SELECTED PROFESSIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF
GEORGIA TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AS PREDICTORS OF
STUDENT READING ACHIEVEMENT

by

GREGORY L. MIDDLETION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mom and dad, Eartha “Ethel” Middleton and Henry Phillip Middleton, who both emphasized and modeled an appreciation and a respect for learning, a strong work ethic, faith in God, a love for family, and a commitment to community. Thank you for your unending love, support, and encouragement. Most importantly, thank you for choosing to be great parents!

I also dedicate this dissertation to my niece and nephews. You inspire me! In some small way I hope this dissertation inspires you as you grow towards your goals and brilliant futures.
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ABSTRACT

GREGORY LAMONT MIDDLETON
SELECTED PROFESSIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF GEORGIA TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENT READING ACHIEVEMENT
Under the direction of CARL DAVIS, ED. D.

Selected professional (educational level and tenure as principal at the school) and demographic (gender and ethnicity) characteristics of Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals were used to predict passing percentages on the third grade reading Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT). The CRCT is the annual state-mandated test for students in all public schools in Georgia.

The principal characteristics were retrieved from the Georgia Professional Standards Commissions Office and the reading achievement data were retrieved from the Georgia’s Office of Student Achievement. Data from 626 schools were collected and analyzed using a multiple regression test. A statistically significant relationship was found between selected principal characteristics and passing percentages on the reading CRCT.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Low reading achievement is a problem for American students and their principals (Lee, 2004). The ability to read well is linked to success in American schools (Borek, 2008; Burns, 2003; National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2007). Students who do not learn how to read well are more likely to struggle in school, not graduate from high school, not attend college, and financially earn less over their lifetime than those who graduate (Aaron, Chall, Durkin, Goodman, & Strickland, 1990a, 1990b; Lee; NAEP; Schmoker, 2006; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Principals that failed to improve student reading achievement faced penalties; for example, these principals were placed on remediation plans, and in severe circumstances, were terminated (Volk, 2008). This study explored the relationship among selected characteristics of school-wide Title I elementary school principals and student reading achievement. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction, the statement of the problem; the purpose of the study, the research questions and hypotheses, the theoretical and conceptual framework; the significance of the study, procedures, limitations and delimitations, definition of terms; and a chapter summary.

"I don’t want to send another generation of American children to failing schools. I don’t want that future for my daughters. I don’t want that future for your sons. I do not want that future for America" (Barack Obama as cited by Doyle, 2008, ¶19). President Obama’s sentiments captured the feelings of many American parents, teachers, and
educational leaders. However, 44 years after the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) of 1965, American educational leaders continue to struggle to teach all American children to read at high levels. Furthermore, educational leaders continue to struggle with the reading achievement gap between minority and White students.

President Bill Clinton initiated the America Reads program, which declared that every child would be able to read by the end of the third grade (Goals 2000, 2000). In 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush. NCLB is the reauthorized version of ESEA. NCLB allocated over $10 billion to Title I to improve America’s reading achievement. For educational leaders and Title I school principals, the allocated funds came with increased accountability, flexibility, and the expectation that reading achievement would be improved. The funds also came with the expectation that educational leaders would close the reading achievement gap in American by 2014 (Miller, 2007).

Often students are leaving third grade unable to read at proficient levels, which contributes to academic struggles in middle and high school and in many cases, limits opportunities for these students to enter college (Borek, 2008; Burns, 2003; Christie, 2008; Lee, 2004). From 2002 to 2005, American schools made no overall reading achievement gains (Lee). Lee also asserted that when compared to pre-NCLB reading achievement growth, American children’s overall reading achievement trajectory had declined during the NCLB era. The 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), report stated that 72% Georgia’s fourth graders read below the proficient level. The 2007 NAEP also showed a 27-point reading gap between White and Black students.
The same report also showed a 26-point reading gap between White and Hispanic students. The reading gap between White and Hispanic students was not significantly different from the gap found between White and Hispanic students in 1992.

Georgia lawmakers passed the Georgia Academic Placement and Promotion Policy that mandated that Georgia third graders demonstrate proficiency on the reading Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) prior to being promoted to the fourth grade. The Georgia Academic Placement and Promotion Policy was included in Georgia House Bill 1187, also known as Governor Roy Barnes’ A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Similar to NCLB, the A+ Plus Reform Act came with increased flexibility for school leaders, more funding to support school improvement efforts, and increased accountability for school leaders. Georgia school leaders were faced with improving third grade reading achievement or retaining high numbers of students in that grade.

According to the NEAP 2007 report, 87%, 79%, and 60% of Georgia’s African-American, Latino, and White fourth graders, respectively scored below the proficient levels on the National Assessment. Twenty-three percent, 24%, and 8% of Georgia’s African-American, Latino, and White fourth graders, respectively scored at the ‘Does Not Meet’ level of Georgia’s Reading CRCT (Education Watch, April 2009). The reading achievement percentages are staggering and add to Georgia school leaders’ concerns pertaining to reading achievement. Lagging reading achievement, a persistent reading achievement gap among America’s social and economic lines and a NCLB expectation that by the year 2014, 100% of America’s children will read at proficient levels has placed new pressures on school leaders to improve student reading achievement.
Statement of the Problem

Low reading achievement in America is a challenge for students and principals. Failure to read well is especially harmful to students who qualify for free and reduced meals and minority students (Callins, 2006). School-wide Title I elementary schools enroll higher numbers of students who qualify for free and reduced priced meals. NCLB mandated that all third graders read well by 2014. Identifying principal characteristics aligned with combating this reading challenge is crucial to improving reading achievement and closing the achievement gap in America (Cotton, 2003; Fullan, 2002).

Three out of four prisoners failed to learn how to read by the end of third grade (Callins, 2006; Christie & Yell, 2008). Callins found that 85% of low achieving middle school and high school students failed to read well by the end of third grade. Callins also wrote that approximately 90 million American adults were functionally illiterate, which contributed to a yearly cost of approximately $224 billion to American society in the form of welfare, remedial education, and the building of prisons.

Children who do not learn to read well by the end of elementary school struggle throughout their schooling experience (Borek, 2008; Burns, 2003; Christie, 2008; Lee, 2004). These students have higher incidence of misbehavior at school and these students are prone to drop out of school (Aaron et al., 1990a, 1990b; NAEP, 2007; Schmoker, 2006; Snow et al., 1998). Among poor and minority students, this concern is even more pronounced (NAEP, 2007). Higher numbers of these students are enrolled at school-wide Title I elementary schools. Principals at these schools are especially pressured to improve student reading achievement (Lee; NAEP).
School leaders have adopted varying reading programs to improve student reading achievement (Commeyras, 2007; Shanahan, 2005). Commeyras speculated that regardless of the reading program approach, there were unexplained incidences where some students had a higher reading achievement while other students continued to struggle. Miller (2007) suggested that additional studies be conducted to learn more about the varying degrees of student reading achievement that may be related to factors beyond the reading program. This study will investigate selected professional (educational level and tenure as principal at the school) and demographic (gender and ethnicity) characteristics of Georgia Title I school principals as predictors of student passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT.

Purpose of the Study

Limited literature concerning Georgia principal characteristics as predictors of student passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT exists. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between selected characteristics of Georgia elementary school-wide Title I principals and student reading passing percentages on the CRCT. Miller (2007) and Hope (2008) conducted comparative studies between reading programs and student achievement on the reading CRCT. These studies found an insignificant difference between reading programs as measured by student reading achievement. The insignificant difference between the reading programs left questions that pointed to factors beyond the influence of the reading curriculum. Miller and Hope recommended additional studies pertaining to other factors that might impact student reading achievement. This study hopes to determine if factors, such as the principal’s level of
education, tenure as principal at the school in the study, gender, and ethnicity can be used to predict third grade reading achievement on the CRCT. Educational leaders should be able to use the findings from this study to understand the relationship between school principals and student achievement. The results may also help to inform and evaluate policies and practices pertaining to the recruiting, selecting, training, and retaining of school principals.

Research Questions

Two research questions will be used to help guide this study:

1. What are the professional and demographic characteristics of Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals?

2. Can selected professional and demographic characteristics of a Title I elementary school principal predict student reading achievement?

The selected characteristics of the principal are: (a) the principal’s level of education as determined by the principal’s certification level; (b) the principal tenure as determined by how long has the principal has been the principal at the school in the study; (c) the principal’s gender; and (d) the principal’s ethnicity. Literature support for the selected principal characteristics is discussed in-depth in literature review found in Chapter 2.

Theoretical Frameworks

Leadership Trait Theory

Lees, Smith, and Stockhouse (1994) found that most leaders borrowed from a combination of leadership theory frameworks. Using leadership traits as an indicator of effective leadership is controversial but to its credit, leadership trait theory is one of the
most researched leadership theories (Jones, 2006; Matyas, 1998; Northhouse, 1997; Yukl, 1998). In an effort to help further identify principal characteristics that are associated with reading achievement, this researcher will use leadership traits and effective schools research to frame this study.

*Effective School Leadership*

Over 30 years of educational research support the relationship between school leadership and student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Marzano and Waters’ research on school leadership and student achievement compliments the earlier effective schools research of Brookover and Lezotte (1979), Edmonds (1979), and Leithwood (1994). Principal leadership is foundational to effective schooling and ultimately improves student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Fullan, 2002). In 1979, Edmonds said, “We already know more than enough to successfully educate all students” (p. 20). It is concerning that in 2010; superintendents, teachers, principals, and policy-makers continue to struggle to educate all students so that all students are successful readers by the end of elementary school.

Look into an effective school and you are likely to find an effective principal. Just as predictable, look into a poor performing school and you are likely to find an ineffective principal. In a 2006 study, Crawford and Torgeson studied struggling readers in 390 elementary schools. Crawford and Torgeson observed seven common traits in schools that successfully improved student reading achievement. These researchers found strong leadership to be essential to improved student reading achievement.
Conceptual Framework

The variables necessary to conduct this study are the selected professional and demographic characteristics of Title I elementary school principals and student reading achievement (refer to Figure 1). The independent variables are the professional and demographic characteristics of the school principal. The dependent variable is student passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT.

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<td>• Level of Education</td>
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<td>• Tenure as principal at the school in the study</td>
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<td>• Gender</td>
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<td>• Ethnicity</td>
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**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework.

**Can principal characteristics predict passing percentages on the reading CRCT?**

Significance of the Study

This study will help policy-makers, superintendents, human resource directors, and community leaders recruit, hire, and retain principals that possess professional and demographic characteristics associated with higher percentages of students passing the reading CRCT. This study will also identify characteristics of principals associated with higher passing percentages on the reading CRCT to further study factors associated with higher reading percentages on the CRCT. Finally, this study will help the aforementioned
stakeholders craft professional development activities for principals that align with the professional characteristics associated with higher passing percentages on the reading CRCT.

