt of the certificate
and remarked, “We have been acknowledged for completing the process.”

During the site observations, the researcher was able to view the certificate mailed
during the summer of 2014 to participants who completed all requirements of the
NBCEL pilot. The certificate was issued from the NBPTS and specifically read,

NBPTS recognizes…for completing rigorous work connected to the National
Board’s pilot and field study on principal certification which led to the first
standards of accomplished practice for principals, and for helping define and
create environments in which teaching and learning thrive for all students and
teachers.

Participants expressed an array of emotions while thinking about the lack of validation or
acknowledgement. The hard work completed was not recognized by anything tangible.
Participant 4 stated, “It was very big disappointment and hours of hard work that we
completed that went unacknowledged. We could at least been offered a PLU
(professional learning unit) at the end.”

Participant 2 added to this opinion:

There are some principals that are so bitter because there were a few of them that
had embarked on doctoral programs which so many of them put aside in lieu of
National Board. We were told that these hours would contribute to doctoral degree credit but nothing was honored.

Participants expressed great disappointment regarding the lack of feedback from the NBPTS, as it was a primary motivation for initial participation. Despite the lack of confirmation from the organization, participants appeared to have inherently found validation by other means, as summarized by Participant 6:

I never got one ounce of feedback. I have no idea how they felt about my work. I only my own idea of the quality of work I submitted. It was their job to rate me based upon my submission and that never happened. Intrinsically, I have validation for myself from the results of our school data and reflecting upon the process.

Comments by fellow participants suggested that Participant 6’s continued expression of disappointment in an organization whose opinion he had come to value captured the typical thoughts of disillusionment:

I want feedback from an organization that I grew to trust and respect which was lost in this process. If they ever get it together, to be fair, go back and score our stuff and give me feedback, what would it mean after all this time? I have already moved on and applied my own learning and reflected upon it. I think I would have certified….I worked hard on that stuff……they upset a lot of people nationwide that trusted that it would start and end as they said it would….I was blown away….I take the opportunity for what it was…I grew a lot.

Participant 8 shared comparable thoughts:
The certificate is all we have to acknowledge that we successfully completed the process and in my mind I am counting that as certification. In the end, we were at least provided a certificate, not that it helped much. It took over three years for them to do a definitive action.

Participant 1 confirmed these feelings:

The results were never reported, you know, when you complete the amount of work that was large as this was and meaningful… *I wrote more than my dissertation in this process…* and never to have it evaluated, it is frustrating. I can see the results of my work here, but as far as the body of work, it will never be evaluated.

Validation emerged as an important theme for participants. Participants displayed despondency from the lack of validation from NBPTS in the form of a score report and ranking for a significant amount of work. Participants found the decision to discontinue the launch of the NBCEL equally disappointing. Although participants are disillusioned by the lack of validation, they found other means of personally validating their practice and the success of their schools.

**Overall Experience**

Despite the setbacks and disappointment from the NBPTS’ electing to not score participants submissions, move forward with the certification of the participants, or officially launch the program, participants expressed a sincere appreciation of the opportunity to have been part of a powerful professional development experience. Participants disclosed that albeit challenging, they found the experience worthwhile, as shared by Participant 4:
It was a positive experience…it taught me a lot as a school leader…the knowledge I got, understanding how to learn my teachers better, students better, community better…showing me these are things I need to do…that grueling process…was positive. It affected me.

Like many candidates, Participant 1 expressed mixed emotions regarding his participation in the program. While he found the experience frustrating, he was able to see the importance of the big picture and the end result:

The importance was looking at the standards and seeing that they each play a part in the project and your goals and putting it all together…that is huge for an individual and a group. It was very powerful….although frustrating….but it caused you to look deep into your practice …everything should be about student achievement and student growth and that is first and foremost. It led you through a process that makes you look at each of the components in relation to that …..and that’s powerful.

Although Participant 5 expressed feelings of dismay, in his current role as assistant superintendent, he shared that he would recommend principals in his district participate in a program of this nature:

Not being scored was disheartening. I was upset, but I met a lot of people and just experiencing the activities and exercises made me a better leader. If you had not been doing it, it taught you about what needed to be done. It was well worth it. I would send all principals through it.

Participant 9 supported those thoughts and added, “The National Board inspired me to lead instructionally….I did not want to be the lights-on water-running managerial type
principal…I wanted to be the transformational leader.” Most participants indicated that they would participate in an activity of similar type if offered in the future, as expressed by Participant 2: “Although I would’ve loved to have received the certification…I would do it again….it was a learning process.”

Compared to other professional development, the participants found participation in the NBCEL more gratifying, as shared by Participant 4: “I attend professional development….they are great…but there is a narrow focus…this was more a global thing for your school and mindset, teachers and students.” Participant 5 shared similar thoughts and expressed:

This was one of the high marks of my career, participating in this program…it was one of the best PD activities I have been in. It was cutting edge, focused on current trends, current literature and models. It was not regurgitating a textbook….the leadership pieces were relevant.

Participant 7 described his participation in the process as enlightening, different from what he grappled from previous activities:

I would use the word enlightened….completing the doctoral program was enriching, but not enlightening. The experience is what I connected to best……the experience, not the accolade that could have come out of it. The experience was so very enlightening….I had already decided to send my assistant principals through it…to support them in that process of enlightenment.

In agreement with Participant 7, Participant 4 compared the experience to her doctoral work: “I received so much more from this experience….than I did the process of writing
the dissertation. Overall the participants found the experience a rewarding yet challenging one, as expressed by Participant 6:

   Rewarding is the first thing that comes to mind….I learned so much about myself….learned a lot about my responsibilities…my school…..how the pieces fit together pursuant of what is most important…students getting to the next level….it was demanding……but I get that …the biggest word was rewarding…it was so not a waste of my time….those who complained… I did not understand the complaining……it made me ask….what were they doing then?…..what was their underlying motivation?….so what are you doing as a leader? They are asking us to reflect on what I hope is what we are all focused on………those Accomplished Principal Standards.

**Challenges.** While the participants in the study expressed a high degree of satisfaction, the NBCEL pilot presented some challenges for the candidates, as in the case of Participant 8, who shared, “I enjoyed it, until the infrastructure of the sponsoring company unraveled. The review process was handled badly and unprofessionally.” Participants expressed that those challenges presented some issues for some candidates and possibly led to a decrease in participation. Participants discussed the firm deadlines and the difficulty with the electronic submission process, as expressed by Participant 4:

   Deadlines…staying focused and accountable to every minute of the day…most difficult was gathering the artifacts……and scanning them in…the electronic process of uploading was tedious and difficult.
She went on to add the deadlines and lack of extensions may have influenced participants to withdraw from the process:

The big section that was due…several or many people dropped out following that submission….many asked for extensions…to my knowledge none were given….

Running the school made it difficult to pull all of that information together…There continued to be a decline in number of participants.

Participants shared that the process was especially demanding on the time of a school principal. Although the tasks were related to the roles of an instructional leader, time away from school was invested to reflect and draft the written submissions. Participant 5 remarked,

The National Board…..was a ton of work…...it was not easy to accomplish….the data was not easy to collect…. …..it took numerous hours to find that data…..it was intense and took quite a few hours of time… it was about 1300 hours I put into the exercises …I understand the point, but the collection of all of that was necessary but a bit much… extra work was required….that reflective piece required you to put it into words…..after work and weekends typically.

