

Efficacy, Community, and Aspiring Principals

By

Bryan Richman

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Kathleen Puckett, Chair  
Teresa Foulger  
Jeffery Smith

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## ABSTRACT

The United States is facing an emerging principal shortage. This study examines an intervention to deliver professional development for assistant principals on their way to becoming principals. The intervention intended to boost their sense of efficacy as if they were principals while creating a supportive community of professionals for ongoing professional learning.

The community was designed much like a professional learning community (PLC) with the intent of developing into a community of practice (CoP). The participants were all elementary school assistant principals in a Title I district in a large metropolitan area. The researcher interviewed an expert set of school administrators consisting of superintendents and consultants (and others who have knowledge of what a good principal ought to be) about what characteristics and skills were left wanting in principal applicants. The data from these interviews provided the discussion topics for the intervention.

The assistant principals met regularly over the course of a semester and discussed the topics provided by the expert set of school administrators. Participant interaction within the sessions followed conversation protocols. The researcher was also a participant in the group and served as the coordinator. Each session was recorded and transcribed.

The researcher used a mixed methods approach to analyze the intervention. Participants were surveyed to measure their efficacy before and after the intervention. The session transcripts were analyzed using open and axial coding. Data showed no statistically significant change in the participants' sense

of efficacy. Data also showed the participants became a coalescing community of practice.

## DEDICATION

In a time when the distance between the haves and the have-nots in our country is increasing, and we have loved ones fighting abroad we shall seek education as a salve and act with a sense of urgency towards what John Adams had in mind for his sons and their children:

. . . study politics and war [so] that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce and agriculture in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.  
(Letter to Abigail Adams, May 12, 1780)

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **Efficacy, Community, and Aspiring Principals**

The public service sector is closely monitored by taxpayers and their political representatives; taxpayers both desire and are entitled to know what is being done with their money (Cayer, 2004). For education, this translates into a desire by the state, city, education agencies, communities, and schools to have effective leaders running the local public school. Effective principals are particularly crucial since they are the pinnacle of leadership at each school. In addition to a de facto need for effective school leadership, there is potential for an upcoming shortage of principals in U.S. schools. There are three reasons contributing to the anticipated shortage: (a) retirement eligibility; according to the U.S. Department of Labor, 40% of the nation's public school principals are eligible to retire; many of the current principals are baby-boomers (Lankes & O'Donnell, 2010), (b) attrition; added pressures from state and federally legislated accountability have made school administration positions less desirable (Lankes & O'Donnell, 2010), (c) lifestyle; former principals have indicated that the higher principal salary is not worth the additional stress compared the salary and stress of a teacher (Lankes & O'Donnell, 2010; Viadero, 2009). In summary, the combination of a workforce with a significant portion eligible for retirement, an increase in attrition, and stress, provide conditions for a shortage of experienced principals.

A review of literature asserts that existing principal training programs are not sufficient to address this emerging need (Fullan, 2003; Fullan, 2008; Lauder,

2000; Murphy, Moorman, & McCarthy, 2008). One way to address this upcoming shortage would be to develop a supply of potential principals. This study examined an intervention that could support the development of principals by creating a learning community for assistant principals where they discuss their experiences and learn from each other.

### **Principal Training**

Murphy et al. (2008) studied the reform of principal training programs across six states. In these states, the aspiring principal takes courses approved by their state department of education. This coursework includes school law, finance law, curriculum, and leadership. Thus, the typical principal training program provides an aspiring school administrator with coursework and a transcript sufficient for certification. Existing programs, however, lack sufficient opportunities to gain authentic knowledge and experience (Murphy et al., 2008).

Anecdotal evidence by this researcher supports Murphy et al.'s (2008) claim of insufficient opportunity for authentic experiences in principal training. For example, during the 2003-2004 school year, this researcher was working towards a school administration certification at a university that partnered with local school districts to train principals. Near the beginning of the coursework, one of the instructors quipped, "You all will learn how to be principals, but the first job all of you will get will be that of an assistant principal - and you will be doing more than you'll learn here." This instructor implied that after having gone through a training program, the aspiring principal would not have sufficient

training. The instructor's quote affirms the purpose of this research in that more than just coursework is needed to train aspiring principals.

Included in most principal training curricula is an internship with a current school administrator. Internships are inherently limited to the situations at hand, and as such, principals who serve as mentors find it difficult to provide the overall experience of being a principal, especially in areas of accountability that accompany the position. The principals who serve as mentors simply cannot allow an intern to take full responsibility as their error could jeopardize the school's functioning or the mentor's job performance (Hall & Harris, 2008; Murphy et al., 2008). The principal intern will, by default, have a limited level of involvement with the responsibilities of school leadership. Consequently, the aspiring principal may not have a realistic view of a principal's job or practical experience as a principal. Experiences where the intern learns to deal with an irate parent or upset teacher help them to address the nervousness of impending confrontation. These real-life experiences are needed to allow each person to determine how to handle their own physiological responses and effectively do the job. Unfortunately, waiting to experience confrontation when on the job presents a new principal with an experience for which they have no frame of reference. These frames of reference can assist in building efficacy. Thus, the aspiring principal may not have a realistic bank of experiences, nor sufficient efficacy, to effectively perform a principal's job.

Obtaining the administrative certificate is just one step to becoming an efficient and effective school administrator. There is a paucity of research

documenting what happens after an aspiring principal fulfills this first step. Murphy et al. (2008) found support communities, like cohorts, show a positive effect on the success and commitment to school administration; but typical programs, which are usually offered through a local college, university, or an online college, have failed to develop a support community for graduates (Hipp & Weber, 2008; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Clearly there is a need to establish frames of reference with practical skills for incoming principals in current principal preparation programs.

This study examined an innovative approach addressing this need. The innovation involved bi-weekly meetings of assistant principals whose goals were to become principals. During these gatherings assistant principals participated in conversations guided by topics initially provided by the researcher from interview data with an expert set. They were asked to discuss their current experiences within these topics, in preparation to become principals. The researcher-participant served as facilitator and investigated whether this approach helped assistant principals learn practical aspects of the principalship, whether it increased their efficacy for the principalship, and the extent to which the participants developed a supportive professional community.

### **Intervention**

This intervention capitalized on the possibility of drawing from two models of social learning with the intent of establishing a self-sustaining professionally oriented community for continued learning, trouble-shooting, and general support. The researcher followed the initial formation steps aligned to the

Professional Learning Community (PLC) model, and nudged a Community of Practice (CoP) from the initial PLC. The district in which the intervention took place already had PLCs for various professional development initiatives; the PLC already was a familiar construct to the participants. However, a PLC, by nature requires formal support by the school district. The school district implements PLCs, assigns various staff members to PLCs, and supports PLCs logistically by providing resources to ensure participation and hold PLC members accountable for participation. On the other hand, a CoP places none of these demands on the school district. A CoP is driven by its members; the membership chooses its direction, and does not rely on any district resources.

For this reason, the intervention started with the formal and deliberate implementation characteristics of a PLC, with the intention of a CoP developing. The researcher hoped that the intrinsic value inherently assigned by members in a CoP would sustain it beyond the intervention. In this way, school districts could benefit from a built in professional development construct that used nearly no district resources. Furthermore, membership in communities like this intervention have been correlated to greater success in school leadership and retention of those leaders (Murphy et al., 2008).

The researcher assembled the Assistant Principal Professional Learning (APPL) group in order to provide assistant principals with professional development to complement their graduate level principal certification coursework through discussion of authentic experiences and connections with a supportive group of professional peers. From these discussions, participants may



experience an increase in their sense of efficacy. A strong sense of efficacy in principals has been associated with persistence in their pursuits, more flexibility in their comportment, and more willing to make changes as needed (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The professional learning community intended to build a greater degree of principal efficacy among assistant principals. Further, this group's intent was to develop into a community of practice over the course of the intervention.

The APPL group was comprised of assistant principals desiring to increase their practical skills in order to become successful principals. This learning community focused on topics most relevant to them, and to the role of principals. To determine which topics are most relevant to the role, an expert set of individuals--superintendents, current principals, and other personnel who train and evaluate principals-- provided their input on the knowledge and skills most important to the development of successful principals. The topics suggested by the expert set of school leaders were used for discussion during the bi-weekly meetings of the APPL group. The APPL group meetings discussed the suggested topics using an established conversation format from the National School Reform Faculty.

## Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Bandura's work on efficacy informs the theoretical framework for this study. It includes elements of social cognitive theory which asserts that learning includes the processing of information at both an individual (self efficacy) and group level (collective efficacy) (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, 2002). The clinical framework for this study is informed primarily by recent research on principal preparation (Fullan, 2008; Goduto, Doolittle, & Leake, 2008; Gutmore, Gutmore, & Strobert, 2009; Hall & Harris, 2008; Lauder, 2000; Murphy et al., 2008).

### Theoretical Framework

**Efficacy theory.** Efficacy theory asserts that self-efficacy increases persistence and "contributes to achievement beyond the effects of ability" (Evans & Bandura, 1989, p.59). Mahatma Gandhi sums up self-efficacy by saying, "If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning" (Gandhi, as quoted by Usher, 2008). Efficacy is supported by confidence in a specific outcome occurring, belief in self to make such an outcome happen, and memory of previous experience with the desired outcome (Evans & Bandura, 1989; Gonzales, 2003). Additionally, Bandura (1997) and Goddard and LoGerfo (2007) indicate that self-efficacy can affect performance. However, low self-efficacy can also affect one's performance negatively (Bandura, 1993; Evans & Bandura, 1989). For example, a white-water kayaker may practice rolling a kayak, but not make a successful practice roll. If the kayaker then needs to actually roll the kayak in the rapids, he may not have

sufficiently high enough efficacy because his recent memory is of failing to make the roll. In this case, the lower efficacy level may have a negative effect on performance.

To form efficacy beliefs at the individual level, an individual must go through a cognitive process consisting of thoughts of events and their outcomes (Bandura, 1993). For example, Walt Disney's idea for a theme park had been rejected initially, yet he continued to develop his idea as if it would happen, and it did. In an academic venue, an example of forming individual efficacy beliefs would include a student who continues to work through an equation until she reaches a solution, because she knows she can, not just that she will (Gladwell, 2008).

At a group level, collective efficacy develops from the cognitive processing of group members (Bandura, 1997). Once again, this refers to thoughts of events and their outcomes at the group level; however, the individual members within a group contribute to a collective sentiment (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, 2002). For example, a school that makes use of vertical teams (teams of teachers representing each grade level) for various decision-making needs has provided an opportunity for staff to work together across grade levels. Now, once this group of teachers has worked together over a period of time, they will have had opportunity to develop a rapport and a history of shared experiences. These teachers will have the opportunity to learn from one another and one another's experiences. They may have felt a social pressure to make active contributions so as not to let down their colleagues in any group task. Thus, the staff would have

collective efficacy that the group could perform at a higher level than the individual.

Like individual self-efficacy, collective efficacy affects not only beliefs, but also performance. Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) found that when demographics and backgrounds of students and staff at two schools were similar, the school with a higher degree of collective efficacy demonstrated higher student achievement than the school with a lesser degree of collective efficacy.

Efficacy is also influenced by social cognitive theory, which asserts that individual and group discipline is strongly related to the degree of their efficacy perceptions (Goddard, 2002). That is to say, individuals' and groups' abilities to act influence their efficacy perceptions. Within education, collective efficacy among a group of teachers is more than a reliance on one another's abilities as educators. It is the absolute confidence in the group's ability to move a group of students from achievement point A to achievement point B. This group with a degree of collective efficacy knows that each member will do what is needed to achieve the group goal of furthering student achievement. They have a common knowledge base and understanding of each others' teaching capabilities, and they have confidence in one another's effectiveness.

**School-specific efficacy.** At the school level, collective efficacy includes the teachers' perceptions that their efforts as a whole will positively affect the students (Brinson & Steiner, 2007; Goddard, 2002). That is, in schools where collective efficacy is a defining characteristic, there is an associated increased student achievement.

Olivier and Hipp (2006) found a correlation between social learning among teachers and collective efficacy. Where this correlation has been seen, whether through formal professional learning communities, or informal collegial discourse, there has also been a positive effect on student achievement.

Individual (self) and group (collective) efficacy have four chief sources (Bandura, 1993; Usher, 2008). First, mastery experience is the memory of an accomplishment met by a known ability. Second, vicarious experiences occur when members of a group benefit from, or learn from the experiences of other members, without having had the experience themselves. Third, social persuasion provides for efficacy in much the same way that being part of a competitive team does. For example, in soccer, winning the game is dependent upon team members doing their job. Team members know that others are relying upon them to perform, which influences their efficacy. The fourth possible source of efficacy is from emotion. Whether through reflection of experience, the mood of individuals, or the effects of leadership, groups may also take on an emotional identity. This emotional identity, or tone of a group, influences the emotional state of a group prior to being in a ready-for-action or agentive state (Fullan, 2008; Goddard, 2002).

Efficacy has also been linked to school leadership by supporting a leader's ability to set direction as well as their ability to get followers to commit to overcome obstacles (Paglis & Green, 2002). However, self-efficacy has predominately been applied to tasks that have tangible outcomes; applying efficacy to leadership is somewhat more subjective and harder to define (Close &

Solberg, 2008). Nevertheless, perceived self-efficacy has been shown to give an edge to those who have it (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Olivier & Hipp, 2006).

In essence, efficacy at both the individual and group level has been shown to have positive effects on performance (Bandura, 1993; Brinson & Steiner, 2007; Goddard, 2002; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard & LoGerfo, 2007; Olivier & Hipp, 2006; Usher, 2008). In an educational venue, positive efficacy of teachers has positive effects on their students. In schools where the instructional staff has a positive degree of collective efficacy, overall student achievement has been higher than similar schools with a lesser degree of collective efficacy (Goddard, 2002; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard & LoGerfo, 2007).

**Measurements of principal efficacy.** The ability to measure a principal's efficacy is beneficial. Efficacy has been shown to have a correlation with performance: the greater the degree of efficacy present, the greater degree of effectiveness a person, or group, has for a certain task (Bandura, 1993; Brinson & Steiner, 2007; Goddard, 2002; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard & LoGerfo, 2007; Olivier & Hipp, 2006; Usher, 2008). A greater degree of efficacy is correlated to a greater degree of effectiveness.

The researcher examined two measures of principal efficacy, one developed by Dimmock and Hattie (1996) and the other by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004). Both measures seek to quantify principal efficacy through measuring their concern leading teachers, managing change, disciplining students, and prioritizing tasks.

The Dimmock and Hattie (1996) efficacy measurement instrument uses nine vignettes of situations a principal might encounter. Principals rate their perceived ability to address each situation on a ten-point scale ranging from “totally not confident” to “totally confident”.

The Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) efficacy measurement instrument is an 18-question survey asking principals how they would rate their ability to address various school leadership situations. The principals rate themselves with a nine-point scale ranging from “none at all” to “a great deal”. These questions are specific to context driven behaviors associated with efficacy in school principals (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The PSES established construct validity through analysis of correlations to other known constructs. Expected and hoped-for findings were found in that survey data was inversely related to work alienation and positively correlated to trust in students, their parents, and teachers (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2004).

**Community as a place for learning.** Hirsh and Hord (2008) found that social learning within a professional community supports the development of efficacy. Such social learning is informed by social cognitive theory, stemming from social learning theory as proposed by Miller and Dollard (1941). Social learning theory involves the transfer and acquisition of new information and learning by means of observation through social interaction. This can include social experiences and outside influences. Social cognitive theory capitalizes on the bi-directionality of influence and learning. Members of social systems, or

organizations, are both influencers of and influenced by their environments (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Two models of social learning are applicable to this intervention, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Communities of Practice (CoP). Professional learning communities are formed deliberately, and do not require regular social interaction to evolve. Through orchestrated invitation and agreed-upon conventions, professionals are formed in to a community with the purpose of learning from colleagues by addressing concerns with expertise found within the group (Hord, 1997). Professional learning communities adhere to five characteristics. First, the members of the community share the values and vision required to improve student achievement. Second, the leadership within the community is shared and supportive. Third, the community provides for collective learning. Fourth, the members of the community share a practice. Finally, the members support each other by developing a positive rapport within the group, and maintain social connections needed for community (Hipp & Weber, 2008; Hord, 1997).