Procedures

This will be a quantitative, non-experimental, correlational study. Because NCLB mandated that by the year 2014, all third graders will be proficient readers, third grade reading achievement was used in this study. The third grade reading CRCT data used in the study were collected from the Georgia Governor Office of Student Achievement Office. The selected characteristics of the principals were collected from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. The schools involved in the study were school-wide Title I schools. According to the Georgia Department of Education, Georgia school-wide Title I schools educate higher numbers who qualify for free and reduced meal plans. To determine if student reading achievement can be predicted based on the selected characteristics of Title I school principals, a multiple regression test was used to analyze the collected data.

Limitations

There are circumstances, settings, and environments that may impact a study and these are beyond the control of this researcher. The selected characteristics of the principals may not be equally distributed among the principals in the study. The high number of erasures on the CRCT may have skewed the percentage of students passing the reading CRCT passing.
Delimitations

To manage the scope and the size of this study, this researcher implemented delimitations. The selected principal characteristics in this study are not inclusive of all possible principal characteristics. Student and school characteristics were not included in this study to allow a greater focus on the principal characteristics. Only Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals were included in the study. The Georgia CRCT was used to measure student reading achievement because the CRCT is used to measure progress towards NCLB goals. Only spring 2009 third grade reading CRCT passing percentages were used in the study.

Definition of Terms

Principal Characteristics. The operationalized use of the term principal characteristics includes characteristics (educational level, tenure as principal at the school in the study, gender, and ethnicity) that are less subjective and this researcher or the participating principals cannot easily manipulate.

Tenure. Refers to the number of years the principal has been the principal at the school in the study.

Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). The CRCT diagnoses students' mastery of Georgia's curriculum, as well as how well schools implemented the curriculum. The CRCT results are also used to determine if Georgia schools met Adequate Yearly Progress as outlined by NCLB (Miller, 2007). Georgia implemented the CRCT in the spring of 2002.
Georgia School-wide Title I Elementary Schools. In the United States these schools typically have a 40% or more free and reduced student population. The ESEA of 1965 defined and allocated funds for Title I schools and these schools are regulated by NCLB mandates.

Summary

Learning to read is paramount to a child’s academic achievement. This researcher speculated that the characteristics of the principal might be predictors of student reading achievement. As reported by Barton, Educational Testing Service and the Princeton, New Jersey Policy Information Center (2003), NCLB mandated that by 2014 all third graders will read at or above grade-level. Educational leaders have adopted varying curricular approaches to teach children how to read but researchers have found varying levels of reading achievement that appear to go beyond the influence of the reading curricular approach (Bell, 2001; Bracey, 1998; Miller, 2007). The selected characteristics of the school principal may serve as predictors of student reading achievement and may offer insight into the low reading achievement crisis in America.

This study investigated the ability to predict reading passing percentages on the third grade CRCT based on selected principal characteristics for the purpose of helping school leaders identify principal characteristics that might help to improve student passing percentages on the reading CRCT. The study has five chapters. Chapter 1 contains an introduction; statement of the problem; purpose of the research; a conceptual framework; the research design; the research questions and hypotheses; the setting and the population; the limitations and delimitations; and the definition of terms. Chapter 2
presents a review of the literature related to this research. Chapter 3 explains the methods used to conduct this research, along with the instruments used to collect data. Chapter 4 provides the results of the study, and Chapter 5 discusses implications and findings related to the results, as well as providing recommendations for future studies related to this study.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The job of the school principal is complex and requires skillful leadership to meet America’s reading achievement goals. According to Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, and Levy (2007), the principal is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school, the supervision of staff members, and student achievement. Specific to elementary schools, principals are expected to ensure that students read well by the end of elementary school. Students that can read perform better in other academic areas. Research has also shown that student reading achievement is linked to future learning success and overall success in school, access to college, and future financial earnings (Anderson & Sadler, 2009). Student reading achievement is associated with rates of delinquency and incarceration (Leone, Krezmlen, Mason, & Meisel, 2005; Platt, 2009; Vanderstaay, 2006). Platt found a significant relationship between students’ reading achievement and youth early participation in criminal and anti-social behaviors. Leone, Meisel, and Drakeford (2002) wrote:

Helping youth acquire educational skills is one of the most effective approaches to the prevention delinquency and the reduction of recidivism. Literacy skills are an essential component of education to meet the demands of a complex, high-tech world. Higher levels of literacy are associated with lower rates of juvenile delinquency, rearrests, and recidivism. (p. 46)
According to Harris et al. (2009), youth offenders who became adult offenders, over their lifetime cost American society between $1.5 and $1.8 million. Fearing public safety concerns – for example, increased anti-social behaviors, youth delinquency, and youth criminal behavior – America’s federal government has implemented laws that require school leaders to use research-based school improvement strategies to counter public safety concerns associated with low reading achievement (Platt, 2009).

Decades of reading achievement research has led to an increased understanding of the factors associated with student reading achievement (Helf, Cooke, & Flowers, 2009). Researchers have linked principal leadership and student achievement (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). This link has added to the responsibilities and job description of principals. This study investigated the ability to predict student reading achievement based on selected demographic and professional characteristics of Title I elementary school principals. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature associated with this study, and is organized in the following sections: (a) An Overview of Reading Achievement and Instruction in America; (b) The Theoretical Framework for the Study; (c) Principal Leadership; (d) The Selected Professional and Demographics Characteristics of Principals; and finally, (e) Summary.

An Overview of Reading Achievement in America

America’s dissatisfaction with reading achievement in America is not a new phenomenon (Raitz, 1990; Rasinski & Padak, 1998; Venezky, 2000). According to Stahl, Pagnucco, and Suttles (2001), the history of reading achievement in America has been
controversial. Sigmund Freud (1937) wrote: “It almost looks as if analysis were the third of those ‘impossible’ professions in which one can be sure before-hand of achieving unsatisfying results. The other two, which have been known much longer, are education and government” (p. 248). Freud’s reference to the unsatisfying state of education in America spoke to the ongoing debate related to student reading achievement in America.

Reading well is a strong indicator of future success in school, social status, and future employment (Noguera, 2008). Students who fail to become proficient readers are prone to misbehave at school and are more likely to engage in criminal behaviors (Platt, 2009). The future of students who fail to read well by the end of elementary school is grim compared to students who become proficient readers by the end of elementary school. Poor reading skills are associated with increased rates of incarceration (Belk, 2006).

Researchers have long felt that the principal influenced student achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Marzano, 2003). Weber (1971) investigated school effectiveness as a determinate of student achievement. Weber put forward that the school’s principal influenced student achievement. Danridge, Edwards, and Pleasants (2000) found that schools that improved student achievement had strong principal leadership. Efforts to identify principal characteristics associated with student achievement are still a focus of educational research.

No Child Left Behind

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson established the ESEA. ESEA created the federal Title I department, which brought new resources for compensatory education to schools. A Nation at Risk (1983), a report from President Ronald Reagan’s newly formed federal
education department, indicated that American children were falling behind their international counterparts and that the decline in achievement jeopardized America’s competitiveness around the globe (Borek, 2008).

As a result of the ongoing debate concerning student achievement in America, NCLB, a bipartisan effort initiated by President George W. Bush, was signed into law in 2002 (Bruce, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigel, 2009). NCLB reauthorized Title I under the ESEA of 1965 and was expected to help close America’s achievement gap. The effort was designed to improve achievement for America’s children by holding schools accountable for increased student achievement, as well as mandating interventions to be implemented by Title I schools that were in jeopardy of not meeting NCLB goals (Hoff, 2007).

The following NCLB principles were expected to improve student achievement: (a) increased accountability by use of annual testing in the areas of mathematics and reading; (b) increased flexibility for parents and students to allow parents to enroll students in non-failing schools; (c) increased flexibility for school systems and states related to use of federal funds, for example, Title I funds provided by the federal government to school systems to help close the student achievement gap; (d) additional funds to support efforts to improve reading achievement in America (Odland, 2007). NCLB is a federal effort to ensure that all students, especially poor and minority students had quality reading instructions. According to Platt (2009), the previously mentioned principles and the use of researched-based reading achievement strategies were cornerstones of NCLB and were considered essential to closing America’s reading achievement gap.
America’s Reading Achievement Gap

Educational achievement is seen as a prerequisite to success in America (Howard & Solberg, 2006). NCLB has increased focus on the achievement disparities among America’s children, specifically, the lower achievement of poor and minority students in America as compared to their non-poor and majority peers (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). According Bruce et al. (2009), America’s minority students are at-risk for underachieving in America. School system leaders, policy-makers, and other public education stakeholders are concerned about the achievement disparities among America’s subgroups. The achievement gap refers to the achievement gap in America between poor and non-poor students. The term is also used to describe the achievement disparity between Black and White students. For the purpose of this discussion, the terms Black and African-American will be interchangeably used. Daeschner, Munoz, and Barnes (2004) wrote, “There is high degree of interest in determining what factors influence school’s ability to close the achievement gaps” (p. 5).

The achievement gap between African American and White students narrowed during the 1970s and early 1980s, but has increased since the late 1980s (Educational Research Service, 2000). Researchers have extensively studied the achievement gap in America (Berends, Lucas, and Penaloza, 2008, NAEP, 2007). Despite those studies, it continues to challenge school leaders. According to the 2007 NAEP report, on average, American students made reading achievement gains, but the achievement gap between Black and White students persisted. Palumbo and Sanacore (2009) studied America’s reading achievement gap and alluded to challenges faced by minority students that may
contribute to low reading achievement. NCLB has placed additional pressure on school principals to close the achievement gap, especially as it relates to student reading achievement.

Factors Associated with the Reading Achievement Gap

African American students have consistently academically performed below their White American peers (Bruce et al., 2009). This gap is referred to as the Black-White achievement gap (Craig, Zhang, Hensel, & Quinn, 2009). According to Gunning (2006), reading achievement disparities have consistently persisted in American schools. The reading achievement gap primarily parallels America's socioeconomic gaps. The achievement and socioeconomic gap is reflected in the disparities found between Black and White students' academic achievements. The NAEP reading test is used to measure American students' reading achievement. Students in grades four and eight are tested. From 1992 to 2005, the reading achievement gap between Black and White students had no significant change (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007).

Noguera (2008) wrote, "Despite overwhelming evidence of a strong correlation between race and academic performance, there is considerable confusion among researchers about how and why such a correlation exists" (p. 9). Ogbu (1987, 1990) asserted that Black students developed oppositional identities toward academic achievement in order to maintain acceptance among their Black peers and community. According to Ogbu (1990), these Black students resist high academic performance as a means of resisting being labeled White acting. These students fear being ostracized by their peers. Ogbu (1990) further claimed that this phenomena transcended socioeconomic
status and that Black middle class and wealthy students also performed lower than their economic White peers in order to be accepted by their Black peers. Noguera countered Ojbu’s findings, by suggesting that not all African American students adopt oppositional identities. Instead, some Black students adopt multiple identities that allow them to maintain a feeling of acceptance among their neighborhood peers and the world of academic success.

Researchers continue to study factors associated with America’s academic achievement gap (Bruce et al., 1990; Gunning, 2006). The United States Department of Education listed school leadership as a strategy to closing America’s achievement gap (Noguera, 2008). Some school principals have demonstrated an ability to ensure reading success for these students. Noguera recommended that superintendents, policy-makers, and principals learn from the experiences of these principals. As a school factor, the influence of the principal has been found to be second only to that of the classroom teacher.