During the on-site observations, many participants were able to share evidence of portfolio entries completed during the pilot with the researcher during the site observations. The researcher was able to observe the artifacts in the form of numerous binders that held the massive body of work completed by the participants.

Participant 2 concurred with this statement and expressed concerns about the timeline and lack of clarity:
The amount of time, hours it took…frustrating….the amount the quality was there but it could’ve been streamlined so that ….we probably spent enough hours to have a doctorate degree. I started on a doctorate so I would say it equated to that….or similar I just think it was so much work……and not quite enough clarity…..you tell us we are going to send the info…then pushed back two months later. … The time frame was frustrating…..we signed in Sept 2010…things just kept being delayed… The final submission was Jan 2013.

Participant 3 also confirmed the statement made by Participant 2 and added,

The pressure…..people requested additional time which National Board did not allow….felt very rushed by deadlines…they waited a year to score them…..started in September of 2010 ended in July 2013. June in 2014 I received a letter from them stating they would not score…We did not get anything for about 6-8 months…. many participants shared that the process impaired their social worlds during the time of participation due to the requirements of the submissions. Participant 3 described her life during that time:

Socially, I did not go out or participate in a lot of things…it was like completing a dissertation all over again…..you had to give up a social life…weekends and after work, I had to write…major change socially. At work, I maintained the same schedule…I rarely worked on National Board at work…..there was no time at work.
Although participation in the pilot presented many challenges, the participants in this study managed to stay on course and complete the demanding requirements of the pilot. Participant 6 looked at his experience this way:

….the whole writing was time consuming and required a great bit of sacrifice of time…likened to grad school….it was hard to carve out chunks of time to complete the work… to infuse it into an already busy schedule……I missed dates with my wife, games, and other things in my personal life….although the tasks were embodied in my daily work

On not quitting the pilot, Participant 6 went on to explain:

People would ask me …Are you still in it?....the mass email went out and you realized that many dropped out……several complaints were posted that it was just too demanding overall….my thoughts were it was made clear to me in the beginning what the expectations were and if I could not handle that, then I should not have signed up……so I was going to complete it no matter what……there was the temptation to stop but that is not me…not in my DNA.

Overall, the NBCEL experience for participants was positive despite the lack of validation and challenges encountered during the pilot. Participants expressed gratitude for having shared in the experience but found some of the elements frustrating. In comparison, participants found the experience more gratifying than other previously attended professional development and graduate study.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The concluding chapter of the study presents a review of the research problem, the methods that were used, and the results of the study. In addition, the researcher will share the conclusions of the study, the significance of the study, implications for future research and practice, and limitations of the study.

In this era of high-stakes accountability, it is essential that school districts ensure that students have every advantage toward becoming highly-skilled competitors (Fleming, 2004; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). As educational reform efforts continue, school districts purposefully plan to confront the demands of producing increased levels of student achievement. Thus, understanding the pathways for increasing the effectiveness of instructional leaders should become an integral part of the reform discussion.

Research has consistently indicated that for student success and school improvement to be fully realized, each school site must have an effective instructional leader (Fullan, 2002; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004; Malone & Caddell, 2000; McREL, 2001; Protheroe, 2005; SREB, 2003). The principal as instructional leader is recognized as a significant factor in increasing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters, 2004). As leadership continues to be recognized, attention must center on the preparation and support of effective school leaders or schools will continue to underachieve.
NBCEL, based on the development and process of NBCT proposed to offer for school leaders the first national credentialing system. While there have been numerous studies conducted on the NBCPT and on the school leader’s perspective on NBCT, no research literature exists on the NBCEL.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore principals’ perceptions of NBCEL based on the experiences and perceptions of 10 school principals who completed the NBPTS pilot study. The central research question for this investigation was as follows: What are principal perceptions of the National Board Certification for Education Leaders? In order to delve more deeply into the experiences of the participants, the following sub-questions were addressed:

1. How do participants in this study describe their experiences of the certification process?
2. How do participating principals describe their roles as instructional leaders after participating in the NBCEL pilot?
3. How do participating principals describe the certification process as a professional development activity?

Qualitative methods were employed to conduct this phenomenological study. A phenomenological approach was chosen to explore the lived experiences of participants regarding their experience of participating in the NBCEL. In order to examine, comprehend, and describe the experiences and perceptions of principal candidates who underwent the NBCEL and address the primary research question, phenomenological inquiry was most appropriate (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Characteristic of qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2002), the researcher sought to explore the phenomenon as
experienced by the participants in their natural setting and, based upon the exploration, to interpret and describe those results.

This phenomenological study was undertaken to address a gap in the literature. Research is needed on the actual lived experience of principal-leader participants as they pursued National Board certification in order to add to the knowledge base of certification programs, continuing professional development for principals and pathways for leadership growth. Participants were recruited from the pool of principals identified as candidates who completed the NBCEL pilot study. Participants were included based on the responses from an invitation letter for participation in the study. The sample for this study consisted of a total of 10 participants.

Data collected to respond to the research questions consisted of in-depth one-to-one interviews with 10 principals. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, on-site observations were recorded, and artifacts were gathered during data collection. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe how qualitative researchers include multiple sources of data to triangulate findings that support the data collected from participants.

A semi-structured interview protocol consisting of 15 questions was used to guide the in-depth one-to-one interviews, (see Appendix C). The first six interview questions were aligned to research question 1: How do participants in this study describe their experiences of the certification process?; Interview questions 7-11 supported research question 2: How do participating principals describe their roles as instructional leaders after participating in the NBCEL Pilot?; and interview questions 12-15 were intended to provide data to answer the third research question: How do participating principals describe the certification process as a professional development activity?.
Creswell (2012) explains transcription as the conversion of audio recordings and field notes into text data. Following the interview, observation, and review of artifacts, the thoughts and impressions of the researcher were recorded in field notes that were transcribed immediately following the experience with the participant. Analysis of the data occurred simultaneously while transcribing participant interviews and reading field notes (Creswell, 2009).

Summary of Research Question Results

Research Question 1

The first research question asked how principals described their experiences of the NBCEL certification process. As stated by Knowles et al. (2011), there are six assumptions characteristic of adult learners: (1) need to know, (2) self-concept, (3) prior experience, (4) readiness to learn, (5) learning orientation, and (6) motivation. In addition there are four principles concerning adult learning, described as andragogy: (1) involve adult learners, (2) adult learners’ experience, (3) problem centered, and (4) relevance and impact on learner’s lives.

Adults have individual views of the world formed by past and present experiences. Those views provide the basis for motivation in adult learners. Participant responses to the interview questions revealed six themes, one of which was motivation. The researcher found that participants shared three main reasons as their primary inspiration to seek participation in the voluntary NBCEL pilot: prior knowledge of National Board, personal growth, and the fulfillment of a personal goal. In order to facilitate learning in adult learners, an understanding of how they are motivated to learn
is warranted. Knowles and colleagues’ assumption of motivation can be employed to better understand motivation for these participants (2011). According to Knowles et al., the most effective motivations are internal rather than external and become more internal as the individual matures. Professional growth dominated as the primary reason for participating in the NBCEL pilot. Principal participants discussed how they wanted to improve as instructional leaders and learn how to lead effectively. They indicated that they wanted to know the gaps in their leadership and how they ranked in comparison to their peers. Participants shared that the challenge of meeting the requirements set by the national standards was a motivator. Participants made few references to any external motivations.