Community is a concept that provides a connection among people with similar interests within a broader context. Communities of practice (CoP) are people who share a common concern or interest. Through regular social interaction, they exchange insights and information, which promotes more effective problem solving (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice can be formal or informal entities. They are not necessarily imposed but they can be encouraged,



and even fostered by an organization. Their evolution relies on previous interaction within an extant community (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Wenger (1998) identifies the initial stage of a CoP as a potential community. Members characterize potential communities by noticing similarities amongst their positions. Following the potential state, CoPs coalesce.

Community members characterize a coalescing CoP by coming together and recognizing their collective potential and begin to define joint enterprises.

According to Wenger et al. (2002), there are three components to each stage in a community of practice: (a) domain, (b) community, and (c) practice. The domain is the common ground on which the identity of the group is based, it is the topic focused on by the group. The community is the reification of the group in order for learning to benefit from the social entity. The practice consists of the knowledge or artifacts developed by or used by the group (Wenger et al., 2002).

When fostered and encouraged, CoP development relies on the support of a community coordinator. “The community coordinator is a community member who helps the community focus on its domain, maintain relationships, and develop its practice,” (Wenger et al., 2002, p.80).

Both PLCs and CoPs are workplace communities existing to help their participants learn and be better at what they do. However, PLCs rely on the active support from a parent organization (like a school district, or school). This support comes in the form of a provided direction, resources for PLC sessions, and possibly even accountability for participation. CoPs, on the other hand, do not rely on any active support from a parent organization. CoPs are driven by

their members. Any resources needed are sought by the members based on the inclinations and established identity of the CoP.

### **Clinical Framework**

Recent educational press has drawn attention to the high turnover rate in the principalship and school districts' difficulty in persuading teacher leaders to pursue careers as principals (Goduto et al., 2008; Hall & Harris, 2008; Hipp & Weber, 2008; Lankes & O'Donnell, 2010; Lauder, 2000; Viadero, 2009). One area of concern emerging from the literature refers to the difficulty in effectively training principals (Fullan, 2008; Gutmore et al., 2009; Lankes & O'Donnell, 2010; Murphy et al., 2008). For example, anecdotal evidence indicates that principal training may not prepare a person who becomes a principal for dealing with angry parents or handling resistant teachers (Viadero, 2009). Furthermore, principal retention is an issue. Even when they were assistant principals prior to being principals, elementary school principals were in their jobs averaging just less than five years over a 13-year period (Viadero, 2009).

Many researchers have examined what a principal needs to do or what the job qualifications should be (Brinson & Steiner, 2007; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996; Fullan, 2003; Fullan, 2008; Goduto et al., 2008; Gutmore et al., 2009; Hall & Harris, 2008; Lauder, 2000; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Murphy et al., 2008). In 1996, the Council of Chief State School Officers published six standards developed by representatives from states and professional associates with the National Policy Board for Educational. These standards are referred to as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)

standards (see Appendix A for the six standards). In addition to the ISLLC standards, a meta-analysis of school leadership research performed by Marzano et al. (2005) has identified 21 responsibilities and behaviors that principals need to lead a school staff to increasing student academic achievement (see Appendix B).

The ISLLC standards are prescriptive, whereas Marzano et al. (2005) have identified descriptive responsibilities and behaviors of effective principals. Most principal training programs typically follow the ISLLC standards. However, the paradigm for training that includes coursework supporting the ISLLC standards and an internship is ultimately left leaving room for improvement, specifically with regards to providing opportunity for authentic experiences.

However, the standards, responsibilities, and behaviors for principals are not prioritized; they are all important, but this does not assist in establishing a starting point. There is nothing lacking in the standards; what is lacking is the opportunity to apply the standards in real educational environments. The internship is simply not enough.

### **Structured Conversation, Structured Learning.**

In order to share information communally, colleagues need to talk. Conversation protocols quickly build rapport within groups, and tune those groups for more effective communication (Bambino, 2002; Easton, 2009; National School Reform Faculty, 2010). There are numerous conversation protocols, serving just as many purposes. The National School Reform Faculty (2010) provides protocols designed to parse out qualities in student writing, protocols to examine lesson plans, and protocols for teachers to use with students

in small groups. Two protocols offered by the NSRF are particularly suited for conversations among administrators, the Success-Analysis and the Consultancy protocols. These protocols offer structure to a group discussion of positive and negative examples of how to navigate various situations encountered in educational settings. These protocols were designed to either discuss a success for replication or share a case study for situational interaction.

The Success-Analysis protocol guides participants to examine successes for application in their own settings. When using a Success-Analysis protocol, a group teases out deliberately replicable elements of the success-occurrence, enabling group members to support each other's professional development and collective learning.

The protocol requires a brief description of the situational success followed by a discussion over the elements that made it a success. Each participant in the conversation using a protocol presents and shares leadership within the meeting. The protocol requires from 40 to 60 minutes for two different successes to be examined (National School Reform Faculty, 2010).

The Consultancy protocol examines a dilemma experienced by a group member or their principal. Optimally, the dilemma should not have been solved or reacted to yet, or if a solution or reaction was reached, it was either inadequate or created unacceptable or unanticipated consequences. Following the presentation of the dilemma, the group examines it by asking questions to elicit more information or establish missing information. Following the questions, the group discussed the dilemma while the member who provided it participates by taking

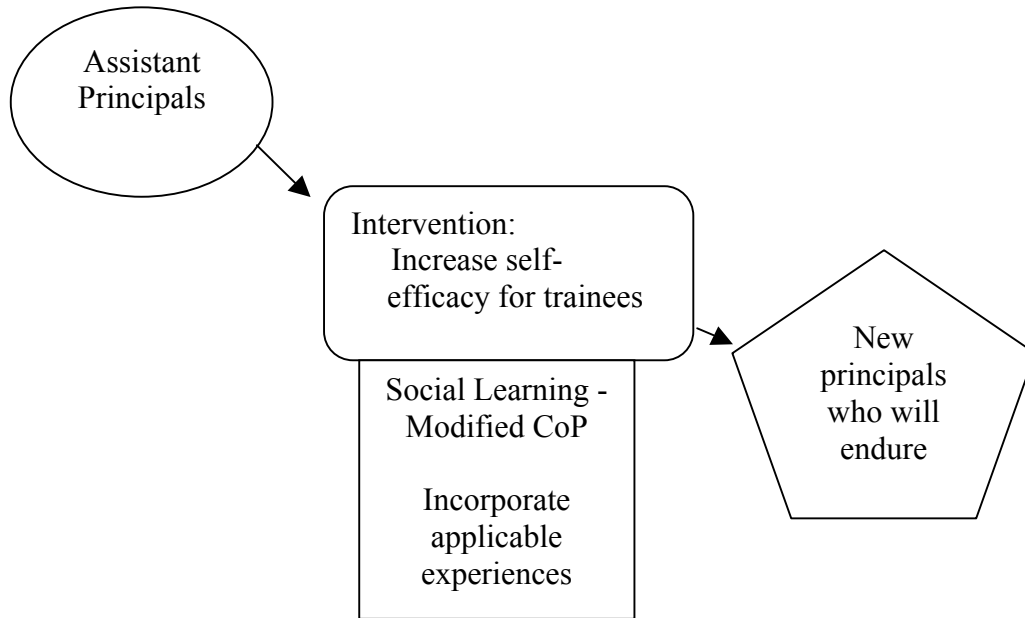
notes of the discussion. Each participant in a protocol driven conversation is presented with a glimpse of experiences they may not have had directly. This protocol also requires 40 to 60 minutes for up to two consultancies (National School Reform Faculty, 2010).

Conversation protocols provide opportunities for participants to reflect on and discuss a situation or issue. The protocols also provide participants with the opportunity to respond to probing questions and to gain differing perspectives and insights. Conversation protocols ensure that sessions are not dominated by any individual and that the conversations stay on topic (Easton, 2009; National School Reform Faculty, 2010).

### **Application of Literature to Research**

This intervention drew upon community learning frameworks from both the PLC and CoP models in order to develop efficacy and provide professional learning and support for assistant principals. Prescriptive standards and descriptive success descriptors exist for principals, but assistant principals do not enjoy the same attention. This study explored whether the social learning models described, delivered both efficacy development and targeted professional development to assistant principals, in order to become successful principals. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the existing literature to the intervention.