Family Structure and Home Literacy

Researchers have suggested that family structures influence student reading achievement (Bruce et al., 2009; Palumbo & Sanacore, 2009). Barton (2003) found that 75% of minority children lived in households led by a single female parent. Dee (2005) found that the first reading teacher is normally the student’s mother and because females mostly staff daycares, pre-schools, and elementary schools, the family structure influences the early experiences with formal reading instruction.
Researchers (Craig et al., 2009) have also found that literacy practices in the home also contributed to student reading achievement. African-American students are less likely to be read to in the home. African American children on average have less access to reading materials at home. In a 2009 study, Craig et al. suggested that the non-Standard English speech patterns found in some African American households contribute to the achievement gap found between Black and White students. The African American speech patterns and speech used at home contradicted speech patterns and reading achievement strategies at the school. Craig et al. concluded that students who learn to use Standard English speaking and reading strategies at school academically out performed those students who did not.

*Socioeconomic Status*

The academic underachievement for African Americans has been linked to chronic poverty found within the African-American community. African American children are three times more likely to live in poverty than White American children are (Craig et al., 2009). According to Educational Research Service (2010), students living in poverty have less access to adequate health care and increased rates of mobility, that is, these students frequently transfer between schools, causing breaks in their learning. These students also have fewer books in their homes, their parents are not well educated, and the family structure is not stable.

The Coleman Report was released in 1966. The Coleman study included 600,000 students from 4,000 schools. In the report, Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, and Mood (Towers, 1992) suggested that student achievement was significantly related to the
student’s socioeconomic status. The Coleman Report found that poor and minority students in general would academically perform lower than their non-poor non-minority peers did. The report also implied that schools could do little to counter the relationship between socioeconomic status and student achievement. The Coleman Report prompted research related to school effectiveness, which eventually led to research related to school leadership effectiveness. Edmonds (1979) was one of the first researchers to identify the principal as essential to closing America’s achievement gap. Edmonds’ correlates for effective schools became the foundation for future effective schools research. Effective schools researchers Fullan (2002) and Marzano (2003) have added to Edmonds’ work with a continued focus on principal leadership as a strong determinate of school effectiveness as measured by student achievement.

_Urban Schools_

Poor and minority students are more likely to attend schools that further add to the achievement gap. Pogrow (2006) wrote, “It is shameful that our society has such high levels of poverty and that so many of the children born into poverty are concentrated in struggling schools across the country” (p. 223). Schools attended by these students have fewer qualified teachers and fewer accomplished principals. These schools are often found in urban areas with higher concentrations of poor and minority students. Wacquant (2000) compared these schools to prisons, stating that these schools operated more like jails and prisons rather than institutions that nurtured and guided all children toward becoming proficient readers. Wacquant further wrote:
Like the prison system, their recruitment is severely skewed along class and ethno-racial lines… Like inmates children are herded into decaying and overcrowded facilities built like bunkers, where under-trained and under-paid teachers… strive to regulate conduct so as to maintain order and minimized violent incident. (p. 15)

According to Kopetz, Lease, and Warren-King (2006) and Cole-Henderson (2000), urban schools are not a new phenomenon. These schools have been associated with larger cities with higher concentrations of minority students. The larger the concentration of minority students, the more intense the problem is at the school. These schools struggle to offer the same educational opportunities offered at middle to upper class schools. Middle to upper communities generated higher funding for their schools and in turn, results in greater resources for their students. The educational opportunities at urban schools are more likely to be inferior and the educational resources inadequate to meet the needs of students who have historically been disadvantaged children.

The effective schools research illuminated the challenges faced by students attending urban schools (Edmonds, 1979). It pointed to principal leadership as a key component to improving student achievement for students in urban schools. Further supporting Edmonds findings, in a 1983 study, Sizemore also found that high achieving schools that served higher number of Black students had effective principals. These principals were believed to have characteristics, skills, leadership styles, and behaviors that distinguished their influence on student achievement from schools that were not high achieving (Bell, 2001).
High Stakes Assessments

The relationship between assessment policies, curriculum, instruction, and student achievement is central to the role of the school principal (Bell, 2001). School system leaders, principals, and policy-makers are concerned about motivating students toward higher achievement. More than ever before, testing is being used to influence teachers’ classroom practices with the hope of increasing student achievement (Diamond, 2007). The assumption is that the benefits and penalties associated with performance on high stakes assessments will improve student achievement (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). To the contrary, research has shown that the increased use of high stakes testing has negatively impacted student achievement for poor and minority students. Diamond wrote, “Other students (i.e., working-class and African American students) often receive instruction that is more practically oriented; involves more memorization and recitation; and prepares them for manual, clerical, or low-wage service-sector work” (p. 287).

A cornerstone of NCLB is the use of high-stakes standardized assessments (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005. Often poor and minority students are not versed in test-taking strategies associated with success on high-stakes assessments. High-stakes assessments and formal schooling are often contradict the learning patterns found in the homes of poor and minority students (Diamond, 2007). Although verbal expression is predominately used in the homes of these students, unfortunately these students come to school with listening skills that serve them poorly in the school environment. Opponents of high-stakes (Diamond; Stiggins & Chappuis) assessments assert that high-stakes
testing further disadvantaged poor and minority students and contributed to the achievement gap found in America.

Black Boys’ Reading Achievement

Sokal, Thiem, Crampton, and Katz (2009) studied boys’ reading achievement and found that many of the strategies for improving boys’ reading achievement were gender-based; for example, boy-friendly books, single-gendered schools and classrooms, and male provided reading instruction. Sokal and associates concluded that the aforementioned strategies failed to consider that boys come with different experiences that influence their achievement. Ogbu (1990) theorized that African-American children and other involuntary minority students do not believe a good education in America would lead to success in America. Ogbu went on to suggest that these students displayed behaviors that opposed the majority middle class norms. Ogbu coined this phenomenon as oppositional culture. According to Ogbu, these students resisted doing homework, participation in class, and speaking Standard English. Mickelson (2001) countered Ogbu’s oppositional culture theory, by asserting that involuntary minority students did not fare as well in school because these students believed that in spite of a good education, they would still face a racist job market.

It appears American boys are at risk of missing out on America’s dream of success and prosperity, but African American boys are at greater risk. According to Anderson and Sadler (2009), researchers, for the most part, have failed to adequately include Black boys in their studies and have failed to find solutions to address low reading achievement for black boys. Noguera (2008) warned that on the most significant quality of life
indicators (e.g., rate for suicide, healthcare, incarceration, college completion, employment, etc.); it appears that America’s Black males are at greater risk of missing the dream than their peers.

Since the 1700s, reading achievement has been a concern for African Americans. African Americans, especially Black boys struggle to reach high levels of reading achievement in America. Reading well has the potential to motivate Black boys to higher levels of overall achievement (Davis, 2009). Unfortunately, American schools have not been a place of learning and achievement for many Black boys. On the contrary, Black boys are punished more than their peers are and do not receive appropriate guidance and support to do well in school (Noguera, 2008). Disproportionately, Black boys are more likely to be identified for special education services in school and enter in the criminal justice system earlier and more frequently than other youth groups (Harris, Baltodano, Bal, Jolivette, & Malcahy, 2009). Disappointingly, the troubles faced by Black boys in American schools have become the norm and somewhat of an outspoken expectation. Furthermore, African American boys very seldom experience school environments that expect them to academically perform high nor do they have many models to map paths toward academic success. Noguera (2008) encouraged principals and school leaders to increase efforts to counter the dismissal achievement of Black boys.

Using data from the 2000 U.S. Census, Harris et al. (2009) reported that although African Americans make up 12% of American society, African American youth represented 52% of the sample in their study of criminalized youth. Belk (2006) expressed similar concerns related to the disproportionate number of incarcerated African
American males as compared to the overall American prison population. Belk found that Black males are ten times more likely to be incarcerated than other members of American society.

Effective School Leadership

The history of educational leadership in America has two basic parts: management plus teaching and learning (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). At the center of these two parts is the role the school principal. According to Ediger (2009), second to the classroom teacher, no other school related individual is more important to student achievement than the principal. The principal is expected to successfully lead the school and increasingly principal effectiveness is being measured by students’ performances on standardized assessments (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). A Nation at Risk, a 1983 report published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Borek, 2008), painted a grim look at American public school education and prompted American public school reform. Bracey (2002) suggested that effective principal leadership was essential to the school reform effort. Researchers have struggled to identify the characteristics of effective principal leadership (DuFour, 2002; Reichhart, 2008; Smith, 2009).

There is growing research that ties student achievement to principal effectiveness (Bell, 2001; Bottoms & O’Neil, 2001). Increasingly, effective principal leadership is measured by how well students perform on standardized student achievement assessments. Using standardized assessments as a measure, NCLB mandated that all children read at proficient levels by the end of elementary school. This expectation is
especially troublesome for elementary school principals who work with poor and minority children (Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Ylimaki, 2007).

Thirty years of research relates to the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. The work of Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, and Wisenbaker (1979); Brookover and Lezotte (1979); Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, and Wisenbaker (1978); and Edmonds (1979) followed by the work of Leithwood (1994) and now the work of Marzano and Waters (2009), chronicled the effective schools’ research movement. The work of these researchers suggested that educational leadership was essential to school improvement and student achievement. The effective schools model has been implemented in over 1000 schools across America (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004), and principal leadership is a hallmark of effective schools (Cotton, 2003). Never before has the role of the principal been so politically charged and complex.

The effective schools research ushered in a movement that propelled principals into the role of instructional leader (Ediger, 2008; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Waters et al., 2003; Ylimaki, 2007). The instructional leader movement expected principals to guide curriculum and instructional activities. Hallinger and Heck (1996) studied the relationship between the principal and student achievement. They put forward that principals had direct effects, indirect effects, and reciprocal effects on school culture, climate, and practices that influenced student achievement. This new role implied that principals influence classroom practices that relate to the implementation of curriculum and instructional program, for example, the reading curricular approach at the school
According Leithwood and Jantzi (2006), effective principal leadership affects student achievement. Scholars and politicians have long debated this assertion (Ovwigho, 2007). Researchers argued that the principal’s role is especially profound as it relates to student reading achievement but many principals are overwhelmed by the challenge of improving student reading achievement (Reutzel & Mitchell, 2003; Wilson, Martens, Arya & Altwerger, 2004). Tupa and McFadden (2009) studied reading achievement in Texas’ Brownsville Independent School District (BISD). Compared to other Texas school district, BISD had a greater reduction in the student reading achievement gap than comparable schools. Tupa and McFadden found that principal leadership was essential to improving student reading achievement in BISD. Further studies are needed to investigate the relationship between characteristics of the principal and student reading achievement.