Knowles and colleagues’ assumption of experience involves taking into consideration the life experiences of the adult learner, acknowledging their varied backgrounds and skills. Those prior experiences serve as resources in the learning (Knowles et al., 2011). Participants in the study indicated that the reputation of the existing National Board certification process for teachers served as a motivation. Several participants acknowledged their prior knowledge of the experience either from teachers at their schools who had undergone National Board certification or the entire school’s participation in the Take One! program process. Additionally, some participants reported having served as assessors or scorers for the National Board. This prior knowledge of National Board certification led participants to believe in the tenets of the existing program and the quality associated with the NBPTS. Many participants discussed favoring participation in the NBCEL over a doctoral study. This indicated an association
of credibility with the NBPTS and the belief that the program would be sustained and merit would be given to participants upon completion of the pilot.

Another dimension of Knowles et al. (2011) assumption of experience relates to the participants’ demonstration of high-quality leadership skills prior to participation in the pilot. Participants in the study demonstrated characteristics of effective leadership prior to embarking on NBCEL. They possessed numerous awards and recognitions for both personal achievement and school excellence. Recognitions have included Distinguished Principal, State Principal of the Year, Banner School, Distinguished Title I School, and Blue Ribbon School. At the time of the study seven participants completed doctoral study and two have since enrolled in a doctoral program.

Adults have a need to be seen as capable and self-directed. Knowles et al (2011) assumption of self-concept involves learning experiences that promote independent learning and provide minimum instruction and maximum autonomy. According to Knowles, adult learners typically get more out of the experience if they are able to work autonomously in the format of a self-study with little instructor intervention. Participants in the study indicated that participants selected to participate in the NBCEL gathered once as a cohort to discuss the program components. They were introduced to task stream, the online communication software through which all submissions and further communications between participants and NBPTS would be made. Deadlines were firmly established and participants were expected to meet imposed deadlines with completed submissions. Participants were left to determine a deeper meaning of the entry and make selections based on that assumption. According to participants, there was very little interaction from the National Board, but clarifying questions could be posted on the
group email board. Participants were independent throughout the process, working as much or little as they chose. While this structure is supported by Knowles’ assumption of self-concept, participants reported that they found this component somewhat frustrating and that they would have preferred more interaction with NBPTS.

Three remaining assumptions about adult learning are the need to know, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning. The need to know simply indicates that adult learners need to know the reason for learning something prior to undertaking the learning. When adults deem the experience as valuable, they will invest a substantial amount of resources toward the learning (Forrest III & Peterson, 2006; Knowles et al., 2011; Thompson & Deis, 2004). Participants shared that the pilot began with approximately 650 candidates with approximately 125 completing all required exercises. Each of the 10 participants in the study completed all of the required submissions and exercises related to the pilot. In order to keep pace with the deadlines imposed by the National Board, participants disclosed having to forfeit time with family and friends. Understanding the relevance of the Accomplished Principal Standards and how they interrelated to represent the consensus of what effective principals should know and be able to do, participants assessed that the tasks themselves all contributed to the core value of effective leadership and remained on course despite the after-hour and weekend workload.

Knowles’ assumptions of readiness to learn and orientation to learning are similar in that adults are ready to learn things that are relevant to real-life situations and that can be immediately applied in present situations. Participants understood that participation in the NBCEL pilot would lead to the receipt of certification if the requirements were met. Certification required the submission of six portfolios that
confirmed the leader’s ability to (1) develop an effective strategic plan for the school, (2) promote student efficacy and growth, (3) improve teacher effectiveness and retention, (4) engage parents and community, (5) create and evaluate a self-improvement plan, and (6) demonstrate continuous accountability. Tasks completed within the framework of the Accomplished Principal Standards provided participants the benefit of incorporating the work from the entries into their daily roles. Much of what participants discovered during the creation of the tasks was immediately applicable, as the principals considered their discoveries benchmarks of high performance.

Although participants favored the program’s task performances, they reported encountering some challenges with technology, time, and validation throughout the process. Participants expressed difficulty with uploading documents via the task-stream portal. This resulted in some frustration to participants as this process took a great deal of time and participants were not sure of the date-time delivery of the documents. Task completion resulted in numerous hours of collecting, analyzing, and reporting the data for the submissions. Participants were faced with committing time after hours and weekends to work on completing the tasks. Lack of feedback during the process was not favored by the participants, and the lack of validation of their work created negative feelings of frustration. NBPTS’ established timeline for the program was not met and the participants waited for months with no correspondence. Participants placed numerous calls and emails to NBPTS to no avail.

The spring of 2014 proved to be devastating to the participants after waiting for a year for results and feedback that never came. Rumors swirled in regard to NBPTS’ consideration to dissolve the NBCEL program. After months of being in limbo, the fate
of the NBCEL program was confirmed: National Board certification for principals would be discontinued (see Appendix G). Participants in the study expressed feelings of frustration. Participant 9 used the phrase “pulled the rug from under me” to convey her reaction. Participant 6 shared a similar reaction: “I was literally blown away.” He went on to add that other participants were indeed despondent about the decision and described their reactions as “very bitter and seeking litigation.” Participant 10 compared the experience to that of “divorce with all of my work being lost as a result.”

Despite the disappointment, participants reported gaining fulfillment from the participation. Reflecting on Knowles’ (1984) four adult learning theory principles of andragogy, principles 2, 3, and 4 were present in the NBCEL process:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.
4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

Experience was at the root of all of the learning tasks. The tasks performances required were tied to real-life applications, which allowed participants to engage the subject matter and gain experience. Performing the tasks also allowed for the fine-tuning of skill sets and acquisition of knowledge, which increases retention. Participants shared that the experience resulted in their being better leaders, giving them an outline of what effective leadership embodied. The opportunity for reflection was invaluable and led to a deepening of instructional practice. Participants strongly felt the program was the only offering available for instructional leaders to reflect on current practices. Each participant
found his or her own kind of closure of the experience and chose to focus on the intrinsic gains. This led the researcher to believe the motivations were intrinsically motivated from the onset. Participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the NBCEL pilot.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question asked principals to describe their roles as instructional leaders after participating in the NBCEL pilot. Research has consistently recognized the school leader as an important factor in school transformation, which requires the presence of effective teachers in the classroom and an effective instructional leader at the helm (Fullan, 2002; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004; Malone & Caddell, 2000; McREL, 2001; Protheroe, 2005; SREB, 2003; Waters, 2004). Effective instructional leaders influence the overall operations, as well as the instructional quality, of the school. When the principal is an accomplished leader, teachers and staff become effective, parental involvement is evident, community stakeholders are engaged, and students achieve.

Three themes emerged during the data collection that supported this research question: Accomplished Principal Standards, reflection, and transformation. NBPTS’ Accomplished Principal Standards served as benchmarks for performance at a high level. National groups have also identified and defined the qualities of effective and accomplished leadership by creating standards. The ISLLC introduced in 1996, revised in 2008, and refreshed in 2014, performance standards for school leaders. At least 40 states have adopted these standards or utilized them in the construction of their own standards
NBPTS’ nine Accomplished Principal Standards closely align with other nationally accepted standards, such as those published by the ISLLC. Participants in the study expressed that the Accomplished Principal Standards closely resembled those from other groups and guided the overall components and task performances in the study. Supported by research of Waters et al. (2004), which identified 21 effective leadership responsibilities of school leaders (see Appendix F), these responsibilities resemble and overlap with the standards developed by ISSLC, NAESP, and the Accomplished Principal Standards founded by the NBPTS. It was evident from the responses of the participants that the Accomplished Principal Standards served as the guiding framework for the pilot. Participant 4 shared,

We had to examine nine standards that led us through the process of looking at leadership: your vision and mission, teaching and learning, a lot of in-depth knowledge of teachers and students, the culture of your school, the strategic plan and management, ethics involved with being a school principal, and of course reflection and growth in the process, which was a huge part of it.