Figure 1. Applied literature



### **Chapter 3 Methods**

This study examined the following questions:

- 1) What was the change in perceived efficacy among the APPL participants during the course of this study?
- 2) To what extent does the APPL group develop into a community of practice? Which stage of development had been reached?
- 3) What factors contributed to the development of this group into a CoP?

This study addressed these questions with the Assistant Principal Professional Learning (APPL) group which will be described below.

#### **Setting**

This study took place in an elementary school district located in the greater Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. The district serves approximately 13,000 students in 17 schools. Each school has an assistant principal and a principal. The district, as a whole, qualifies for Federal Title I funding with more than 75% of the student population identified as economically disadvantaged. Approximately half of the student body speaks English at home as the primary language, while most of the remainder speak Spanish. There are also students speaking Vietnamese, Arabic, and other languages as their primary language. As of 2008, 71% of the schools in the district were in Federal School Improvement (Arizona Department of Education School Report Cards, 2008).

#### **Participants**

**Expert set.** An expert set of school leaders were consulted in order to provide information on what qualities are desired in a principal (Gupta, 1999).

Each expert in the set had experience being a principal, hiring principals, training principals, or evaluating principals. Experts had been chosen because of their affiliation with school districts that have elementary schools and that have at least one school qualifying for Federal Title I funds. Table 1 shows the demographics of the group. To be included in this expert set, participants must have led a school that qualified for Title I funding in order to match the setting in which the intervention took place. Criteria were verified through a demographics review of the Arizona Department of Education School Report Card data.

Table 1

*Expert Set Composition*

Expert	Current Role	Qualifying Role
A	University Program Director	Retired Superintendent
B	Consultant	Retired Superintendent
C	Superintendent	Superintendent
D	Superintendent	Superintendent
E	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction	Assistant Superintendent
F	Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources	Assistant Superintendent
G	Consultant	Retired Principal
H	Consultant	Retired Principal
I	Principal	Principal
J	Principal	Principal



These participants formed the expert set of school leaders who, from interviews, provided the data from which the topics of discussion for the APPL group were derived. Initial participants were solicited from the school district where the intervention took place and successive participants were found through snowball sampling.

**Assistant principals.** The second set of participants consisted of assistant principals, recruited from schools in the district, who indicated their interest in becoming principals. The participants were invited by email to participate. The invitation included the purpose of the study, the time-frame for the study, and the time commitment required for the study. Participants were informed that participation would entail meetings in small groups every other week for about 40 to 60 minutes to discuss job-related topics in a structured conversation. The letter also indicated that the meetings were to be recorded, and participant identities would be protected; no names or identifying information would be used. In all, the APPL group consisted of nine members, eight recruited, and the participating researcher. As a member of the community being studied, the researcher provided emic insight that was written in the field notes (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

### **Phase One: Establish Meeting Topics**

**Data collection.** The researcher solicited current input from experts in order to provide starting points for discussion and provide local corroboration to the existing standards and descriptors for successful principals. During the summer of 2010, the expert set was interviewed to provide current information on

the nature of being and becoming an effective principal. After recruitment, the researcher scheduled interviews at times and locations convenient to the experts. Interviews started with pleasantries and reminded assurances of anonymity, followed by clarification of the purpose of the interview and a brief description of the intervention. Each interview consisted of the same questions and the researcher scripted the responses as they were given.

Based on your experiences and opinions:

- a) What are the job requirements of a school principal?
- b) What are the important qualities in a person in order to be a successful principal?
- c) What are the important qualifications in order to be a successful principal?
- d) What qualifications have been lacking in principal preparation?
- e) What experiences have been lacking in principal preparation?
- f) What additional factors are important to the development of successful school principals?

The questions were designed to elicit some overlap in responses in order to elicit multiple views of the same information (Gay, Airasian, & Mills, 2009). At the end of each interview, the researcher reviewed the responses with the interviewees to verify for accuracy (Harnish, 1994).

**Phase one data analysis.** The scripted responses were analyzed using an open coding and then an axial coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher read the scripted responses and labeled the phenomena as they emerged, and then condensed them categorically. Table 2 shows the phenomena

and categories. The phenomena were then sorted by conceptual similarities and collapsed in to five thematic categories. In order of incidence, the five thematic categories were: cultivating relationships, interpersonal skills, instructional leadership, general management, and use of data. Four of the phenomena: affinity for working with people (both children and adults), sense of humor, time management, and personal investment were infrequently mentioned or did not directly inform principal training needs and were eliminated from the list.

Table 2

*Phenomenon and Categories*

Open Codes	Coded Phenomena Condensed Categorically
Community Relations Collaboration Delegation Cultivating Relationships	Cultivating Relationships
Communication Change Leadership Interpersonal Skills	Interpersonal Skills
Instructional Evaluation Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leadership
Use of Resources Situational Awareness General Management	General Management
Constant Learner Use of Data	Data

The categorized phenomena on the right side of Table 2 formed the discussion topics for the APPL group meeting sessions. The importance of the topics was determined by how often they appeared in data provided by the expert set.

Topics deemed most important by the expert set formed the basis of discussion for the Phase 2 intervention. Three topics were used by the group and were part of the research: cultivating relationships, instructional leadership, and use of data.

### **Phase Two: Meeting Sessions**

In August 2010, the participants came together for the first time as the APPL group. The researcher presented the findings from the expert set, and briefed the group on how the sessions would work. During the fall semester the group met for two training sessions and five topic-specific sessions. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from these sessions as follows.

**Data collection.** Individual principal efficacy levels were established using the Principal Sense of Efficacy survey (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). The researcher chose the Tschannen-Moran and Gareis instrument because it surveyed specific instances of efficacy as opposed to reactions to vignettes as used in the Dimmock and Hattie survey (1996). Participants took the PSES in September as a pretest, and then again in December as a posttest. Participants' pre and post mean scores were analyzed, as well as their scores within the three constructs of instruction, management, and moral leadership.

Participants took the survey prior to meeting as a group to discuss the topics provided by the expert set. The order in which topics were discussed was provided to the participants, but they were also asked for input as to whether they would prefer to alter the order. Participants were instructed to come to each meeting ready to discuss an experience that fit the topic for that meeting.

In order to assist participants' readiness to discuss their topic related experiences, the researcher structured the meeting sessions with conversation protocols. The researcher trained the participants how to use the protocols in much the same way as if they were playing a game of poker with all hands being shown, along with a question and answer dialogue about which card to play when. The APPL group learned how to use the adapted Success Analysis and Consultancy protocols while discussing the use of data topic.

During the training sessions the researcher took on a leadership role, assigning who will share when. Leadership was distributed among participants for the remaining meetings. The length of the sessions were relatively consistent, each session lasted about one hour.

This first meeting also provided an opportunity for the group to develop norms. Over the course of the sessions, the researcher asked the group to provide any norms thought to be needed or of benefit for the operation of the conversations. The researcher reiterated the norms at the beginning of each session.

**Phase two data analysis.**

*Quantitative.* For the pre and post efficacy measure, results on the PSES were compared to examine any change over the course of the intervention. The PSES consisted of three constructs examining different facets of principal efficacy. These constructs matched the themes provided by the expert set from their interviews. The Instruction construct and Instructional Leadership theme included the guiding of teachers to increase student achievement. The Management construct and General Management theme referred to the operational end of running a school. This included managing the school’s budget, maintaining the facility, and overall attendance to issues not directly related to teaching and student performance. Management from the PSES also entailed the principal’s own management of their stress. The Moral Leadership construct aligned to the Cultivating Relationships theme. Both concepts consist of how an administrator affects the mood and image of the school, and both rely on the creation and maintenance of relationships among the school personnel, community and students. Table 3 shows a crosswalk correlating the discussion themes and constructs from the PSES.

Table 3  
*PSES/Phase 1 Crosswalk*

PSES Construct	Expert Set Theme
Instruction	Instructional Leadership
Management	General Management
Moral Leadership	Cultivating Relationships

Survey results were reported with mean scores on a nine-point scale for each construct. The overall mean scores were also reported. Changes found between the pre and post measure were analyzed for statistical significance and effect size.

***Qualitative.*** The APPL group sessions were transcribed from video/audio-recordings. The transcripts were coded using the qualitative analysis software HyperResearch 3.0. The researcher used a-priori codes based on Wenger's et al. (2002) description of CoP developmental stages to analyze the data. Table 4 shows the definitions of the main codes used in the analysis.