Theoretical Frameworks

According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), the influence of the principal has remained vague and hard to determine. Leithwood and Riehl wrote, “While the impact of a good leadership may be difficult to determine, the effects of poor leadership are easy to see” (p. 9). Waters and associates (2003) suggested that just as important as the benefits of good principal leadership are the concerns of poor and marginal principal leadership. The influence of principal leadership on student achievement is an ongoing debate among educational researchers (Barker, 2007). It was believed that effective leaders were born to
be leaders (Keirsey, 1998). English (2008) argued that effective leaders were not simply born to be effective leaders but instead effective principal leaders were a product of complex interactions and characteristics that can be developed. The role of the effective principal has evolved beyond the expectation of managerial tasks and traditional, authoritarian leadership practices designed to maintain traditional bureaucratic school structures. The 2000 era required effective principals possess characteristics associated with improved student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). This shift in the role expectations of the principal has prompted increased educational research related to the effectiveness of the principal; specifically, what principal characteristics, behaviors, responsibilities, and leadership styles are associated with the effective principal as it relates to student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi). Researchers, superintendents, school leaders, and policy-makers are reminded that leadership is a complicated matter with varied approaches and theories (Northhouse, 2004).

Leadership Trait Theory

Leadership traits theory as a framework for effective schools leadership is controversial (Matyas, 1998; Northhouse, 1997; Yukl, 1998). Can some inherited characteristics of the principal associated with effective principal leadership? Although controversial, a body of research that goes back as far as the early 1900s supports the trait approach to understanding principal. Bass (1990) argued that leaders have traits that help them to function well in the role of leader. Heck (1998) stated that much of the early research concerning school leadership investigated the relationship between school success and leadership traits (e.g., gender, personality, level of education, experience, and
style). There are no clear guidelines for determining who should lead American schools. Researchers continue to study leaders to identify characteristics of effective leaders (Lees et al., 1994).

According to Northhouse (1997), theorists have argued that effective leaders were endowed with leadership traits, attributes, and characteristics that were inherited and unique to the leader. Smith (1975), in an effort to examine the views of Chester Barnard’s concepts of leadership, also alluded to leadership effectiveness being tied to physical or biological traits of the leader. Northhouse and Smith both cautiously concluded that a weakness of the leadership trait theory might be that leadership traits might be situational and lack sustainability. Countering Northhouse and Smith’s comments, Yukl (1998) suggested that the leadership trait theory’s sole focus on the leader and not the situation or the followers might be beneficial. In other words, identified traits of effective leaders that are not dependent on the situation or the followers might be beneficial to those recruiting, hiring, and retaining personnel for critical leadership roles.

**Effective School Leadership**

While principal leadership has evolved over the years, most of the research on effective principal leadership has pertained to the behaviors and responsibilities of known effective school leaders (Yukl, 2002). Researchers have debated which behaviors and responsibilities most correlate with effective principal leadership (Cotton 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). Bogler (2001) argued that effective leadership based on behaviors and responsibilities is a social construct relevant to the school in which it was developed, but may not transfer to another school setting. Waters et al. (2003) put forward that effective
principals must know when and how to align policies, resources, and rewards to school priorities. Effective principals understand the change process and most importantly, these principals understood how relationships with people in the organization influence the work of organizational members.

Effective principals were once seen as managers that worked well within a bureaucratic organization. Principal leadership effectiveness relied on how well the principal controlled staff members. Principals were primarily selected based on teaching effectiveness and administrative certification (Ovwigho, 2007). The principal, as the authoritarian manager of tasks, continued into the 1980s (Cowen & Capers, 2000).

The 1980s ushered in a change in the role of the principal. According to Barth (2001), and Crow, Hausman, and Scribner (2002), the expectation that principals would be effective managers, effective instructional leaders, and effective relationship leaders was new to the role of the effective principal. The publishing of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), a report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, further spurred this new role. *A Nation at Risk* encouraged educational leaders to further link principal effectiveness to student achievement (Wong, Guthrie, & Harris, 2004).

Effective principal leadership included the principal’s ability to use effective interpersonal skills and participatory leadership strategies to include teachers and other school stakeholders. In the 1990s, participatory leadership became the hallmark of effective leadership. Professional Learning Communities (PLC), a school restructuring model that brought all school professionals to the table to make decisions about the school’s strategic efforts, grew out of the participatory leadership era. The new role of the
principal included effectively leading PLCs in efforts to improve student achievement (DuFour et al., 2008).

In 2001, Bottoms and O’Neill asserted that school principals were faced with more challenges than ever before. NCLB mandates increased diversity among student and increased student achievement demands. Thomas and Bainbridge argued that effective school principals were expected to ensure desirable student achievement for all students. High student achievement was linked to effective schools and effective schools were linked to effective principals (Barth 2001). Effective principals possessed characteristics that improved student achievement. These principal characteristics warrant further study (Mackey, Pitcher, & Decman, 2006).

Meeting state reading standards and the principal’s role in student reading achievement has become a vital part of principal evaluations since the passing of NCLB. Now more than ever, the principal’s effectiveness is linked to the school’s effectiveness. The principal effectiveness as it relates to student reading achievement has largely been measured by student reading achievement on standardized tests (Blair, 2002). According to Hallinger (2003), effective schools have effective principals at the helm. Principals that fail to meet state reading standards are subject to job termination (Volk, 2008).

Proficient reading achievement for all American children has eluded many educational leaders (Pogrow, 2006). Similar to proficient reading achievement in America, defining effective principal leadership has also eluded educational leaders (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004; Hume, 2006). Blair (2002) and Pogrow went on to say that effective schools have effective principals. Researchers (Brookover, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Fullan,
2002; McCallum, 1999; Waters et al.) also linked principal leadership to correlates associated with effective schools. Effective schools have strong leadership, high expectations, orderly learning environments, and an effective relationship between parents and the school. Schools that have improved student achievement often have effective principal leadership (Sergiovanni, 2005). According to Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) and Halawah (2005), principal leadership is one of the most important factors related to student achievement.

According to Blair (2002), the role of the principal is crucial to student academic success. Some researchers (Johnson & Uline, 2005; Summers, 2001) have linked principal effectiveness to student achievement while other researchers (Barker, 2007; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006) say that the principal leadership influence has a small and indirect effect on student achievement. McCallum (1999) and Hume (2006) found that the principal influence was primarily related to the supervision of curriculum and instruction and the supervision of teachers. McCallum also found that teachers appreciated effective principal leadership and that this appreciation helped to foster a positive school culture and climate. According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), principals at effective schools possessed interpersonal skills that contributed to an effective relationship among the principal, the teachers, the students, and the surrounding community. Contrary to the aforementioned studies, Miller and Rowan (2006) conducted a study that involved 20,000 students and 250 schools. Miller and Rowan’s study found that principal leadership did not influence student achievement. The research concerning
student achievement and principal leadership is complicated and warrants continued research.

Selected Professional and Demographics Characteristics of Principals

The trait, great man, and heroic concept guided much of the early research associated with principal leadership (Robbins & Coulter, 2003; St. John, 2009). According to Robbins and Coulter, effective principals sought to imitate the responsibilities, behaviors, styles, and characteristics of past and current effective leaders. Marzano and associates (2005) study identified 21 leadership responsibilities associated with student achievement. Although viewed as a major study, the meta-analysis did not identify principal characteristics associated with the responsibilities, specifically, what principal demographic and professional characteristics are associated with leadership responsibilities and student achievement. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) argued that transformational principal leadership contributed to improved student achievement. Similar to the Marzano et al. (2005), Marzano (2003) and Marzano & Waters (2009), Leithwood and Jantzi did not show a link between specific principal demographic and professional characteristics associated with student achievement. O’Donnell and White (2005) also studied the relationship between the principal and student achievement. These authors found a relationship between principal behaviors and student achievement, but similar to prior studies, they did not emphasize the association between specific principal characteristics and student achievement.

The psycho dynamic of human interactions will not allow effective principal leadership to be easily defined via identified principal behaviors, responsibilities, and
characteristics. Davis (1998) argued "the dynamics of the relationship between individual principals and their schools are simply too complex and unique to provide anything other than general guidance on how an effective principal ought to behave" (p. 6). In a 2006 study, Cheung and Walker argued that inner and outer forces stimulate successful principal experiences. They went on to argue that the principal age, gender, years of experience, and education were characteristics that might be associated with the principal's effectiveness and consequently, student achievement. Mackey et al. (2006) recommended less focus on the principal's behavior and responsibilities but a greater focus on principal characteristics that are less subjective and characteristics that are not easily manipulated.

Anderson and Sadler (2009) posited that many factors impact student reading achievement. The ongoing debate among the reading instructional approaches implies that reading achievement might go beyond the reading curricular approach. Commeyras (2007) put forward that regardless of the reading program approach, there were unexplained incidences where some students had higher reading achievements while other students continued to struggle. Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, and Thomas (2005) identified schools that made noticeable gains that could not be associated with a reading program or school policy. One factor could not explain these gains but they were a complex blending of factors, one of which is the influence of the principal.

Research has found that several demographic and professional principal characteristics are associated with student achievement, specifically, the principal's gender (Coleman, 2003; Eckman, 2004; Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007); the principal's tenure or how
long the principal has been the principal at that school (Duke et al., 2007; Gieselmann, 2004; Norton, 2003; Ylimaki, 2007); the principal’s level of education (Bottoms, 2001; Day, 2005; Leone, Warnimont, & Zimmerman, 2009; Socol, 2007); the principal’s ethnicity (Brown, 2000; Echols, 2006; Escoffery, 2004; Freigruber, 2009; Giese, 2006; Hilliard, 2003; Hilliard & Ortiz, 2004; Tillman, 2008; Vinzant, 2009; Yeager, 2005). The term principal characteristic has been operationalized to include characteristics of the principal that are less subjective and are not easily manipulated.

**Gender**

The gender of school leadership is changing from a position once dominated by males to one with an increased presence of female principals (Beckford-Bennet, 2009). The management and the business community (Adams & Hambright, 2004; Aldoory & Toth, 2004) have largely ignored gender as a leadership effectiveness influence. Adams and Hambright speculated that overwhelmingly, the disproportionately higher number of males in leadership roles was attributed to male domination in society and in the workforce. The changing roles of women in the workforce has impacted the proportionality of men and women in the workforce, as well as changed the roles of women in the workforce. Increasingly, the number of women in leadership roles in the world of management and business has grown and has spurred interest in research related to gender as a leadership effectiveness factor. Groves (2005) studied 108 leaders and 325 of their direct followers. Groves asserted that women possessed attributes that better equipped them for leadership roles compared to their male counterpart.
Researchers (Holder, 2009; Myers, 2003) found differences between male and female personality profiles and interpersonal skills. Waters et al. (2003) found that the relationship between the principal and members of the organization influence student achievement. Aldoory and Toth (2004) put forward that women were better at building work relationships and were better at fostering effective two-way communication at work. Contrary to the Aldoory and Toth study find, Halawah (2005) conducted a study that found male principals to be better communicators than female principals. Halawah’s study also found differences between male and female principals related to school security, student discipline, student peer to peer relationships, and instructional supervision. In each of these areas, female principals were found to be better leaders.

In 2001, Arnold conducted a study that involved differences between male and female leadership styles. Arnold found differences between the degrees of supportive leadership behaviors, flexibility, and effectiveness between male and female leaders. Arnold’s study found female leaders exhibited more supportive leadership behaviors while males practiced greater flexibility and greater overall effectiveness.