Of the nine Accomplished Principal Standards, Standard V, Culture, resonated with all the participants. This standard addressed the culture of the students, adults, and larger community, while exhibiting respect for diversity and ensuring equity. Studying this standard led each participant to realize a deficiency in leadership. This awareness led to immediate reflection that resulted in a defined plan of action to include all stakeholders. Participant 7 shared his experiences:

I had to restructure many of the programs and create better ways of communicating what our goals were at the school to the larger community. I had
to create better advocacy for students at the school and drive deeper to locate more resources for both students and teachers. I began to work out in the community alongside leaders, the mayor and city council members, and organizations such as Kiwanis Club, the Boy Scouts, and other organizations that really could contribute to the advancement of the school…sharinating where we wanted to do in relation to the vision and mission. The surveys provided this information. I saw there was a need for me to connect to the community at a deeper level…

The experiences of Participant 7 resulted in a new lens that led to a deep commitment and collaboration between the school and the larger community that increased opportunities for students:

We have created some great partnerships that we did not have prior to my experience in this National Board pilot program. We created a partnership with Weyerhaeuser. Over the last two years, they have contributed 60 to 80 thousand dollars toward the better education of these students at the school. Weyerhaeuser is an international major company in the county; they produce the cellulose from pine trees to create the lining in pampers. This is a big-time company that has made a commitment to help support the school. We also developed a partnership with South Georgia Technical College and created a program that is directly linked to the technical school and to Weyerhaeuser …our students could have an international career there.

This process of reflection was supported by the reflective theory of Schön (1995) and the theme of reflection that emerged during data collection.
Reflective practice is a rigorous, disciplined way of thinking that is linked to professional growth and improvement (York-Barr et al., 2006). There has been a shift toward reflective practice as an important component to improving teaching and learning (NBPTS, 2010; York Barr et al., 2006). Reflective practice and instructional leadership have ties to improvement (Spillane, 2004; York Barr et al., 2006). Principal candidates participating in the NBCEL commonly reported that the process presented them with the opportunity to closely examine their instructional practice at multiple levels. According to the participants in the study, reflection was ever-present throughout the process. Participants shared that the NBCEL process provoked reflection to occur regularly, multiple times within a day’s span in response of the deeply probing questions within the tasks. Reflection was exercised and applied at the time of the event. Participant 1 shared his thoughts about the reflective process:

It’s all about reflection. It’s all about choosing something that you want to implement and then not only when it’s over, reflecting on the practice that made it happen, but the practice as you go…..you formatively assess what you are doing in many ways: through the opinions of others, hard data, observation, however you choose to do it. Those reflections cause you to see that you need to rethink something or confirm that I did a great job there and can move on. Reflection was just an important part of it and it was constant: end of lesson, period, or day, what happened today and what must I change. It was an ongoing process.

This type of reflection is described by Schön as reflection-in-action. Participants also shared that reflection occurred after the school day while reviewing video submissions or composing written entries. Schön refers to this type of reflection as reflection-on-action,
which occurs with past decisions or events in determining any needed revisions to the event.

The theme of transformation emerged from the data analysis. The type of transformation reported by principals involved a change in their assumptions, leading to a new lens about instructional leadership practice. Participants revealed that the reflection led to a deep transformation of practice, which continues to exist in present in current practice. By consciously and critically reflecting, participants stated that their practices were redefined, which ultimately changed their frames of reference and impacted instructional decisions. Participants cited NBCEL as one of the few activities that provokes critical reflection. Participants attributed the transformation to the completion of the tasks and exercises and the reflection that followed the task themselves, resulting in a lasting commitment to critical reflection and progress monitoring.

Participants in the study reported evidence of school transformation resulting from the deeper exploration of teaching and learning and shared leadership with faculty and staff. Participant 4 shared her awareness:

I now talk with teachers about identifying students for tier 2 [instructional intervention] and resolving having too many in tier 3 [students]. I now visit classrooms during intervention time and ensure that we follow up with formative assessments and adjustments as quickly as possible.

Participant 6 shared his concept of the ICE that has permeated throughout the school and impacts instructional decisions:

Everything we do now is centered around what I call the ICE....National Board helped me to get to this.....the I is for instruction, quality instruction. The C
represents collaboration, effective collaboration, and E is for environment, safe and orderly learning environment. National Board helped me to think about all of that…environmental factors, teachers working together….but broadly quality instruction, effective collaboration, and a safe learning environment. Everyone has duties and responsibilities, administrators and teachers….along the lines of the ICE and everyone understands their responsibilities……..literally everything must fit within the ICE…….

Transformation was evident in the improvement of school achievement data and feedback from qualitative data acquired from stakeholders in response to leadership team objectives and outcomes.

**Research Question 3**

Research question three asked participating principals to describe the NBCEL certification process as a professional development activity. The ISLLC’s (2006) “Proposition for Quality Professional Development of School Leaders” states that professional development for school leaders has substantial impact when it

1. Validates teaching and learning as the central activities of the school,

2. Engages all school leaders in well-planned, integrated, career-long learning to improve student achievement,

3. Promotes collaboration to achieve organizational goals while meeting individual needs,

4. Models effective learning processes, and incorporates measures of accountability that direct attention to valued learning outcomes.
The research on National Board certification for teachers indicates that the teacher program is a high-quality and cost-effective professional development opportunity. Participants in this study shared that participation in the NBCEL pilot was not associated with a cost or fee. This factor potentially served as added incentive for participants to participate. As previously shared, it was revealed that participants’ primary motivation to participate in the NBCEL was to improve and grow professionally. This indicates that sitting principals are demonstrating a profound interest in ways to improve instructional leadership practice and ultimately student achievement. In addition, they are actively seeking opportunities in which to focus and strengthen their skills in this area.

Due to the demanding schedule and time constraints in the role of school administrator, the duration of time for training for this group is generally short. Participants in the study disclosed that most professional development for principals is focused around a narrow topic or is content-specific. It is impossible to learn and understand the skills, attitudes, and behaviors of effective leadership in the typical formal workshop setting. DuFour and DuFour (2007) recommended that professional development shift from the typical workshop format toward job-embedded practice that becomes less noticeable as professional development and more common practice in the school culture. Participants reported that the reflection that occurred while completing the task performances in this process was the element that allowed for the consideration of those skills, attitudes, and behaviors in their practice.

According to Schön (1995), in reflective practice, knowledge is gained from the individual’s own experiences coupled with formal knowledge of theory, and classroom/school experiences. Through reflection, theory knowledge, and experiences
are reviewed, refined, or discarded. In a study of the NBCET, Lustick and Sykes (2006) concluded that the accomplished teacher standards serve as a valuable resource in teacher practice, allowing teachers to become “more reflective practitioners.” They also found that participants displayed transformative qualities by immediately changing previously held beliefs and incorporating new learning into daily practice. The principals in the study reported employing multiple types of reflection while considering their leadership performance with the Accomplished Principal Standards as the structure. This process enabled them to create meaning about what is working and identify areas in which to grow professionally. Additionally participants described evidence of personal transformation that impacted instructional decisions. They also discussed school-wide transformation with student learning in the forefront. Reflective practice is supported by Learning Forward’s (2011) discussion of professional development:

> Professional development takes place primarily at the school level; is facilitated by well-prepared principals or teacher leaders; and is based on a comprehensive assessment of student, teacher, and school learning needs. Teams use data to better understand student learning needs and examine research evidence to identify effective classroom practices, such as lesson study, examination of student work, action research, and developing formative assessments. They regularly assess the professional development’s effectiveness in achieving learning goals, improving teaching, and promoting student achievement, and they use the findings to inform their practice.