Table 4

*A Priori Codes for Community Development*

Dimension	Potential (Stage 1)	Coalescing (Stage 2)	Mature (Stage 3)
Domain	<p>Scope and Interest – defines scope and aligns member interests</p> <p>Engage Members – determines scope by engaging members; does not determine the shape of the group</p>	<p>Domain – establishes value of sharing knowledge about domain</p>	<p>Domain – role in organization defined</p>
Community	<p>Community – recruit members</p> <p>Assign Value – assign value to the budding community</p>	<p>Develop Relationships – increase connection among members and to community</p> <p>Develop Trust – trust in members and in community</p>	<p>Community – boundaries and purpose defined in relation to one another</p>
Practice	<p>Practice – common knowledge needs identified</p>	<p>How to Share – plans on how knowledge should be shared</p> <p>What Knowledge – of the knowledge needs identified, what knowledge should be shared</p>	<p>How to Share – plans on how knowledge should be shared</p> <p>What Knowledge – of the knowledge needs identified, what knowledge should be shared</p>



Once coded, the labeled phenomena were counted. By looking at the counts of various phenomena, and their conversational environment the researcher described the stage of community development for the APPL group.

The researcher analyzed the field notes with an open coding process, from which phenomena were analyzed for their contribution to community development findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The field notes analysis was performed in much the same manner as the interview data from Phase One.

Figure 2 describes the process and procedures organized by the two phases of this study. Procedures for pre-intervention interviews with the expert set were given in Phase One. Procedures for APPL group meetings are listed in Phase Two.

Figure 2. Intervention process and procedures

Phase 1: Pre-Intervention Interviews		
Interview expert set (e.g. those who hire, evaluate, train, and/or supervise principals, and principals.)		
Code interview data into themes.		
Member Check; Share themes with interviewees for confirmation and discussion.		
Develop discussion topics from the themes.		
Phase 2: APPL Group Sessions		
When	What	Who
July 2010	Recruit assistant principals	Researcher recruits assistant principals
August 2010	Participants complete the Principal Self Efficacy Survey (pre-test)	Participating assistant principals
August 2010	Introduce and practice using National School Reform Faculty Protocols	Participating assistant principals and embedded researcher
September 2010 – December 2010	APPL meetings conducted in adapted National School Reform Faculty protocol format. Topics of discussion derived from Phase 1 interview data	Participating assistant principals and embedded researcher
September 2010 – December 2010	Ongoing transcription; note modifications and supports in field notes.	Researcher and transcriptionist
December 2010	Member check themes with participants	Participating assistant principals and researcher
December 2010	Participants complete Principal Self Efficacy Survey (post-test)	Participating assistant principals

## **Summary**

The APPL group discussed topics informed by an expert set of school leaders who were interviewed and provided information for aspiring principals. The assistant principals used discussion protocols to interact with these topics. A pre and post measure in the form of a survey assessed changes in efficacy among the assistant principals. The group discussions were audio and video recorded and analyzed through coding processes to address research questions concerning community development and its stages.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### Research Question 1

Research question one asks, *what change in principal sense of efficacy did the participants experience over the course of the intervention?* The results from Tschannen-Moran and Gareis' Principal Sense of Efficacy Survey (2004), and participant interview data provide the information to answer this question.

**Survey results.** Six of the nine participants took both the pre and the post survey. Out of a possible maximum of 9 points, the pre-test ranged from of 5.22 to 7.00, with post-test mean scores ranging from 5.06 to 7.11. While each participant scored differently on the pre and posttests, some participants did not score higher on the posttest, and actually showed a lower final efficacy score. Each significance measure is reported at the 95% confidence interval with degrees of freedom at 5. Table 5 shows participants' scores per construct.

Table 5

*PSES Results by Construct (n=6)*

Construct	Statistics	Pre	Post	Change
Instruction	Range	4.33	2.67	5.17
	<i>M</i>	5.36	6.33	0.97
	<i>SD</i>	1.50	1.09	1.87
			Sig. (2-tailed)	<i>P</i> =0.259
Management	Range	3.33	1.50	4.50
	<i>M</i>	6.07	6.22	0.15
	<i>SD</i>	1.102	0.61	1.52
			Sig. (2-tailed)	<i>P</i> =0.819
Moral Leadership	Range	2.33	1.83	2.67
	<i>M</i>	6.42	5.94	-0.47
	<i>SD</i>	0.84	0.71	1.07
			Sig. (2-tailed)	<i>P</i> =0.328

The Instruction and Management construct scores increased from pretest to posttest. Moral Leadership scores slid from the pretest to the posttest. The Instruction construct had the greatest change in scores.

The change in scores from pretest to posttest showed no statistical significance. Each *p* score was greater than .05. Even though no statistical significance was shown, each posttest range of scores was smaller than the pretest range. The standard deviations follow this same pattern. Consistently, the range scores and the standard deviations decreased from the pretest to the posttest.

When examining the results of the survey as a whole, the mean pretest score was 6.11 with a standard deviation of .60. The mean posttest score was 5.93 with a standard deviation of .72. A paired sample  $t$  test revealed a statistical insignificance to the change. (95% confidence interval,  $t = .54$ , degrees of freedom = 5, significance = .615,  $p > .05$ .) Analysis of individual scores showed a range of variability in change between pre and post test. The participant with the greatest growth saw a .83 point increase in their mean score from the pre to the post test, whereas the participant with the least growth actually backslid, losing 1.27 points in their mean score.

Nevertheless, a change between the pre and the post tests exists. Therefore, the effect size may provide some insight. Effect sizes are interpreted by whether they fall closer to 1 or to 0. Those that fall closer to 1 show a stronger effect and those closer to a 0 show a weaker effect. This works for both positive and negative 1, where a positive 1 shows a positive relationship (or correlation) and a negative 1 shows just as strong of a relationship, but as a negative correlation. The Pearson correlation score showed a .16 relationship, indicating nearly no effect, which is in line with the statistical significance indicator. Cohen's  $d$ , was also examined, and this effect presented with a .31. Although slightly stronger than the Pearson correlation, Cohen's  $d$  shows, at best, a weak positive correlation. Therefore, through the use of effect size, data show that, at best, the intervention had a weak positive effect on the participants' efficacy.

**Stories behind the numbers.** Despite the quantitative data indicating no statistically significant change to participants' efficacy score on the PSES, their

voices show an increased sense of efficacy in their roles as assistant principals. When asked if they (the participants) felt more ready or able to navigate situations discussed, the replies were positive. Participants shared sentiments of an increased sense of security and expressed a greater confidence in being able to, “get through” situations discussed. The following paragraphs show examples of these sentiments from the participants.

***Instruction.*** The strongest positive change on the PSES was in Instruction. Whether or not it was the specified topic of the discussion protocol, instruction regularly bubbled up into the conversation and was integrated into the discussion topic. Participants acted as if some tacit understanding reminded them that instruction was the foundation of all that they did during the course of a day. For example, during a Cultivating Relationships conversation, a discussion of instructional coaching developed. Participants segued into instructional coaching, more specifically the post-observation conference with teachers. Coaching still relies on relationships in that without a suitable working rapport, the teacher may not receive what the administrator may have to offer. Nevertheless, it is also firmly founded in instruction.

Another participant shared how she conducts her post-observation conferences. She does them in two sittings. The first sitting is a coaching session where they only talk about how to improve instruction, as well as support what is being done well. After some time passed, and the teacher had a chance to benefit from the coaching, she sits down with them again to discuss their performance in an evaluative sense. She shared that this way, the teachers have a chance to focus

on their craft first, before any concern or worry about how they are evaluated. She said it lowers their level of concern and helps allow them to receive the feedback before being evaluated.

During another conversation on instruction, the discussion revolved around the difference between a subject matter expertise and instructional delivery expertise. Members discussed that a teacher has to have both, but an administrator evaluating teachers cannot be expected to be a subject matter expert on everything. For example, an administrator, whose teaching experience had been in the primary grades, may not have the subject matter expertise to determine whether the material taught in the eighth grade algebra class is correct. However the administrator is expected to possess expertise on instructional delivery sufficient to evaluate teachers' instruction.