Similar to the management and business community, educational researchers have largely ignored the principal’s gender as a factor associated with student achievement (Coleman, 2003; Kruger, Eck, & Vermeulen, 2005; Pollard, 1997). Historically, males have disproportionately held elementary school principal positions compared to females. Rand Education (2004) found that although 70% of the classroom teachers in the study were female, only 50% of the school principals were female. The disproportionate number of male principals compared to female principals contradicted findings that
showed that 85% of principals were at one time classroom teachers (Fuller, Young, & Orr, 2007).

Gender diversity among elementary school principals has increased in public education. From 1993 to 2004, the percentage of female elementary principals increased from 41% to 56% in the United States (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). In Georgia, from 1998 to 2008, the percentage of female principals increased from 56.2% to 64.9%. The percentage of male principals decreased from 43.8% to 35.1%. If the principal gender trend continues in Georgia, female principals may double that of male principals in a few years (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2009).

Shakeshaft (1987, 1989, 1998, a leading researcher of gender differences and educational leadership, asserted that educational leadership research is primarily based on the male perspective. More recent research has found that men and women principals differently lead schools (Coleman, 2003; Collard, 2003; Eckman, 2004; Fecher, 2007). Gieselmann (2004) found that women approached leadership more globally. Women were more focused on strategies that developed human capital while men approached leadership using more traditional approaches. The differences between men and women principals indicate that gender might be associated with student achievement (Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry, 1992, 2000).

Coleman (2003) and Collard (2003) conceded that men and women share some leadership characteristics. For example, Coleman’s study found that both men and women saw their leadership style as both collaborative and people-oriented. Coleman went on to recommend that a principal’s gender be considered when studying the impact
the principal has on student achievement. According to Coleman, women principals are more people oriented and are more focused on student achievement.

Ylimaki (2007) studied four elementary school women principals. The leadership at these schools was marked by a focus on student achievement. Although the four women had varied backgrounds and took different paths to the role of principal, within a relatively short period of time, the four women principals showed improved student achievement at their schools. In a study conducted by Eckman (2004), the women in the study saw themselves as instructional leaders with an emphasis on curriculum. The female principals in the Eckman study also emphasized interpersonal relationships. The women saw the principalship as a more comprehensive role. Women principals focused more on developing talent rather than focusing on management activities. In contrast, the men in the study focused on management tasks and took a less comprehensive approach to leadership.

Research showed that men and women actually chose leadership roles for different reasons (Kruger, 2008). Women chose to be principals to have greater influence over curriculum and instructional matters. Men entering the role of principal were influenced more by the increase in salary. Kruger asserts that women principals were more focused on instructional and strategic educational leadership, while male leadership was more focused on non-instructional and non-strategic educational leadership. For example, in the Eckman study (2004), the male principals spent a larger amount of their time completing management tasks, specifically, activities related to extra-curricular athletic activities.
Men and women principals have some shared leadership attributes associated with student achievement (Kruger, 2008). According to Kruger, optimizing the male and female characteristics associated with increased student achievement is recommended. Kruger went on to argue that schools would benefit from educational leaders ending the debate concerning which gender lead best for an option that would maximize the attributes of each gender most associated with effective leadership for the purpose of improved student achievement. Kruger wrote, “Turning the differences to our advantage is becoming increasingly necessary, because expansions of scale, decentralization, and increasing autonomy of schools are making the business of running schools more complex and principals are being asked to do the impossible” (p. 156).

**Tenure**

Interestingly the principal’s gender has been associated with principal tenure (Belt, 2009). Belt conducted a study involving principals from Missouri and Wisconsin and found that female principals demonstrated higher levels of principal tenure than their male counterparts did. In contrast, Bruggink (2001) asserted that at low performing schools, male principals’ tenure was longer than female principals. Bruggink wrote:

> Gender and age are important factors to consider when analyzing the frequency of turnover…This belief would imply that schools with low performing students and male principals might experience lower principal turnover rates that the schools with low performing students and female principals. (p. 84)

Earlier research concerning principal tenure and student achievement has been mixed. For example, Rowan and Denk (1984), Phelps (2000), and Bruggink (2001) found an
inverse relationship between principal tenure and student achievement. In contrast to the Rowan and Denk study, Miskel and Owens (1983) found no significant relationship between principal tenure and student achievement. In later studies, Balfanz and Maclver (2000) and Fogo (2002) asserted that, regardless of the school reform, improved student achievement is difficult to improve without low principal tenure. Research has shown that low performing schools are characterized by low performing principals (Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002). Fogo argued that struggling schools that were working to improve experienced higher levels of principal turnover than high performing schools. Fogo also asserted that those schools with higher rates of principal turnover were more likely to remain a failing school.

Macmillan and Meyer (2003) suggested that the principal’s comprehensive view of the school is crucial to student achievement and that principal tenure is counter to improved student achievement. It is rare that a novice principal is able to enter the role of principal and meet all of the expectations associated with the effective principal (Copeland, 2001; Snyder & Anderson, 1986). Deal and Peterson (1994) found that the role of the principal was filled with unexpected problems and enigmas. The role of the principal lacked predictable paths and many of those paths would only become clear with time in the role of principal at that school.

Macmillan and Meyer (2003) also asserted that there was a relationship between principal tenure and teachers’ work. Teacher apathy and teacher to principal relationship was diminished as a result of principal tenure. Schools with lower rates of principal turnover had higher levels of teacher buy-in and commitment to the reform efforts at the
school. High rates of principal turnover may foster apathy among the teaching staff. DuVall (2001) studied school systems that showed above average achievement gains. Duvall found that student achievement was linked to leadership tenure. In other words, schools with lower rates of principal turnover showed greater student achievement than those schools with higher rates of principal turnover.

Research has shown that principal involvement in curriculum and instructional matters influenced student achievement (Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000). Researchers have linked principal tenure to the principal’s involvement in matters pertaining to curriculum and instruction at the school (Gieselmann, 2004). Agunloye and Sielke (2007) argued that there was a relationship between principal tenure at the school and student achievement. They went on to say the longer the principal was at the school increased the principal’s opportunity to implement his or her vision and expectations at the school.

Fullan (2001) and Hall and Hord (2001) asserted that school improvement is impacted by time. Fullan went on to recommend further research pertaining to principal tenure to learn more about the association between principal tenure and student achievement. Supporting Gieselmann’s (2004) report, Partlow (2004) asserted that principal’s tenure influenced student achievement. Partlow wrote, “The principal’s role is an essential component because the principal is the only individual who must have a holistic view of the school and the initiatives required to improve learning for students” (p. 34). If so, then the growing turnover rate of principals is a threat to student achievement.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) reported a 42% turnover rate of elementary school principals. Principal tenure is considered by school
systems seeking to turn around low performing schools (Ylimaki, 2007). Principal tenure is also associated with principal experience. Ylimaki studied inexperienced and experienced elementary school principals in high poverty high minority in four elementary schools. Ylimaki asserted that although all principals in the study experienced improved student achievement, the experienced principals employed substantive curriculum and instruction improvement strategies. The experienced principals were more confident than the less experienced principals were. The difference in confidence was associated with the level of confidence felt by the teachers at the schools in the study. A teacher at a school lead by an experienced principal said, “you just felt she knew from the beginning what to do. It wasn’t long before everyone could see she had cleaned up the school physically and instructionally” (p. 17).

Educational Level

NCLB ushered in an era of unprecedented accountability for school principals and accountability was linked student achievement. At the center of the NCLB policy is the mandate that principal lead schools in a manner that would yield proficient readers. Bottoms (2001) put forward that the new student achievement expectations meant changes for all educators. Bottom posited that successful principals needed a deep understanding of curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. Waters et al. (2003) found a relationship between the principal’s knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and the principal’s ability to stimulate members of the organization intellectually.
The influence of the principal on student achievement is second only to the influence of the classroom teacher (Leithwood et al., 2004). According to Nelson and Sassi (2000) and Prestine and Nelson (2003), school leadership preparation programs have varied in the content and rigor of course work used to prepare candidates for the role of principal. These researchers go on to assert an association between the principal’s preparation and student achievement. Researchers, (e.g., Educational Research Service, 2000; Farkas, Johnson, Duffett & Foleno, 2001; Hale & Moorman, 2003) put forward that principal preparation was the new frontier in educational improvement. Georgia’s Professional Standards Commission awards teaching and leadership certificates at levels based on the principal’s level of degree attainment. The certification level of the principal is an indicator of the principal’s educational level. This study will investigate the relationship between the principal’s level of education and student reading achievement.

Goldwyn (2008) asked, “Are principals equipped with the knowledge necessary to be high-quality instructional leaders?” (p. 3) Stein and Nelson (2003) argued that like teachers, principals need a basic level of knowledge to do their jobs effectively. Traditionally principals were not expected to have more than a basic level of knowledge related to curriculum, instruction, and student achievement (Bottery, 2006; Cardo & Fitzgerald, 2005; Carr, 2005). Changes in the role of the principal required a new level of knowledge for an effective principal.

Determining what level of knowledge is needed to effectively be a principal is complex (Overholt, 2008). Researchers have recommended improving principal effectiveness via increasing principal knowledge (Stein & Nelson, 2003). Further
defining the new level of knowledge needed by the effective principal may help educators improve student achievement (Crawford & Torgesen, 2006; Stein & Nelson).

There are varying approaches to preparing leaders for the role of principal (Bush, 2005; Bush and Jackson, 2002; Chapman, 2005). Marzano et al. (2005) argued that educational leaders have long known that a principal’s knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and overall educational preparation influenced their effectiveness.

Most states require principals and other school administrators to have advanced training in the administration of schools. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration has repeatedly recommended building levels that administrators be required by their school systems to hold a doctorate in school administration (Yeager, 2005). Some educational systems promoted individuals to the role of principal based on their performance as a teacher (Bush, 2005). In the United States, it has become customary that principals complete graduate school courses and obtain licensure and certification prior to entering the role of principal (Bush & Jackson, 2002). Principal licensure and certification levels in Georgia may mirror the principal’s degree obtainment (Georgia Professional Standards, 2009). The principal’s pursuit of educational excellence, which may be reflected in the principal’s degree attainment, may serve as a predictor of student achievement (McGhee & Lew, 2007).

Stein and Nelson (2003) wrote, “without knowledge that connects subject matter, learning, and teaching to acts of leadership, leadership floats disconnected from the very processes it is designed to govern” (as cited in McGhee and Lew, 2007, p. 373).
The Children’s Literacy Initiative (CLI) asserted that the principal’s knowledge level influences student achievement. CLI outlined nine principal knowledge competencies that characterize principals at schools with effective literacy programs: principal’s knowledge of school culture; cutting edge craft related to literacy achievements; quality children’s literature; instructional models; curriculum; school structure as it relates to the use of instructional time and space; assessment of content standards; special interventions for struggling students; and research knowledge that allows the principal access to school improvement models (Overholt, 2008).

In 2001, the NAESP created the *Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do* (NAESP, 2002). The six NAESP standards state that effective principals possess characteristics that allow them to: (a) Lead schools in ways that put student and adult learning at the center; (b) Promote the academic success of all students; (c) Create and demand rigorous content and instruction; (d) Create a climate of continuous learning for adults; (e) Use multiple sources of data as diagnostic tool; and (f) Actively engage the community. These standards outlined what principals connect student achievement to the characteristics of the principal.