Principals in the study shared there was an absence of available mentoring and support resources. Participants independently completed the exercises as required by the
imposed deadlines. Participants believed that due to the variances in experience, effectiveness, and leadership qualities, more principals would have remained in the pilot had more support been available to them. The National Board certification program for teachers has established varied support at both the national and state levels. Candidates are offered support via candidate-support programs led by Candidate Support Providers (CSPs) who are teachers who are National Board certified. CSPs participate in 2-day training from the NBPTS and assist candidates by reviewing video content, reading written commentaries and portfolio entries, locating elements of evidence, and providing feedback to candidates to facilitate deeper thinking about practice (NBPTS, 2014). The candidates can additionally contact NBPTS via email or phone for clarity on any parts of the certification process. A case study conducted by Williams, Peters, and Fifolt (2014) explored how CSPs fostered and encouraged reflection among teacher candidates pursuing National Board certification. Williams et al. found that CSPs utilized multiple strategies that proved to facilitate candidates’ use of reflective practice. The absence of support and mentoring for principals participating in the NBCEL pilot does not support what research says about high-quality professional learning, as stated by Learning Forward: “Professional learning should provide job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom.”

While participants in the study appreciated their participation in the NBCEL pilot, they reported that the most important takeaway include the Accomplished Principal Standards, as they provide the guiding framework for what all principals who are instructionally effective should be focused on. Principals felt that the task performances, in accordance with the accomplished principals, were valuable as they provoked the
much-favored levels of reflection. It was expressed that principals should be required to complete at least two evidence-based task performances during each school year. What resulted was an overall positive sentiment in regard to principals’ participation, despite the unexpected demise of the program.

Multiple principals shared that their colleagues should participate in this type of professional development. There was a disparity in opinions about what level of principal would be ready for this type of experience. Most participants shared that it would be appropriate for all levels of administrators, as expressed by Participant 6:

I think a professional development program of this type is beneficial for any principal at every level…it provides the biggest opportunity to refine your practice……all of the elements, the standards, surveys……every last bit of the process was some very good stuff……will propel other leaders to check how they spend their days…..

These thoughts were similarly expressed by Participant 7:

This program would be great for anyone wanting to develop leadership skills, whether first or 15th year…..it will drive you and push you toward improvement whether you are conscious of it or not….speaking with other cohort members…despite all the griping, they all say….I am better as a result of this program…I transformed……I am better as well……I win…..and the students are winning.

Other participants felt the process would be appropriate for administrators with at least 6 years of experience or new principals with the presence of a mentoring principal.

Participants shared that a desire for professional development is both needed and
warranted among their colleagues, as explained by Participant 4: “I think every principal needs to go through this or a type of this experience. There is a hunger for some kind of principal program to prepare principal beyond administrator coursework or dissertation.”

**Implications of the Study**

The findings from this research have practical implications for national, state, and local education leaders who want to develop meaningful professional development activities that promote reflection and transformation that leads to school improvement. The results of the qualitative phenomenological study revealed six themes. Implications for this study will be discussed for five of the themes: motivation, accomplished principal standards, reflection, validation, and challenges.

**Motivation**

The theme motivation revealed that personal growth served as the primary motivation for principals’ voluntary participation in the NBCEL pilot. Participants felt strongly that the National Board certification process provided the best vehicle at that the time for growth. Participants not holding doctoral degrees opted to take the route of National Board over a formal doctoral program of study. It was shared that the NBCEL program would improve their instructional leadership practice and thus improves student achievement. Past experience and reputation with National Board was also cited as motivation. Principals reported having had opportunities to support teacher participation in the candidate process as well as the school teams who participated in National Board’s Take One! program. Some participants shared having experience as assessors for the
National Board prior to transitioning into leadership. This prior knowledge led to confidence in the quality of the leadership certification program. Participants also disclosed that National Board certification would fulfill a personal goal and the challenge of meeting national standards. This resulted in the researcher determining that, as a whole, educational stakeholders create well-purposed opportunities and strategies for new teachers and struggling teachers and principals alike. This theme revealed that, among principals, high-performing principals are the thirstiest for knowledge and self-improvement. Due to the high functioning of these individuals, they can be the least of concern within school systems and can be overlooked as a group. More opportunities focused on growth should be developed for those principals who currently exceed in the area of leadership.

**Accomplished Principal Standards**

The Accomplished Principal Standards developed by NBPTS emerged as a theme. Participants felt that the standards embodied all the elements of a framework for instructional leadership practice, noting that the standards felt familiar and aligned with other national standards, such as ILSSC and NAESP, and state standards such as the Alabama Instructional Leadership Standards. Participants particularly identified with one particular standard, Standard V, Culture. Standard V respects the culture of the students, adults, and larger community, while exhibiting respect for diversity and ensuring equity. Participants revealed that as a result of the task performances, they discovered a professional weakness in that area. The awareness led to a meaningful result of actions that focused on encompassing the school, stakeholders, and greater community. Every
participant in the study praised the value of the standards and cited them as one of the biggest takeaways from the experience. It is recommended that the Accomplished Principal Standards are considered in the design of principal effectiveness models. Additionally, the development team should greatly consider the tasks themselves in collaboration with the use of the standards since it was the combination of the task performance with Standard V, Culture, which revealed areas of weakness for the participants. In addition, professional development and training embodying Standard V, Culture, should be added to coursework in principal leadership preparation programs, training, and evaluation. It was also revealed that the task performance piece inspired principals to distributed surveys to stakeholder groups. Several participants indicated that these were some of the best surveys they had seen. Groups such as AdvancED accreditation utilize their own surveys. It is recommended that the National Board surveys be utilized to strengthen states’ educator effectiveness models.

**Reflection**

The theme of reflection was a major component of the NBCEL program for participants. Principals commonly reported that the process presented them with the opportunity to closely examine their instructional practice at multiple levels. The portfolio process was developed around a structured set of entries that required the principal candidate opportunity to demonstrate and provide evidence that provoked deep reflection. There were deeply probing questions that pushed self-reflection of practice. Participant comments indicate evidence of both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action practice. Conscious and critical reflection by participants redefined their
instructional decisions and plans, which resulted in an ongoing transformation in practice. Participant 7 shared this view of reflection and added, “When the pilot ended, it did not stop the reflection process. Even now I reflect on current issues within the school; for example, “What can I do to improve our math scores?” The repeated references made by participants about reflection on practice were especially strong. It is recommended that future leadership preparation programs and professional development for instructional leadership include multiple opportunities for reflection on practice. District administrators can support reflective practice of school leaders by incorporating structures to facilitate principal reflection: encouraging collegial relationships, allocating time to reflect, recognizing successful organizational performance, and using process monitoring indicators to measure instructional programs. It is recommended that a reflection component be added to state principal evaluation systems. Adding a reflective task performance piece could deepen evaluation process for administrators.