Another participant was concerned that her instructional delivery skills were becoming "rusty" as more time had passed since she'd been in the classroom. Other participants chimed in by telling her that she really should take advantage of being able to spread the skills observed from better instructors to those who need to improve. In this way, she did not have to feel that she was relying on her own skills.

One participant sums up this finding succinctly; "Instructionally – I feel that is my strength..." as Instruction is the construct showing the most growth from the pretest to the posttest.

***Moral leadership.*** Participants rated their Moral Leadership lower in the post-test than in the pre-test. Participants made it a point to share that either they



felt they grew in the construct, or that it was their area of need. Most shared that they felt better for having heard others share their insights and experiences.

One participant noted that, "...the relationships conversations are what I get the most out of." When reflecting about what it was that she felt helped her inferred growth with regards to their relationship building (Moral Leadership), another participant shared that, "...talking about it with others helps." If not expressing direct growth, another participant expressed enjoyment in reference to talking about making professionally healthy relationships, "I liked having the opportunity to listen to the specific experiences of one particular person, and being able to offer advice from my own experience, which was very similar." Another participant summarized his experience, and included this, "...the theme of relationships kept reoccurring and the sessions kept reminding me and refocusing my efforts upon them..."

The participants described their role in Moral Leadership as making positive relationships within the school community. One participant shared her lack of opportunity and experience with maintaining relationships. Each year she has been moved to another school. She felt she had made good first impressions, but did not have experience fostering that first impression into a positive and sustainable relationship. She summed it up well when she quipped, "...how do they believe in me without knowing me?" In that statement, she had referred to getting to know the staff, and making herself available for the staff to get to know her. She was coming to the conclusion that providing opportunity for the staff to

get to know her, to sustain that first impression, is a part of what it would take to build a sustainable positive relationship.

When asked about her perception of being able to navigate the principalship better because of this experience, she related to what she was learning from her current principal about making better relationships with the staff, about listening, and that she got the most out of the relationship related conversations within the APPL group.

During one session a participant shared a troublesome situation with the group. In that experience, she was able to run through her situation and get feedback on possible courses of action, as if she were part of a simulation for her situation. She summed up the experience and as she put it, she felt better able, "...to approach her or handle her in a way that might lead to a stronger relationship." Once again, the participant expresses a greater sense of ability. In her exit interview, she specifically referenced the one session, even though she participated in others as well. Despite survey data indicating negative results in this construct, participants talked about Moral Leadership showing it was an important issue to them.

Although the intervention intended to prepare assistant principals to be principals, the conversations remained under the scope of the assistant principal. When participants shared their views of the intervention's effect, they referred to their positions in the present, as assistant principals, and not as if they were already principals.

**Management.** The Management construct also showed the smallest amount of change from the pretest to the posttest. Study of this intervention ceased before Management became a topic of discussion. Management was referred to obliquely in the exit interviews. Participants referred to learning about budgeting and other general management issues from their principals, but these were absent in APPL group conversations.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question asks, to what extent did the group develop in to a CoP? The researcher analyzed the APPL group session transcripts, exit interviews, and the researcher's field notes in order to determine the extent of the group's development in to a CoP.

Table 6 shows a breakdown of Community Development by stage. The greatest occurrences from the three possible stages are in Stage 2 coalescing. Within Stage 2, the greatest amount of coded incidents was from practice. Data also show evidence of Stage 1 as well. Within Stage 1, the greatest amount of coded incidents was from domain. The group session transcripts consisted of 310 minutes of conversation with 632 incidents specific to community development.

Table 6

*CoP Development Frequencies*

Stage	Community Development	Rate of Occurrence	Totals by Stage
Stage 1 Potential	Domain	131	173
	Community	8	
	Practice	34	
	Total Potential		
Stage 2 Coalescing	Domain	32	436
	Community	183	
	Practice	221	
	Total Coalescing		
Stage 3 Mature	Domain	1	23
	Community	1	
	Practice	21	
	Total Mature		
Total Community Development			632

**Domain in coalescing.** In a coalescing CoP, participants showed *domain* by establishing value in sharing knowledge from within the domain, which in this group consisted of what principals need to be able to do. Recall from the review of literature that in a coalescing CoP members are coming together and recognizing their potential. In the APPL group, members indicated that the topics were important to them; that they were doing the right thing and valued what the group was talking about. One participant showed this when he simply said, “I think it’s a great topic,” in reference to what would be discussed that day.

Another participant chimed in that a fellow member was, "... at the right time, and the right place," in reference to her attendance at that particular session. In another example, a participant noticed, "...it would probably behoove somebody to teach incoming leaders how to work with your principal, and I never got that class." In that statement she was sharing what she had missed in her training, right after another participant shared a recent unpleasant experience with her principal. These indicators of value were throughout the data set.

**Community in coalescing.** Participants showed *community* by developing relationships through sharing their professional and personal experiences. For example, one participant led a discussion regarding a poor relationship with her supervising principal, and another responded that, "unfortunately I have a lot of experience with this dilemma." This participant continued to share her travails and lessons from her similar situation. Each person in the group knows the principals being discussed, and only one no longer works in the district. This type of sharing may not have happened if members of the group had not developed trust in one another.

In another exchange group members assured a new participant that the conversations were confidential and would not be discussed outside of the sessions.

A – You can say anything you want in here and it's safe.

B – Right, this is a safe room.

C – Oh, okay.

D – Absolutely.

B – We don't talk about this outside this room.

Members also shared their self-reflections. One participant shared, "...my family will tell you – I am not the most patient woman in the world." Another shared, "I do think that for me it is more comfortable for myself knowing what the expectations are or what the role and function of myself is." These examples of members sharing sensitive information show risk-taking. This risk-taking shows that participants willingly made themselves vulnerable, and this is an indicator of relationship and trust building. Additionally, the simple act of interaction also assists relationship building.

**Practice in coalescing.** Participants show *practice* by sharing their knowledge from the *domain* (what principals need to be able to do). Members shared their knowledge through conversations talking about their practice. Some conversations started by stating a problem, "My problem is...I'm walking in to these [classrooms] and people don't even know me." Some shared observation of a practice they would like to address, such as the isolation teachers feel or express, "...why do we still have teachers that (sic) feel isolated and want to shut their door..." Other members listened, and then offered counsel, "So here's another way to look at it besides putting your armor on and..." Members also shared knowledge through their successes. "So some of the things that I have done that have been...really helpful is that I have gone in and actually teach a class and showed sort of walking the walk...that helps earn the trust and credibility..."

The knowledge sharing was not limited to posing a problem, or sharing a success. Many of the conversations simply explored expert set topics. For example, when discussing cultivating relationships, participants talked about whether administration should attend staff happy hours. In another example, under the topic of instructional leadership, a member related it to cultivating relationships:

I have also consistently tried to come back to how I can help and support them being effective...it is about how can I help you [the teacher] help kids and if all the decisions are made in the best interest of children and [I] continue to bring all those conversations back to that, that helps earn the trust and credibility, you know?

Members also characterized practice in a coalescing CoP by making plans on how to share their knowledge. They demonstrated this by taking charge of the structure they wanted for each meeting. For example, initial meetings had a defined structure (through the protocols) provided by the researcher. After a few meetings the researcher attempted to fade the use of this meeting structure. Participants at that meeting did not share their knowledge to the same extent that they had in earlier meetings. For subsequent meetings, they chose to return to the structure for knowledge sharing. This choice was made when the researcher re-offered the use of the conversation protocols, and the members agreed to their use.

Table 7 shows this relationship between the use of the protocols to structure the meeting, and the incidence of practice related discussion. In

sessions one and two, the researcher led the group using the protocols, and incidences of practice related discussions rose. In session three, the protocols were not used, and practice related discussion decreased. After reinstating the use of the conversations protocols for sessions four and five, participants continued increasing their practice related discussions.

Table 7

*Protocol to Practice Related Discussion Relationship*

Meeting Session	Protocols Used	Incidence of Practice Related Discussion
1	Yes	30
2	Yes	73
3	No	22
4	Yes	51
5	Yes	93

**Research Question 3**

The third research question investigates the factors that contributed to the development of this group into a CoP. The transcripts from the APPL group sessions and the field notes provided data to answer this question.