Beyond NAESP and CLI principal characteristics and performance standards, there is a gap between principal leadership standards and principal knowledge of content. Stein and Nelson (2003) refer to this gap as the missing paradigm in the research on principal leadership. Stein and Nelson argued that not enough research has been conducted related to the principal’s knowledge base and recommended more studies related to principal knowledge and on how this knowledge influences his or her leadership. Stein and Nelson
recommended more studies related to the principal’s knowledge level as it relates to how
the principal thinks in relationship to his or her knowledge level.

Stein and Nelson (2003) investigated three educational leadership cases; two of the
three cases specifically related to the principal’s knowledge. This researchers
hypothesized that effective principals employ three levels of knowledge. Level 1 is
knowledge of subject matter, “how knowledge is developed and verified, and of the role
of “schools of thought” in defining what is worthwhile and acceptable” (p. 14). Level 2 is
knowledge of how children learn and how teachers can assist children’s learning.

Stein and Nelson wrote:

They [principals] also must know something about how students learn a subject
matter (typical challenges and stumbling blocks, ways of connecting new ideas to
previous ideas, and so on) as well as information about the best ways of teaching
that subject matter. (p. 3)

Level 3 is knowledge of how teachers learn to teach and how can principals assist
teachers’ learning, that is, like classroom teachers, principals also must understand
content and how that content can be best be understood by teachers, taught by teachers,
and learned by students.

Principal knowledge level is associated with student achievement. There is an
expected level of professional knowledge associated with the principalship (Bottoms,
2001; Day, 2005; Leone et al., 2009; McGhee & Lew, 2007; Socol, 2007). According to
Leone et al., the principal’s knowledge is associated with the effectiveness of the school.
The principal’s knowledge of reading curriculum and instruction especially influences the
reading achievement (Mackey et al., 2006). More than ever, principals are expected to be
both knowledgeable about interpersonal and contextual matters related to student achievement (Wildy & Clarke, 2008).

According to Hess and Kelly (2005), school improvement depends on the principal’s leadership. These researchers asserted that principals were at the center of the work needed to improve student achievement, and like the world of business or that of commander on the battlefield, school principals must be knowledgeable in those core matters associated with student achievement.

Beyond meeting the licensing requirements, principals are expected to be knowledgeable about curriculum and instructional matters. Unfortunately, principal preparation and the knowledge base associated with educational leadership are ambiguous (Walker & Dimmock, 2006). The ambiguity related to the knowledge level needed to lead schools successfully contributes to principals feeling under prepared for the role (Bruggink, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Orphanos, 2007). This ambiguity sometimes leads to principal frustration. Socol (2007) a former principal, shared frustrations related to not being equipped with the knowledge needed to move the school beyond a basic level of instruction to a level of instruction that would promote meaningful student achievement gains at the school. Socol went on to share that the principal’s knowledge contributed to the school’s ability to improve student achievement.

Pitcher et al. (2006) did a qualitative study of four elementary principals and the reading curricular approach at the school. Each principal implemented different reading curricular approaches at their school. The principals also had different levels of knowledge related to reading curriculum and instruction.
Ethnic diversity has increased among America's school student populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Young and Brooks (2008) wrote that by 2050, the Hispanic population will increase by 188%, the Asian population by 213%, and the Black population by 71%. The demographic changes in America are expected to influence America's student enrollment. Beckford-Bennett (2009) recommended that school leadership researchers examine the principal's ethnicity and diversity experiences as a possible influence on student achievement. Beckford-Bennett went on to suggest that student achievement maybe influenced by students' access to role models that reflect the increased diversity found among America's changing students population.

Congruence between the cultural experiences of students and their schooling experiences has been linked to student achievement (Beckford-Bennett, 2009). Vinzant (2009) suggested that the principals that share some of the experiences of disadvantaged students might better understand the needs of these learners. According to Educational Research Service (2010), many times cultural congruence between Black students and their school experiences is lower than the cultural congruence between White students and their school experiences. Researchers (Escoffery, 2004; Yeager, 2005; Freigruber, 2009; Giese, 2006; Vinzant) have explored the principal's ethnicity as a variable associated with student achievement. These researchers and others (e.g., Echols, 2006; Hilliard, 2003; Hilliard & Ortiz, 2004; Tillman, 2004, 2008) investigated the association between student achievement and the principal's ethnicity.
In 1998, 75.3% of Georgia’s principals were White, 23.9% were Black, and Multiracial and Hispanic principals made up 1.5%. In a 2008 report, Georgia’s educator certification agency, reported that 67.5% of Georgia principals were White and 31.6% were Black. Combined, Multiracial and Hispanic principals made up the remaining 0.9% of Georgia principals in 2008. Researchers (e.g., Pang, 2001; Tillman, 2008) recommended that ethnicity be considered when hiring school principals, especially when the student enrollment majority minority.

Summary

Reading achievement in American continues to lag behind other comparable countries. Low reading achievement in America is not a new issue (Venezky, 2000). Low reading achievement in America has placed additional pressures on school leaders to ensure that American children read well by the end of the third grade. This reading achievement expectation has disproportionately impacted elementary schools (Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Ylimaki, 2007).

The ongoing debate concerning reading curricular approaches in America further convoluted principal struggles to improve student reading achievement. There is a growing field of research related to the principal and student achievement. Thirty years of research points to a relationship between school leadership and student achievement, adding a new dimension to the reading curricular approach debate, and offers an alternative to those looking to improve reading achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

The effective schools’ research ushered in a movement that propelled principals into the role of instructional leader (Ediger, 2008; Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Waters et al.,
2003; Ylimaki, 2007). Never before has the role of the principal been so politically charged and complex. The instructional leader movement expected principals to guide curriculum and instructional activities. This new role implied that principal behaviors influence classroom practices (Cotton, 2003; Day 2005; Ediger; NAESP, 2002; Marzano; Dufour et al., 2008; Matsumura et al., 2009; Rammer, 2007; Schmoker, 2006;). The effective school research, that is, principal leadership is linked to student achievement is compelling but can we use specific characteristics of the principal to predict student achievement? There is research that asserts that the principal’s gender (Coleman, 2003; Hill, 2000; Kruger et al., 2005; Pollard, 1997), the principal’s tenure (Gieselmann, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Newmann et al., 2000), and the principal’s level of education (Bottoms, 2001; Day, 2000; Duke, 2006; Socol, 2007; Leone et al., 2009; McGhee & Lew, 2007) might be factors associated with student achievement.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Reading achievement in Georgia remains a concern for Georgia students, parents, teachers, and school leaders. Identifying principal characteristics associated with passing percentages on the reading CRCT may help to improve principal effectiveness. Effective schools research (Marzano et al., 2005) and leadership trait theory research (Jones, 2006) has linked principal leadership and the school’s achievement success. Farkas and fellow scholars (2001) found that the majority of the school system superintendents in their study believed the principal was essential to the success of a school. The purpose of this study was to explore predictability between selected principal characteristics and student reading achievement. More specifically, can the selected professional and demographic characteristics of Georgia Title I elementary school principals be used to predict passing percentages on the Georgia third grade reading CRCT? The selected professional and demographic characteristics of the principal were: (a) the principal’s level of education as determined by the principal’s certification level; (b) the principal’s tenure as determined by how long the principal has been the principal at the school in the study; (c) the principal’s gender; and (d) the principal’s ethnicity.

Previous researchers have explored links between characteristics of the leader to investigate the relationship between leadership effectiveness and characteristics of the leader (Jones, 2006). Researchers have argued that principal leadership is essential to
improving student achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Researchers have found an association between the principal and student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Ediger, 2008; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Rammer, 2007; Schmoker, 2006; Waters et al., 2003).

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the professional and demographic characteristics of Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals?
2. Can the selected professional and demographic characteristics of a Georgia Title I elementary school principal predict student reading achievement?

Hypotheses

To scrutinize research question 2, the following hypothesis and null hypothesis were used:

1. Hypothesis: the selected characteristics of the Title I school principal can predict student reading achievement on the third grade CRCT.
2. Null hypothesis: The selected professional and demographic characteristics of a Title I elementary school principal cannot predict student reading achievement on the third grade reading CRCT.

Research Design

This study is concerned with predicting student reading achievement based on selected professional and demographic characteristics of the principal, (i.e., gender, tenure, knowledge level, and ethnicity). A quantitative correlational research design was
used to examine the ability to use the characteristics of the principal to predict student reading achievement (Warner, 2008). The principal characteristics were collected from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission Office and the student reading achievement data was collected from the Georgia Department of Education website. To make predictions of one dependent variable from the four independent variables in this study, a multiple regression statistical procedure was used to examine the collected data.

**Independent Variables**

Selected professional and demographic characteristics of the principal were the independent variables in the study. For the purpose of this study, the term principal characteristic referred to non-modifiable and non-easily manipulated characteristics of the principal versus principal behaviors (Cotton, 2003) and principal responsibilities (Waters et al., 2003). For this study, the operationalized use of the term principal characteristics included the following six selected professional and demographic principal characteristics: gender, tenure, knowledge level, and ethnicity.

**Dependent Variable**

Student passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT was the dependent variable for this study. Student who fail the third grade reading CRCT face being retained and failure on the reading CRCT serves as a predictor of future struggles in school for these students. Local, state, and federal governments sanction schools that fail to help students become proficient readers. The principals at these schools also sanctions. These principals face being terminated for failing to improve to improve student reading achievement (Leone, Meisel, & Drakeford, 2002).
NCLB has mandated that all students should be proficient readers by the end of the third grade (Hilliard, 2003; Hilliard & Ortiz, 2004). All of the schools included in this study administer the third grade reading CRCT. This is used to measure third grade students’ mastery of the Georgia Performance Standards. The CRCT results are also used to determine if Georgia schools met Adequate Yearly Progress as outlined by NCLB. Georgia implemented the CRCT in the spring of 2002.

Population

School-wide Title I schools serve higher numbers of poor and minority students than non-school-wide Title I schools. Reading achievement for poor and minority students is lower than non-poor and majority students in the United States (NEAP, 2007). The United States’ federal government allocated funds to Title I schools to improve to reading achievement for poor and minority children (NCLB, 2002). According to the NAEP 2007 report, Georgia’s student reading achievement is below the nation’s reading achievement. The state and federal government sanction Georgia schools that fail to show Adequately Yearly Progress towards meeting NCLB’s reading achievement goals. Georgia’s school-wide Title I principals were targeted for this study. In 2009, there were 626 school-wide Title I elementary schools in Georgia.

Instrumentation

The Georgia CRCT is administered in grades one through eight. The CRCT subtests assess reading, English/language arts, and mathematics and are administered in the spring of the school year. Grades three through eight are also administered the CRCT science and social studies subtests. The reading portion of the test is used to determine if
students are proficiently reading by the end of the third grade. Students who do not score at a proficient level are retained in the third grade. CRCT scores range from 650 to 950 and are reported as scale scores. The scores are categorized into Level I (650–799), Level II (800–849), and Level III (850–950). Level II and Level III represent proficiency on the CRCT (Miller, 2007).