Participant interviews also revealed a thread of reflective practice and transformation, both personally and in the overall context of the school. Participants found evidence of school transformation from school achievement data and feedback from qualitative data from stakeholders. Critical reflection led to the transformation of practice and assumptions as a result of the deeper exploration of teaching and learning and shared leadership with faculty and staff. In order for the practices of transformation to occur within the school, the faculty and staff must engage in regular discourse as reported by participants who engaged faculty and staff in the task performances.

According the standards for Accomplished Principals (NBPTS, 2010)
Effective principals know that constructive reflection is key to continual improvement of the culture within the learning community. They collaborate with their colleagues, network, study research, and seek experiences to enhance their practice, expand their repertoire, and deepen their knowledge. They develop the ability of staff and teachers to reflect in the moment, in the midst of action, and then to conduct deeper reflection. These principals provide regular opportunities to teachers for self and group reflection to continuously improve teaching practices. For example, they may establish professional learning communities to provide a structure for collegial reflection.

It is recommended that districts encourage participation in programs that allow whole schools to participate in professional learning communities such as the job-embedded Take One! program offered by NBPTS as a plan for school-wide improvement in teaching and learning. A study conducted of teachers participating in Take One! in high-need schools reported an improvement in the quality of instructional planning and implementation that improved their approach to analyzing and reflecting on their teaching practices (Learning Point Associates, 2008).

**Validation**

The theme of validation revealed that participants wanted verification of current leadership practice. Participation in the NBCEL pilot would validate their practice and recognize their effort. Notice of cancellation of the continuation of NBCEL resulted in the lack of confirmation for participants. Lack of validation from NBPTS was disappointing to participants as they left without feedback about how they stand
professionally among peers as an instructional leader. Growing professionally was provided as the main reason for participating in the NBCEL pilot, and the failure to receive feedback after completing the requirements proved to be a major disappointment for participants. A determination was also made to not grant any of the pilot participants National Board certification as initially promised. The theme of validation demonstrated a weakness at the central office level regarding principal evaluation and recognition and lends evidence of the need for districts to conduct crucial conversations around growth and evidence of practice. It is additionally recommended that benchmarks and observation tools be created to monitor growth as well as strengths and weaknesses.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative phenomenological study examined principals’ perceptions of the NBCEL. The sample included 10 principals who completed the NBCEL pilot study in four states. A quantitative study of teacher perceptions of principal growth as a result of participation in the NBCEL could be conducted with the entire group of the remaining 125 principals who completed the pilot across the 16 SREB states in which the pilot study was conducted. The study would survey teachers in regard to principal effectiveness and growth as indicated by the National Board’s Accomplished Principal Standards. A study of this sort would add another dimension to the perceived effectiveness of the principals who participated in the NBCEL.

A mixed methods study could be conducted with the 125 principals who completed the NBCEL pilot and the 525 principals who prematurely withdrew from the
pilot to examine the relationship of leadership quality between them. Themes from participant interview data could be included in the development of a survey instrument.

A quantitative study could be undertaken sampling the 525 principals who withdrew from the NBCEL pilot to understand their experiences in participating in the NBCEL and to examine characteristics of effective leadership practices using the accomplished leadership standards. This study could result in a better understanding of adult learning, motivation, and high-performing principals.

A mixed methods study could be conducted to examine self-reflection within a principal evaluation model. Reflective practices of principals utilized during yearly evaluation and how this impacts professional learning activities and student achievement could be examined. A study of this kind would add to the existing knowledge base of reflection for school principals.

**Overall Significance of the Study**

This qualitative phenomenological study provided insight into the perceptions of the NBCEL process for administrators. Research has recognized the importance of school leadership in successful school transformation (Joyce, 2004; New Leaders for New Schools, 2009). Researchers agree that effective leadership, next to instruction, greatly impacts student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D., 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson, 2007; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Understanding the impact instructional leaders have on student achievement, reform efforts have focused on the preparation of school leaders to effectively transform 21st-century schools into high-performing learning
organizations by calling for higher standards for principals and more rigorous means of credentialing principals (Hale & Moorman, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Schlechty, 2009; Wallace Foundation, 2006).

In the effort to improve school leadership, the NBPTS began implementation of NBCEL, a research-based, nationwide advanced certification for principals (Maxwell, 2009). The NBCEL would have offered the first national credentialing system for school leaders. This phenomenological study helped to add to the literature by examining the perceptions of principal candidates who completed the requirements of the NBCEL pilot.

Perceptions and experiences of principals participating in the National Board process for education leaders may be transferable to multiple stakeholders. This study was significant because the information collected may be meaningful to education stakeholders interested in developing a national certifying credential, as the insights shared by the principal candidates indicated an immense desire and necessity for professional development for principals who have reached the point in their administrative career where they wish to excel further in their craft.

Education stakeholders should find this study significant as it contributed to the scant amount of literature on principals’ reflection and transformational learning. State leaders may find the study significant as they seek ways to improve the states’ effectiveness models and current evaluation models for school administrators. This study was significant for universities because it provided valuable insight for preparation programs for school administrators. Meaningful insight regarding professional development activities for school administrators was provided in this study. It may also serve as a premise for future support through funding, mentoring, and professional
development. A final significant aspect of this study is that is specifically gave a voice to the participants who experienced the phenomenon. Serving as the only documentation of data for the NBCEL pilot, this study may provide insight to NBPTS if re-examination of the program is considered in the future.

**Conclusion**

Thirty years ago, the release of the landmark document *A Nation at Risk* (1983), condemned the state of education in America and inspired reforms to improve the dismal state of public education. In 1987, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEA) released the report *Leaders for America’s Schools* (UCEA, 1987), which addressed deficiencies in educational leadership preparation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 resulted in the realization that school leadership could no longer be ignored as a factor in school improvement. While the literature on instructional leadership is emergent, researchers agree that the role of school leader is critical to school transformation. The role of the school principal has evolved from that of task manager to that of instructional leader. National attention and reform efforts have focused on the principalship, including standards, licensing, certification, re-certification, and professional development of school administrators. Locally, states have created standards, re-designed preparation programs, and stiffened the requirements of re-certification and evaluation. The goal of both national and local education stakeholders is to coherently improve leadership development in order to ultimately improve student achievement.
The NBPTS developed the NBCEL in the effort to develop, recognize, and retain, school leaders based on the previously established program for teachers. Although the initiative was highly endorsed by multiple educational stakeholders, the decision to refrain from moving forward with it was realized during the summer of 2014 after a promising start in 2010. The program would have offered the first national certifying credential for school administrators. Understanding the premise of this initiative could inform the emergent literature regarding instructional leadership.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore principals’ perceptions of the NBCEL based on the experiences and perceptions of school principals who completed the NBPTS pilot study. The data collection for this study was guided by the central research question and was supported by sub-questions, which resulted in the emergence of six themes. The themes of motivation, Accomplished Principal Standards, reflection, transformation, validation, and experience provided answers to each of the research questions.

The researcher shared implications for future study that included (a) creating additional professional development opportunities that focus on growth for principals in the areas of instructional leadership; (b) developing and expanding course work in principal leadership preparation programs, training, and evaluation to include Standard V, Culture; (c) incorporating the Accomplished Principal Standards in the design of principal effectiveness models; (d) utilizing the surveys from the National Board to strengthen the state’s educator effectiveness model; (e) adding a reflective task performance component to state principal evaluation systems; (f) encouraging participation in programs that allow the entire school faculty to participate in professional
learning communities; (g) increasing crucial conversations that center around professional growth and evidence of practice; and (h) establishing benchmarks and observation tools to monitor growth, and strengths and weaknesses.