**How coalescence was reached.** Recall from the literature review that the first stage of a CoP is potential, and the second is coalescence. Data suggest that the group first went through the stage of a potential CoP, aided by the nature and use of PLC formation framework. It also suggests that the role of the community coordinator who front loaded topics and provided meeting structures assisted in



reaching coalescence. Community coordination was a transitional element facilitating the shift from PLC to CoP. The group started as a PLC with external influences. Then the nurturing of the community coordination facilitated the CoP emergence. These factors, combined, appear to have allowed for the group to come together quickly. As the PLC transitioned to a CoP, the members embraced an identity and began talking about their practice.

***Domain in potential.*** Recall that domain in a potential CoP is characterized by the members aligning their interests within the domain's scope. From Phase 1, the expert set contributed the topics of conversation, and by doing so, set the scope of the domain: what principals need to be able to do. Cultivating relationships and instructional coaching were two of these topics. Members' interests were aligned through recruitment. By accepting the invitation, members indicated their aligned interest in becoming principals.

Further alignment occurred in the initial meeting sessions. Members engaged in conversation sharing their personal views to establish how they fit in the group. One member shared, "we (all) have is the sense of urgency in our day..." In an exchange, two other members shared their common view of openness on the job:

A-           The decision making on the fly and if you shut the door and you are behind closed doors...you know people feel disconnected...they feel like there is a barrier.

B- Which I think...is part of the culture of the business that we are in, that it is supposed to be barrier-less...and it is supposed to be very accessible.

In the last example, members shared their experiences about the expectation of openness placed upon them. In the initial meeting sessions, this type of sharing characterized domain in potential.

The domain described here aligns with the domain assigned when the APPL group started as a PLC. As community members affirm topics of relevance, and align their interests, there is a subtle shift from PLC to CoP.

***Community in potential.*** Prior to this intervention, the APPL group existed in the form of colleagues from the same organization. Wenger et al. (2002) states that a CoP can start from an extant community, and this one did. In this instance, the shift from PLC to CoP is less subtle, as the APPL community more closely resembled a CoP because members were affiliated. Recruitment targeted assistant principals in one school district; they already knew each other, and attended other professional meetings together regularly.

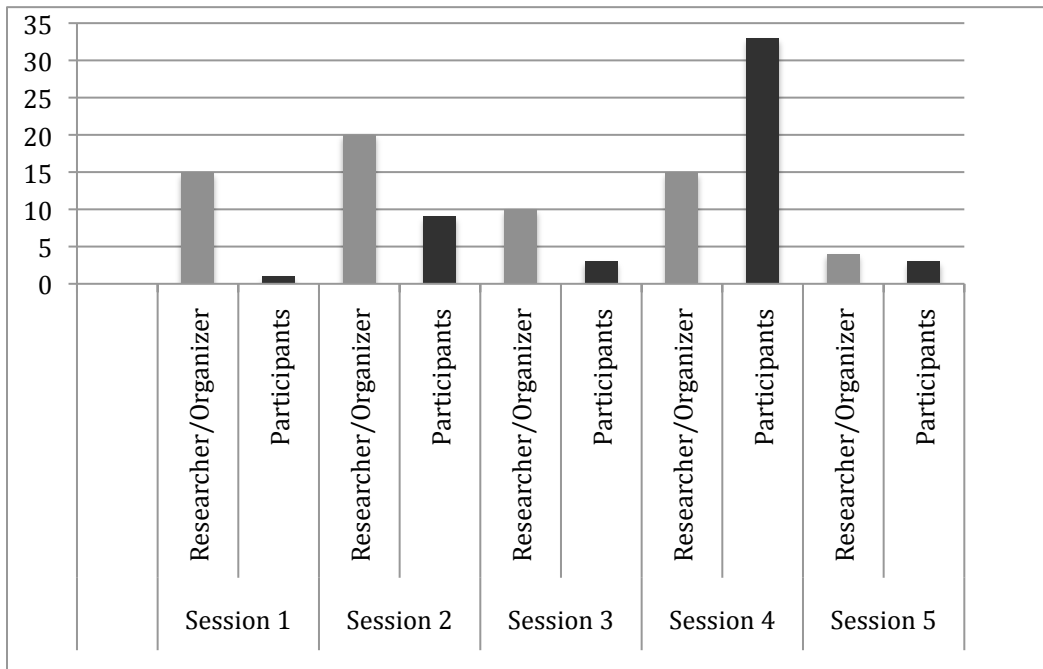
Once recruited and initially discovering the evolution of the community, members assigned value to the budding community (Wenger et al., 2002; Muhammad, 2009). For example, after an early meeting, one member said, “I enjoy the dialogue and collegiality...I think you have created a good medium for professionalism.” After missing sessions a member shared, “I just feel bad I didn’t come to the other ones.” As demonstrated by the data, members appear to

have assigned value to the community early on. This value assignment is what provides for the intrinsic motivation and sustainability that supports the shift from PLC to CoP.

***Practice in potential.*** Recall from the literature review that practice in a potential CoP is characterized by identifying common knowledge needs. For this study, the expert set in Phase 1 identified the common knowledge needs for the potential CoP. Whereas the domain is what a principal needs to be able to do, the common knowledge needs provided were cultivating relationships and instructional leadership. There were additional common knowledge needs identified but the group did not discuss them during the intervention.

***Community coordinator.*** Wenger et al. (2002) defines the community coordinator as a member of the community who, “helps the community focus on its domain,” (p.80) fosters relationships among members, and helps develop practice. Initially, the researcher filled the role of community coordinator. However, once the group started meeting in sessions, members also engaged in community coordination, as seen in Figure 3. As members took on community coordination roles, the researcher’s role as *the* community coordinator was deemphasized and reinforced the transition to a CoP.

Figure 3. Overall incidence of community coordination by session



From the first session community members, in addition to the researcher, contributed to community coordination. Successive sessions show an increasing trend of participant enacted coordination, and in session five both participants and the researcher engaged in community coordination almost equally. In session one, participants engaged in 6% of the community coordination acts, and in the second session, 31% of community coordination acts. In the fourth session, participants engaged in 69% of community coordination acts. This participation in community coordination could be interpreted to show that participants were taking responsibility for maintaining the group, and this helped foster the group's transition from being that of a group or a PLC, to a CoP that is coalescing.

This researcher's analysis revealed two themes aligned to Wenger's et al. (2002) composing the community coordinator's role for this intervention: keeping the group focused and managing member participation.

***Focus.*** The researcher performed the initial act of keeping the group focused when he prioritized the common knowledge needs of the expert set. When starting topic-related conversations, the researcher began with a review of the topic and protocol. Once the topic had been shared, sometimes he invited the group to choose the protocol, "Alright, so do we want to do this as a consultancy or as a success?" Likewise, participants started conversations. One began simply by stating, "I have a scenario that I was thinking about...because I found myself in a very difficult role." Once the intervention started, community coordination became a behavior that any member of the group could perform. After the APPL group started meeting, community coordinator behaviors consisted of topic clarification to keep the group on track in building its practice, or make sure what was said had been understood. Additionally, the community coordinator initiated the topic related conversations.

At the conclusion of a session discussing cultivating relationships, a participant made a proposal to the group. She first shared experiences she had with her principal and then asked the group about theirs. Then she proposed that in the next session the group talk about relating to principals from the perspective of an assistant principal. This topic had not been part of the original list, but the group, as a whole, expressed interest in this topic, and saw that it fit within the existing domain. In this case, the participant who proposed this topic was acting

as a community coordinator. She had identified a common knowledge need that the researcher had not received from the expert set. Furthermore, she led the community from the PLC topics to CoP *practice* by bringing forth a common knowledge need that sealed the APPL community's identity as a community of assistant principals. The scope of the expert set topics revolved around being a principal. This new topic is wholly rooted in the community as it is, and not as it was formed.

One participant clarified her own understanding of a topic by sharing how it applied to her and asking if it made sense. Another participant summarized what he had heard before responding, "I guess what I'm hearing you say from those examples is the current leadership is a command and control, directive, authoritarian approach." In another example, a participant closed the session, "We need to probably continue this conversation..." In these examples the community coordinator clarified pieces of conversation, set topics, made sure fellow participants understood what was being discussed and that the discussion followed the practice being built.

***Managing member participation.*** The theme of managing participation included encouraging members and making them feel welcome. For example, one member knew of another member's situation and encouraged her to "throw it out there, let's go sister." Another participant intended encouragement by saying, "I need to talk to her because I went through a really hard time when I was principal and I got voted off the island."