**CRCT Validity and Reliability**

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) monitors the development of the CRCT. The CRCT developers adhere to standards established by the American Education Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (GaDOE, 2007, 2008, 2009). CRCT validity and reliability rests on the CRCT’s ability to consistently measure students’ mastery of the Georgia Performance Standards.

To establish CRCT validity, GaDOE created a curriculum that includes clear learning standards for students. Educators across Georgia then determined which curriculum standards would be tested by the CRCT. The second phase used to establish CRCT validity included the writing of test items by professional assessment specialists. Georgia educators review the created test items for suitability. Accepted test items are field tested under standardized testing conditions. After being field tested, data from the field tests are analyzed by Georgia educators to examine how different groups of students responded to the test items. Test items that showed signs of bias and test items that failed to measure established curriculum standards are rejected. Test items that are accepted are placed in a bank of test items to be used on future CRCTs. Next, accepted
test items are included during a CRCT administration and statistical data from subsequent CRCT administrations are used to determine consistent measurement of curriculum standards. Finally, CRCT scores are produced and reported. As previously stated, CRCT scores are reported as Level I, Level II, or Level III (Miller, 2007).

Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Coefficient (CARC) and the Standard Error of Measurement (SEM) are two reliability indices used to establish CRCT reliability. The CARC is “an index of internal consistency reliability that assesses the degree to which responses are consistent across a set of multiple measures of the same construct…” (Warner, p. 1005). The SEM “describes the variability in the values of a sample statistic across hundreds or thousands of different samples from a specific population…” (Warner, 2008, pp. 1036–1037). The Georgia third grade reading CRCT CARC for the following years were 0.892 (2007), 0.89 (2008), and 0.88 (2009). The SEMs for 2007, 2008, and 2009 were 2.42, 2.46, and 2.49, respectively.

Data Collection

Approval was secured from the Mercer University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the collecting of data (Appendix A). The study was conducted in the spring of 2010. Anonymity was protected for all participating principals, schools, and school systems. The spring 2009 CRCT third Grade Reading achievement data were collected from the Georgia Department of Education website. The selected characteristics of the principals were collected from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission Office. The data collected for this study were accessed via the Georgia Professional Standards Commission Office and the Georgia Department of Education website.
Data Analysis

An analysis of the collected data was conducted using the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. To determine statistical significance, an alpha level of .05 was used. A multiple regression test was used to analyze the data because a regression analysis allowed this researcher to use characteristics of the principals to predict student reading achievement on the CRCT. Multiple regression tests are found within SPSS. Inferential statistics from the analysis were used to determine predictability between the independent variables and the dependent variable in this study. The data set came from the Georgia spring 2009 third Grade Reading CRCT.

Reporting Results

Chapter 4 provides a presentation of the results from the analysis. The findings are organized under the study’s research questions and hypotheses. Descriptive statistics were used to address Research Question number 1. The descriptive statistics shows information related to the gender, ethnicity, tenure, and educational level of the principals in the study. A regression analysis was used to address the study’s null hypothesis. The regression analysis statistics shows descriptive, correlational, ANOVA, and coefficient information pertaining to the study. Tables were used to display and facilitate the study’s findings. Along with each table is a narrative of the findings.

Summary

Learning to read well by the end of the third grade has been linked to success in schools. Students who fail to learn how to read well in elementary school are less likely to complete high school, and enroll in college. An inability to read well has also been
linked to greater rates of incarceration (Noguera, 2008). A growing body of research points to a link between the school principal and student achievement. Schools with higher student achievement are more likely to have an effective principal. Researchers have sought to determine the responsibilities and behaviors of effective principals (Escoffery, 2004). This study investigated the characteristics of principals to help educational leaders recruit, hire, and retain principals with those characteristics associated with higher student reading achievement.

A quantitative correlational designed study was conducted to investigate the ability to predict third grade reading achievement on the CRCT based on selected demographic and professional characteristics of the principal. Data for this study were collected via the Professional Standards Commission Office and the Georgia Department of Education website. The selected characteristics of the principals were collected from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission website and the grade reading achievement data were collected from the Georgia Department of Education website. Using SPSS, a multiple regression test was used to analyze the data. The results and analysis of the data acquired from this study are presented in Chapter 4. Recommendation and implications for further study are presented in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter 4 shares the results of this study and provides an analysis of the data. This study investigated the ability to predict reading passing percentages on the CRCT using professional and demographic characteristics of Georgia school-wide Title I principals. The predictor variables for this study were the principal’s gender, ethnicity, tenure, and level of education. Student reading achievement on the Georgia third grade reading CRCT was the dependent variable. The principal characteristics were collected from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission Office, and the student reading achievement data were collected from the Office of Student Achievement and Accountability. A multiple regression was executed on the principal characteristics and the CRCT student reading achievement data.

Organization of Data Analysis

Chapter 4 includes descriptive statistics for the professional and demographic data from the study’s principal participants. Chapter 4 also reports predictability between the professional and demographic characteristics of the principals and third grade reading achievement on the 2009 Georgia CRCT. The results of this study are organized under the study’s two research questions. Using SPSS, this researcher addressed Research Question 1 with descriptive statistics. The null hypothesis for Research Questions 2 was tested using a multiple regression analysis.
Findings

Research Question 1

Descriptive statistics were used to address research question 1, which asked: What are the professional and demographic characteristics of Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals? Six hundred twenty-six Georgia school-wide Title I principals were included in this study, of which 452 (72%) were female and 174 (28%) were male. For analysis purposes, this variable was nominally coded using 1 for females and 2 for males.

The principals in the study were mostly White and Black, with the majority being White. One of the principals was Indian American, two were Asian, two were Hispanic, two were mixed (multi-ethnic), 257 were Black, and 362 were White (Table 1). Nominal coding was used for this variable (Asian = 1; Black = 2; Hispanic = 3; Indian American = 4; Mixed [multi-ethnic] = 5; and White = 6).
Table 1

*Ethnicity of Principals in the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>00.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>00.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>00.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>00.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>57.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>626</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research question 1 also pertained to the principal’s tenure as the principal at the school in the study and the principal’s educational level, that is, level 5 (Master’s degree), level 6 (Educational Specialist), or level 7 (Doctorate). The principals in this study all held a Georgia leadership certificates, ranging from a level 5 to a level 7. One hundred and nine of the principals held a level 5, 368 held a level 6, and 149 held a level 7. This variable was also nominally coded (5 = Master’s degree; 6 = Educational Specialist; and 7 = Doctorate).

In 2009, Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals’ tenure as principal at the school in the study ranged from zero years of tenure to more than nine years of
tenure (see Table 2). Principals' tenure data exceeding nine years were not maintained by
the Georgia Professional Standards Office and were not included in this study. For this
study, nine years of tenure means nine or more years of tenure.

Table 2

*Tenure of Principals in the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>626</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked: Can the selected professional and demographic characteristics of a Title I elementary school principals predict student reading achievement. To test research question 2, the following null hypothesis was used: *The selected professional and demographic characteristics of a Title I elementary school principals cannot predict student reading achievement.*

This researcher conducted a multiple regression analysis using SPSS to investigate the relationship between passing percentages on the Georgia third grade reading CRCT and the predictor variables, that is, the characteristics of Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals. The enter method was used to analyze the relationship between the four independent variables and the one dependent variable. The means and standard deviation can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables in the study (N = 626)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Passing CRCT</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis included 626 Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals. The four selected principal characteristics were gender, educational level, ethnicity, and tenure. The relationship between the independent and the dependent variables and the relationship among the independent variables are found in Table 4. The correlations between the independent and dependent variables are all positive. The strongest correlation of 0.329 ($p = 0.00; r^2 = 0.113$) is between the principals’ ethnicity and passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT. The remaining correlations were very small and ranged from 0.013 to 0.075.

Table 4 also examines the correlation among the four independent variables. There were six correlations among the four independent variables. They ranged from -0.140 to 0.457. Three of the six correlations among the independent variables were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The highest correlation among the independent variables is 0.457 and was between the principals’ tenure and the principals’ gender. According to Shannon and Davenport (2001), a correlation less than +/- .80 is acceptable. The .457 correlation indicates that there is a positive relationship between the principals’ gender and the principals’ tenure, which may imply a positive relationship between a principal’s gender and the principal’s tenure at the school.
Table 4

*Multiple Regression Correlations Between Independent and Dependent Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Passing</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>% Passing</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.329</td>
<td>.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRCT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.140</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (1-tailed)</td>
<td>% Passing</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.374</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRCT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td></td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The model summary (Table 5) provides additional information about the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The R-squared value (.113) represents the amount of variance in the third grade reading passing percentages that can be explained by the principal characteristics used in this study.
Eleven percent of the variance in student reading achievement on the 2009 reading third grade reading CRCT explained by the independent variables used in this study.

Table 5

*Model Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R-Squared</th>
<th>Adjusted R-Squared</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.336&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.113</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>6.212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tenure, Gender, Ethnicity, Educational Level

The ANOVA statistics (Table 6) displays information related to the statistical significance of this study’s results. The results of the F-test reveals a statistically significant F-value of 19.785 ($p = .000$). The degrees of freedom for this F-test are 4 and 621. Using the enter method, a significant model emerged ($F(4, 621) = 19.785$, $p = .000$) with the adjusted R-squared = .107.
Table 6

*Analysis of Variance for Multiple Regression*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>3054.195</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>763.549</td>
<td>19.785</td>
<td>.000a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>23965.344</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>38.592</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27019.539</td>
<td>625</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05*

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tenure, Gender, Ethnicity, Educational Level

b. Dependent Variable: % Passing CRCT

The Coefficients Statistics (Table 7) shows collinearity statistics information about the relationships among the independent variables. The independent variables in this study have a relatively high level of tolerance. A higher tolerance level indicates a lower level of overlap with the other independent variables. The higher the tolerance values the more opportunity for the independent variable to influence the dependent variable. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) indicates the amount of interaction among the independent variables. The VIF is calculated by dividing the number 1 by the tolerance value. A VIF close to 1 is desired. The VIF values for this study range from 1.015 to 1.037, which is acceptable (Shannon & Davenport, 2001).
Table 7

*Coefficients Statistics from the independent and dependent variables in the study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Collinearity Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
<td>82.51</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>8.58</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: % Passing CRCT

Because the principals' ethnicity was statistically significant, this researcher ran a means analysis and a linear regression to further investigate the principal ethnicity finding. Six hundred nineteen of the 626 principals in the study were Black or White. The remaining seven principals were the Asian, Hispanic, Indian American, or mixed (multi-ethnic). These seven principal were removed to reduce skewed results. The Black and White principal were coded using dummy variables (Black = 1 and White = 0). The means analysis shows White and Black principals respectively averaged 92.3% and
87.8% passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT. The linear regression analysis yields the following equation:

\[
\text{Predicted Passing Percentage on the Third Grade CRCT} = 92.364 - (4.449)(\text{Ethnicity}).
\]

The regression equation respectively predicts a 92.3% and 87.8% passing percentage on the third grade reading CRCT.