The researcher also made recommendations for follow-up study including two quantitative studies: (1) a study of teacher perceptions of principal growth as a result of participation in the NBCEL to add to understanding the perceived effectiveness of principals who participated in the NBCEL and (2) a quantitative study sampling the 525 principals who withdrew from the NBCEL pilot to understand their experiences of participating in the NBCEL to examine characteristics of effective leadership practices using the accomplished leadership standards. In addition, two mixed-methods studies were recommended for follow-up study: (1) a study with the 125 principals who completed the NBCEL pilot and the 525 principals who prematurely withdrew from the pilot to examine the relationship of leadership quality between them and (2) a study to examine self-reflection within a principal evaluation model.
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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER
June 11, 2014

Dear National Board Candidate,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Leadership program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and I am asking for your assistance with this effort (I would like to invite you to participate).

I will be conducting research into the National Board certification process for education leaders. In this investigation, I will be talking with first time candidates for National Board certification for principals who participated in the pilot study in Alabama. My purpose for contacting you is to solicit your participation. Participation by candidates is completely voluntary and in no way impacts the work done by the candidate in completing his/her portfolio entries. Participants will know that they have contributed to the accumulation of research data that will potentially help better understand your experiences as a candidate attempting National Board certification.

Each volunteer participant will participate in one interview session conducted by the researcher that will last approximately one hour and will be audio-taped for future transcription and analysis. The interview will be conducted in the most convenient location for the participant and at a time convenient for both participant and researcher, although time must be prior to the candidate’s notification of certification results. All tapes will be number coded so that no tape will be associated specifically with any individual. A list of names and codes will be secured by the researcher and will be destroyed at the completion of the study. In addition, a follow up interviews will be conducted via email or telephone.

Each participant will also be asked to provide the researcher with access to his/her portfolio submissions or copies of those entries for analysis. The data will also be number coded so that no information will be associated specifically with any candidate. Again, a list of names and codes will be secured by the researcher and will be destroyed at the completion of the study. All portfolio entries will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Following data analysis, participants will be provided with selected notes and quotes from the interview transcripts or taken by the researcher during examination of the portfolio entries. Participants will have the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher. Final results of the research will be provided to those participants who indicate interest in receiving it.

If you are willing to participate in this research investigation, please provide your signature at the bottom of this correspondence and return it to me via email wknigh@bhm.k12.al.us or fax (205) 231-2250 by June 18, 2014. I look forward to hearing from you and to engaging with you in the process of adding new information to the research base regarding the National Board certification process.

Thank you,
Wendy Conner-Knight
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT DATA SHEET
Participant Data Sheet

Participant Information

1. Participant’s Name _____________________________________________
2. Position _____________________________________________
3. How many years have you been a school principal? _______
4. Have you served in any other administrative positions? ___________ if so, explain____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
5. Where have you served the most time as a school principal?
   a. Urban schools _____ b. Suburban schools _____ c. Rural schools _____
6. At which university did you obtain your principal’s certification? __________
7. What year? __________
8. How many years were you a teacher? _______
9. What grade/subject (s) did you teach? ____________________
10. Date (s) of participation in the NBCEL Pilot____________________________

School Demographic Information

11. Name of School District______________________________________
12. Name of School _____________________________________________
13. School Grade Level
   _____ Elementary _____ Middle _____ K-8 _____ High
14. School Identification
   ___________ urban ___________ rural ___________ suburban
15. School Address ______________________________________________

16. School Phone ______________________________________________

17. School Fax ________________________________________________

18. Number of staff members _____

19. Student Enrollment _____

20. Number of sections/classes at each grade level:

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<th>Grade Level</th>
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APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today about your experiences as a participant in the pilot for National Board Certification for Education Leaders (NBCEL). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the meaning perspectives associated with the NBCEL process as constructed by principal candidates who participated in the NBCEL pilot.

I will be conducting interviews today and a subsequent follow-up interview which will be recorded and transcribed. Your name will remain confidential throughout the study. Following the interview, you will receive a copy of the transcript to review for accuracy and clarify any responses.

I am interested in your perspective and encourage you to freely discuss your views, impressions and feelings. I would like to ask you the questions that I provided to you prior to our visit today. I may ask some additional questions that you have not reviewed for clarification. In addition, I will be scribing periodically throughout the session.

Are you ready to begin?

Background: Tell me about yourself:

Interview Questions:

1. What motivated you to pursue National Board certification?

2. What are the components of the NBCEL pilot study?
3. What activities were parts of the NBCEL pilot study?
4. Describe potential changes that occurred while participating in the NBCEL process, was there a normal execution of operations (social, personal, work) or was there a deviation from the norm?
5. Describe the role of reflection in your effort to complete the certification process?
6. How did participation in the NBCEL pilot study impact your skills as an instructional leader?
7. How did participation in the NBCEL pilot study impact your knowledge as an instructional leader?
8. How did participation in the NBCEL pilot study impact your attributes as an instructional leader?
9. How did participation in the NBCEL pilot study impact your practice as an instructional leader?
10. How would you characterize your experience in participating in the NBCEL process?
11. How would you describe the experience in terms of its value as a professional development experience?
   a. In what way did the tasks themselves contribute to the value of the process?
   b. How does the experience of participation in the NBCEL compare with other professional development experiences you had?
12. What types of mentoring/support were available throughout the process?
13. What are the next steps regarding certification?
14. Is there any additional information you would like to add or something we have not discussed?
APPENDIX D

NATIONAL BOARD CORE PROPOSITIONS
FOR ACCOMPLISHED EDUCATIONAL LEADERS
National Board Core Propositions  
for Accomplished Educational Leaders™

SKILLS

1. Accomplished educational leaders continuously cultivate their understanding of leadership and the change process to meet high levels of performance. (Leadership)

2. Accomplished educational leaders have a clear vision and inspire and engage stakeholders in developing and realizing the mission. (Vision)

3. Accomplished educational leaders manage and leverage systems and processes to achieve desired results. (Management)

APPLICATIONS

4. Accomplished educational leaders act with a sense of urgency to foster a cohesive culture of learning. (Culture)

5. Accomplished educational leaders are committed to student and adult learners and to their development. (Learners and Learning)

6. Accomplished educational leaders drive, facilitate and monitor the teaching and learning process. (Instruction)

DISPOSITIONS

7. Accomplished educational leaders model professional, ethical behavior and expect it from others. (Ethics)

8. Accomplished educational leaders ensure equitable learning opportunities and high expectations for all. (Equity)

9. Accomplished educational leaders advocate on behalf of their schools, communities and profession. (Advocacy) (NBPTS, 2009)
APPENDIX E

ACCOMPLISHED PRINCIPAL STANDARDS
Accomplished Principal
Standards Statements

Standard I: Leadership for Results
Accomplished principals lead with a sense of urgency and achieve the highest results for all students and adults. They build organizational capacity by developing leadership in others. These dynamic, forward-thinking principals lead collaborative organizations that realize and sustain positive change that enhances teacher practice and improves student learning.

Standard II: Vision and Mission
Accomplished principals lead and inspire the learning community to develop, articulate, and commit to a shared and compelling vision of the highest levels of student learning and adult instructional practice. These principals advance the mission through collaborative processes that focus and drive the organization toward the vision.

Standard III: Teaching and Learning
Accomplished principals ensure that teaching and learning are the primary focus of the organization. As stewards of learning, these principals lead the implementation of a rigorous, relevant, and balanced curriculum. They work collaboratively to implement a common instructional framework that aligns curriculum with teaching, assessment, and learning, and provides a common language for instructional quality that guides teacher conversation, practice, observation, evaluation, and feedback. They know a full range of pedagogy and make certain that all adults have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to support student success.

Standard IV: Knowledge of Students and Adults
Accomplished principals ensure that each student and adult in the learning community is known and valued. These principals develop systems so that individuals are supported socially, emotionally, and intellectually, in their development, learning, and achievement.

Standard V: Culture
Accomplished principals inspire and nurture a culture of high expectations, where actions support the common values and beliefs of the organization. These principals build authentic, productive relationships that foster a collaborative spirit. They honor the culture of the students, adults, and larger community, demonstrating respect for diversity and ensuring equity. They create and maintain a trusting, safe environment that promotes effective adult practice and student learning.
Standard VI: Strategic Management

Accomplished principals skillfully lead the design, development, and implementation of strategic management systems and processes that actualize the vision and mission. These principals lead the monitoring and adaptation of systems and processes to ensure they are effective and efficient in support of a high-performing organization focused on effective teaching and learning.

Standard VII: Advocacy

Accomplished principals effectively advocate internally and externally to advance the organization’s vision and mission. These principals strategically seek, inform, and mobilize influential educational, political, and community leaders to advocate for all students and adults in the learning community.

Standard VIII: Ethics

Accomplished principals are ethical. They consistently demonstrate a high degree of personal and professional ethics exemplified by integrity, justice, and equity. These principals establish a culture in which exemplary ethical behavior is practiced by all stakeholders.

Standard IX: Reflection and Growth

Accomplished principals are humble lead learners who make their practice public and view their own learning as a foundational part of the work of school leadership. They are reflective practitioners who build on their strengths and identify areas for personal and professional growth. They adapt their paradigm and practice to result in improved student performance and enhanced teacher instruction through reflective practices.
APPENDIX F

21 LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL LEADER
## Leadership Responsibilities of the School Leader

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Behavior</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Affirmation</td>
<td>The leader recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments—and acknowledges failure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Change Agent</td>
<td>The leader’s disposition to challenge the status quo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Contingent Rewards</td>
<td>The leader recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Communication</td>
<td>The leader establishes strong lines of communication with and between teachers and students.</td>
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<td>5. Culture</td>
<td>The leader builds a culture that positively influences teachers, who, in turn, positively influence students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Discipline</td>
<td>The leader needs to protect teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their instructional time or focus.</td>
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<td>7. Flexibility</td>
<td>The leader adapts their leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent.</td>
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<td>8. Focus</td>
<td>The leader establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school’s attention.</td>
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<td>9. Ideals/Beliefs</td>
<td>The leader communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling.</td>
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<td>10. Input</td>
<td>The leader involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.</td>
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<td>11. Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>The leader ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices regarding effective schooling and makes discussions of these a regular aspect of the school’s culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment</td>
<td>The leader is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum,</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and, Assessment</th>
<th>instruction, and assessment activities at the classroom level. The leader is aware of best practices in these domains.</th>
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<tr>
<td>14. Monitoring/Evaluating</td>
<td>The leader monitors the effectiveness of school practices in terms of their impact on student achievement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Optimizer</td>
<td>The leader inspires others and is the driving force when implementing a challenging innovation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Order</td>
<td>The leader establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines.</td>
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<td>17. Outreach</td>
<td>The leader is an advocate and a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders.</td>
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<td>18. Relationships</td>
<td>The leader demonstrates an awareness of the personal lives of teachers and staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Resources</td>
<td>The leader provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Situational Awareness</td>
<td>The leader is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Visibility</td>
<td>The leader has contact and interacts with teachers, students, and parents.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

NBPTS CORRESPONDENCE TO PRINCIPAL CANDIDATE
April 12, 2014

Dear [Name],

In 2008, the National Board decided to extend its work on teacher certification to include principal certification. For more than two years, the Board worked with principals and other educators to develop the standards of accomplished practice and the core propositions that define the work of effective principals.

In September 2010, 673 principals agreed to participate in the first pilot/field testing. A year later another 623 principals became the second cohort. From these individuals—largely recruited thanks to the strong efforts of NASSP, NAESP, and other advocates for principals—only 127 principals from the first cohort and only 103 principals from the second cohort completed the process. You were one of the few who had the commitment and stamina to submit a full portfolio.

As I'm sure you understand, in order for assessments to be valid and reliable they must be created according to certain psychometric practices. Not only does the pilot/field test group have to be of a certain size, for example, but the individuals must be representative of the general population targeted by the assessment. The disappointingly low completion rate makes it impossible to confirm the psychometric reliability and validity of this assessment. Further, because final assessments usually include changes made as a result of lessons learned during the pilot/field tests, only on rare occasions are people who participate in those tests able to be certified based on those assessments. Those who brave the unknown and participate in the development of such assessments have a leg up in pursuing certification once the final process is established, but they often must go through the process again.

In its communications with you over the past few years, the National Board was not clear enough that it was unlikely participants in the pilot/field tests could be certified based solely on that experience. That outcome was technically possible only if the final assessment was identical to or had only minor changes from the pilot/field tests. Given the technical issues, we will not be able to certify anyone who has completed the pilot/field test process. I deeply regret that we have arrived at this conclusion.

As a result of the insurmountable technical challenges, after broad consultation with staff and others, I brought the issues to our Certification Council with the recommendation that we end development of the current principal certification program. After conducting its own review, the Council delivered to the Board of Directors a recommendation that affirms its commitment to a standards-based profession and to partnering with other organizations in the use of Accomplished Principal Standards, but discontinues development of the current principal certification program. The Directors took the issue today and voted to accept the recommendation of the Council.
Although we cannot issue certifications based on the current design, the National Board remains committed to working with principals on other programs that promote outstanding practice. New programs may include standards-based assessments that lead to advanced credentialing, as well as professional development built on our National Board Accomplished Principal Standards, which were developed by this initiative and remain valuable to the school leadership field.

We are currently in the process of securing the services of a team of well-trained principals who will provide each candidate who completed the process with narrative and personal feedback on the work you submitted. I realize this is not equivalent to receiving a score -- and certainly not certification -- but I hope it will make at least a small contribution to your professional growth. We will mail this feedback to you no later than July 28, 2014.

Education is at a very important moment in its development, and the National Board was founded more than 25 years ago to help teaching claim its rightful place among other true professions. We continue to make significant progress on behalf of teachers, and it was our hope to support those who lead our schools in the same way. That dream has proved to be more elusive, undoubtedly a reflection of how truly complex the work of principals is, but we remain committed to the work, and I thank you for what you have done to make that happen.

Sincerely,

Ronald Thorpe
President & CEO
APPENDIX H

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM
UAB has Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) that are approved Federally with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The Assurance number is H-00020590 and it expires on January 31, 2017. The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56.

Principal Investigator: CONNER-KNIGHT, WENDOLYN A
Co-Investigator(s):
Protocol Number: E140401008
Protocol Title: Principals' Perceptions of the National Board Certification Process for Administrators: A Phenomenological Study

The above project was reviewed on 5/9/14. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This project qualifies as an exemption as defined in 45 CFR 46.101, paragraph d.

This project received EXEMPT review.
IRB Approval Date: 5/9/14
Once IRB Approval Issued: 5/9/14

Cari Oliver
Assistant Director, Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

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 to 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.