Summary

Using SPSS, a descriptive analysis of the data was executed in response to research question 1. The descriptive analysis revealed that the majority of Georgia’s school-wide Title I principals are female, White, and had earned an Educational Specialist degree. The descriptive analysis also revealed that the principals in the study on average were at their current school as the principal for 3.2 years.

The study’s regression model included the principal’s gender, educational level, ethnicity, and tenure. The model revealed a statistical significance \((p = .00)\). The principal’s ethnicity was a significant variable \((p < .05)\). The relationship between the principal’s ethnicity and passing percentages on the third grade CRCT reported the strongest relationship \((r = .349, p < .05)\). The R-squared statistics for the used regression model explained 11% of the variance found in the dependent variable.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Research has linked the principal to student achievement (Fullan, 2002; Marzano, 2003; Waters et al., 2003). This research study investigated the professional and demographic characteristics of the principal and passing percentages on Georgia’s reading CRCT. The predictor variables for this study were the principals’ level of education, gender, tenure, and ethnicity. The criterion variable was the percent of students passing the Georgia third grade reading CRCT. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the study, a summary of the major findings, a discussion of the findings, conclusions are discussed, implications related to the study, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

Reading achievement among American children, especially poor and minority students remains a concern for American students, parents, school leaders, and policymakers. Increased scrutiny via NCLB has increased the amount of accountability placed on school principals to ensure achievement for all students. There is over 30 years of research indicating that the school’s principal is associated with student achievement. Waters and associates (2003) conducted a meta-analysis and found evidence that supports the principal’s link to student achievement. Continued research pertaining to how the principal is linked to student achievement and which characteristics of the
school principal is related student achievement is needed. To improve student achievement, this research study investigated the relationship between selected professional and demographic characteristics of the principal to determine the relationship between the principal and reading passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT.

Crucial to the improvement of student reading achievement is the effectiveness of the school’s principal. Identifying the principal characteristics aligned with student achievement is vital to efforts to improve student achievement. A quantitative correlational design was used to conduct a multiple regression analysis of passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT and the selected four characteristics of Georgia’s school-wide Title I elementary school principals.

Summary of Major Findings

Research question 1 asked: What are the professional and demographic characteristics of Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals? The descriptive statistics analysis showed that the 2009 Georgia school-wide Title I elementary school principals was a diverse group. The majority of the principals were female. The majority were White principals, with Black principals being the next highest represented group. Most principals possessed an Educational Specialist degree, and the principals averaged 3.2 years of tenure as the principal at the school included in the study.

Research question 2 asked: Can the selected professional and demographic characteristics of a Title I elementary school principal predict student reading achievement? The following null hypothesis was used to scrutinize this research
question: *The selected professional and demographic characteristics of a Title I elementary school principal cannot predict student reading achievement.* Based on the results of the multiple regression analysis, this researcher rejected the null hypothesis.

**Discussion of Findings**

The descriptive analysis revealed a higher number of female principals than male principals which supports the increasing number of female principals as indicated in the literature review. Contrary to research found in the literature review, the principals’ gender in the study was not statistically significant. The majority of the principals in the study possess an Educational Specialist degree (level 6). The minimum degree requirement for a principal in Georgia is a Master’s degree (level 5). The principals’ level of education on averaged exceeded the minimum educational level required for the role of principal in Georgia. The principals’ level of education also proved to be statistically insignificant as it related to passing percentages on the reading CRCT. The principal tenure data showed that the group of principals on average had less than four years of experience as principal at the school in the study. More than 30% of the principals in the study had less than two years principal tenure at the school in the study.

Nominal coding was used to enter the principals’ ethnicity into SPSS (Asian = 1; Black = 2; Hispanic = 3; Indian American = 4; Mixed [multi-ethnic] = 5; and White = 6). The regression analysis showed that the principals’ ethnicity was linked to passing percentages on the reading CRCT. Six hundred nineteen (98%) of the principals in the study were either Black or White. The remaining seven (2%) principals were Asian, Hispanic, Indian American, or Mixed. To further explore the link between the principals’
ethnicity and passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT, a linear regression was executed using the principals' ethnicity as the independent variable and passing percentages on the reading CRCT as the dependent variable. Because 98% of the principals in the study were Black and White principals, these principals were included in the linear regression. The linear regression equation yields the following average passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT: White principals averaged 92.3% and Black principals averaged 87.8%.

Conclusions

The multiple regression used to test predictability between selected principal characteristics and passing percentages on the reading CRCT was statistically significant ($p = .00$). A statistically significant relationship ($p = .00$) was also found between the principals’ ethnicity and passing percentages on the Georgia third grade reading CRCT. Because factors related to the schools and students in the study were not included in this study, links between the principals’ ethnicity and passing percentages on the reading CRCT were not conclusive enough to support existing literature related to leadership traits (Matyas, 1998; Northhouse, 1997; Yukl, 1998) and effective school leadership theories (Brookover, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 2002; McCallum, 1999), which asserted a direct or indirect relationship between school principals and student achievement.

Vinzant and Faidley (2006) conducted research related to the direct or indirect relationship between the principal’s ethnicity and student achievement. Vinzant suggested that the principal’s ethnicity may directly or indirectly help to establish cultural
congruence between the school leader and those whom the leader wishes to lead. Other researchers (e.g., Ford, Moore, Whiting, & Grantham, 2008; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005) have also explored an association between student achievement, race, and ethnicity. These researchers encouraged continued investigation and conversation about how these factors relate student achievement.

This researcher suspects that the found statistical significance between Georgia’s school-wide Title I elementary school principals’ ethnicity and passing percentages on the reading CRCT may be a peripheral effect of the persistent achievement gap between Georgia’s White and minority students (NEAP, 2007). For instance, if the majority of the principals in the study are at schools that have a student population that mirrors the principal’s ethnicity, then White principals are primarily at schools with primarily White student populations and Black principals are at schools with primarily Black student populations. If this were the case, the statistical significance found between the principal’s ethnicity and student reading achievement in Georgia might be related to the achievement gap between White and Black students in Georgia (NEAP). Because school and student characteristics were not included in this study, linking the study’s principals’ ethnicity finding to Georgia’s achievement gap is not possible.

Implications

The relationship between student achievement and principal characteristics is complex. No one study can ever hope to answer all of the questions related to the influence of the principal on student achievement. The psychodynamics associated with
school leadership suggests that multiple and many unexplained factors influence the impact of school leaders on student achievement (Holder, 2009).

The statistical significance of the regression test indicates a relationship between the characteristics of the principals in the study and passing percentages on the reading CRCT exist. Policy-makers, superintendents, human resource directors, and community leaders will need to understand the relationship between characteristics of school principals and its relationship to student achievement as it relates to how shared experiences between principals, students, teachers, parents, and the greater school community may impact student achievement. They are also encouraged to explore student, school, and principal characteristics to identify strategies that will improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. Also, principal evaluations are greatly influenced by student achievement. Those who evaluate principals may need to consider factors beyond the principal’s control when evaluating the principal’s performance. Finally, school leaders will need to continue to explore the effective schools research, especially as it relates to school leadership and its connection to student achievement.

Recommendation for Future Research

Student achievement data from the spring 2009 administration of the third grade CRCT and the selected characteristics of the school principal were respectively retrieved from the Georgia Office of Student Achievement and Accountability and the Georgia Professional Standards Commissions Office. At the time of this study, validity related to Georgia’s 2009 CRCT student achievement data was marked by suspicions related to
high numbers of erasures from incorrect to correct answers on student test documents.
The recommendations for future research emanated from the study’s findings.

The scandal concerning high numbers of erasures on the CRCT has placed a cloud of suspicion over CRCT passing percentages. This researcher recommends replicating this study using student achievement data from school years with lower numbers of student erasures on the CRCT.

The principals’ ethnicity in this study was statistically linked to passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT. To further explore the ethnicity findings, this researcher recommends conducting qualitative studies to deeply investigate principal characteristics associated with student achievement.

This researcher speculates that the link between passing percentages on the reading CRCT is linked to the achievement gap between White and minority students. Investigating principal and student characteristics as predictors of student achievement may yield greater understanding of the interplay among principal characteristics, student achievement, and the achievement gap.

School leaders are grasping for solutions for combating low reading achievement in America. These leaders are bombarded by vendors and companies with reading programs that claim to be the answer to closing the achievement gap as well as improving reading achievement. This researcher recommends investigating principal characteristics and varied reading curricular approaches as predictors of student reading achievement.
Summary

Student reading achievement in America continues to plague American policymakers, superintendents, and school leaders. Increased accountability as a result of the NCLB Act of 2001 has spurred new interest in educational research pertaining to the relationship between the school's principal and student achievement. This study examined predictability between selected characteristics of Georgia school-wide Title I school principals and passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT.

Over three decades of educational research exists supporting the relationship between school leadership and student achievement. Earlier researchers have long argued that principal leadership has a direct or indirect impact on student achievement (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Brookover et al., 1978; Brookover et al., 1979; Edmonds, 1979). Marzano and Waters (2009) have continued research related to principal responsibilities associated with student achievement. Principal leadership is a hallmark to school improvement and never before has the role of the principal been so politically charged and complex (Cotton, 2000).

The principal characteristics data were retrieved from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission Office and the student achievement data were collected from the Georgia Office of Student Achievement and Accountability. Two research questions were used to guide this study. One null hypothesis was used to scrutinize the data. SPSS was used to run a multiple regression analysis of the data. The regression model was significant ($p < .01$). Out of the four principal characteristics used to conduct this study,
the principals' ethnicity was found to be statistically related to passing percentages on the third grade reading CRCT.

Policy-makers, superintendents, and school leaders are cautioned against narrowly using the result of this regression analysis to make crucial decisions related to school leadership and student achievement improvement. They are also encouraged to conduct further studies related to characteristics of school leaders to further explain the complex relationship between school leadership and student achievement.
APPENDIX A

MERCER IRB APPROVAL
16-Mar-2010

Mr. Gregory Middleton
College of Education
Mercer University
Tift College of Education
Department of Educational Leadership
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: "The Selected Professional And Demographic Characteristics Of Title I Elementary School Principals As Predictors Of Student Reading Achievement Reading" (H1003085)

Dear Mr.:

Your application entitled: "The Selected Professional And Demographic Characteristics Of Title I Elementary School Principals As Predictors Of Student Reading Achievement Reading" (H1003085), was reviewed on behalf of Mercer University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Research, and is Exempt from further review at this time, in accordance to federal regulations set forth at 46 CFR 101(b) Category 4.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be re-submitted for IRB review to insure that risks to the subject have not changed.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Ava Chambless-Richardson, BA, CIM, CIP
Compliance Coordinator
Institutional Review Board
REFERENCES


Daeschner, S., Munoz, M., & Barnes, J. (2004). Meeting the challenge of closing the achievement gap: What can we learn from urban, high poverty/racially mixed schools? Spectrum (Summer).


Vinzant, J. (2009). Black principals’ perceptions of how their racial, cultural, personal, and professional identities affect their leadership. (Doctoral dissertation, Boston