Managing member participation also included facilitation. Facilitation kept the members talking, and invited participation. One member facilitated the group when she turned the conversation around, “Ok, you’re not worried about the scores, so I’m going to play devil’s advocate...with you.” Also, when facilitating, the community coordinator assigned speakers, “Ok why don’t we let you go first this time.”

### **Summary of Findings**

The APPL group moved towards being a CoP as shown by indicators of coalescence. Members reported feelings of increased efficacy, though survey results did not support this increase in feelings of efficacy. Throughout the intervention, participants continued to participate as assistant principals, and gave no indication of seeing themselves as principals.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

This intervention provided support for assistant principals who aspired to become principals. Referencing two different learning community frameworks, the researcher identified a group of assistant principals and initiated the APPL community. This research investigated the development of a CoP that engaged group members in a process that capitalized on social learning and mutual support in an effort to prepare them for the role of principal.

### Discussion of Results

**Efficacy development.** One goal of this research was to increase the efficacy of assistant principals. While the Principal Sense of Efficacy Survey demonstrated a minor increase in two of the three constructs for efficacy development, the scores were not statistically significant. The qualitative data, however, did demonstrate the participants' levels of efficacy did increase. The dissonance between the quantitative data and the qualitative data may be explained by the types of experiences the participants had before the intervention versus during and after the intervention. To explain this further, when the school year started, the views of the participants were grounded in their perception of administration in the coming school year, whereas once the post survey was taken, participants had actual experiences in addition to their perceptions. Over the course of the school year, their views aligned more with their experiences. As a result, the participants' sense of efficacy increased.

Table 4 shows that the ranges of the posttest scores were smaller than the ranges in the pretest. This seems to indicate the APPL members developed a



common lens for viewing their own efficacy by having interacted in the APPL sessions. Furthermore, the decrease in score ranges also supports an indication for community identity development as the group was developing their own common lexicon. Their views of efficacy in given situations had become more aligned with one another.

Despite the absence of quantitative data supporting a significant increase in efficacy, the qualitative data did show an increase in the areas of Instruction, Moral Leadership and Management. Participants' concurrent experiences outside of the intervention may have assisted this increase. However, the intervention provided an arena for members to reflect on their experiences communally, thus allowing members' sense of efficacy to develop socially, vicariously, and emotionally (Bandura, 1993; Usher, 2008). Members' perceptions of their own efficacy at the pretest could not account for what they were yet to experience in the ensuing school year.

**CoP development.** This research examined factors that led to the development of a CoP that would contribute to the preparedness of assistant principals who were aspiring to become principals. The researcher formed the Assistant Principal Professional Learning group in line with a Professional Learning Community format; it was deliberately formed and structured (Hipp & Weber, 2008; Hord, 1997; Louis, 2003).

Prior to recruiting participants, the researcher identified a topic (essentially the domain) of the yet to be formed community. From this topic, the researcher pursued expertise from the field by interviewing the expert set, and analyzing

their answers in to what would become discussion topics for the yet to be formed community.

After laying the foundation of domain and information from experts in the field, the researcher recruited participants based on their interest in the topic. In similar fashion Hung, Chen, & Koh (2006) recruited participants who formed a CoP with what he called reverse peripheral participation. Instead of a community attracting members, the membership and topic were the focal point around which the community was formed. The community examined in this research had also been formed around the interest of the membership in a given topic.

By design, the researcher had taken on a managing role in what would become the APPL community. Up to this point, the researcher had identified the domain in the form of a topic (the topic could also be called a problem), recruited members, and was ready with real-time valuable information. These actions did not preclude an organic emergence of a CoP, but it did *jumpstart* the community. Other case studies identified a similar role to accelerate CoP formation. In Singapore, a principal was assigned to form a community examining English language instruction; in the United Kingdom a nurse working in a stroke unit formed a CoP among colleagues who also worked with stroke patients; in the United States, an information technology administrator formed a CoP of other information technology administrators from various higher education facilities (Hung et al., 2006; Kilbride, Perry, Flatley, Turner, & Meyer, 2011; Koan, 2011). In each case, a single person formed a group around a given topic, and continued to nurture community.

Each of these CoP formation cases started with a given topic, but that topic was not sacrosanct. In each case, the membership had opportunities to adjust their practice based on the current needs of their situations. Each CoP was populated with intrinsically motivated members who were not required to produce any deliverables. In time, these things would come, but in these samples of accelerated community coalescence, deliverables were absent at the outset.

A CoP isn't simply membership and a topic. Members must interact. From this point, further roles need to be filled to expedite coalescence. Wenger et al. (2002) talks of the community coordinator who takes on a managerial role within a CoP to keep it together and focused. The accelerated CoP formation in this study made use of conversation protocols to work around dependence on a single person, and provide an immediate structure for productive conversation.

***The role of protocols.*** Conversation protocols were used in order to keep the group cohesive and provide an environment and organization for practice-related conversations dealing with either professional development or problem solving. The protocols provided structure and focus. The researcher used conversation protocols because they are inclusive by design and help facilitate participation without relying on any single member exclusively.

At one point in the intervention, the researcher deliberately did not use the protocols – and to ill effect. Based on the lack of practice-related conversation in the one session where protocols were not used, this intervention may not have developed a coalescing CoP had the protocols not been used at all. Despite the researcher's intention to move away from using the conversation protocols, the

community chose to continue using them. Perhaps their continued use encouraged conversations supporting the ongoing sharing and development of *practice*.

### **Limitations**

**Participation.** Participation in this study was limited to volunteers in a relatively small school district. Participants were offered no overt incentives other than increased interaction with colleagues. Initially there were over ten assistant principals who had expressed interest in participating. Six participated consistently. The limitation was the inconsistency in members' session attendance, and the related conversation participation. Given a greater span of time with which to provide more opportunities for conversation, or consistent participation, participants might have had more opportunities to develop a greater sense of community.

**Survey.** The measure used for efficacy was written for principals. The expert set provided topics aligned to principals, yet the actual discussions and the member-provided topics all reflected an assistant principal's view. As discussed earlier, even by the end of the innovation period, participants did not appear to think of themselves as if they were principals. Had the participants seen themselves as principals, the chosen survey may not have been as limiting.

**Bias.** As much as the emic position of the researcher provided an inside view of community development, it also could be a potential source of bias. Because the researcher was a participant, he may have analyzed data from a personal perspective as opposed to an objective one. The researcher addressed

this potential source of bias by confirming data coding with a critical friend, and keeping reflective field notes in a journal (Anderson & Herr, 2005). The field notes described any deviations from the proposed study and offered reasons, whether unintentional or planned, along with thoughts on the direction of the intervention. Additionally, the researcher shared final findings with critical friends to help validate the researcher's claims (Anderson & Herr, 2005; Stringer, 2007).

### **Implications**

**Professional development.** This style of community learning appears to be a viable method supporting the preparation of assistant principals for a principalship. At minimum, this intervention seems to be an important vessel to help assistant principals be more successful and confident in their current position. This was accomplished through the APPL community. With an intrinsic drive, it appeared that the group, which started as a PLC became a CoP.

School districts inclined to develop assistant principals and support them need to see that the district's environment allows for the emergence of a community. The district should make sure that there is an avenue for communication among the assistant principals in the district. This can be done simply with an e-mail listserv, regularly scheduled meetings with time for unstructured conversation (a coffee break, for example), or district supported socializing (a holiday get-together, for example). Most importantly, however, a district leader needs to encourage a current assistant principal to coordinate his or her colleagues in to a group dedicated to discussing their practice. This

coordination and dedication needs to be subtle for a community to develop organically. Once organized, the assistant principal who acted as the community coordinator may have occasional or regular interaction with the district leadership, and share some of the practice concerns being developed or discussed. These conversations may also provide information that may influence resources, or changes. A district fostering the formation of a CoP among assistant principals would benefit from the possibility of increased retention, ongoing training, a view to the unknown as issues emerge within the CoP, and general support for a generally unsupported role.

**The identity of an assistant principal.** Participants were recruited by their interest in becoming principals. This intervention started with conversations in which the discussion topics were all rooted in being a principal. All of the interview questions for the expert set were about being a principal. However, throughout the intervention, participants continued to see through the eyes of an assistant principal. When discussing cultivating relationships, members talked of their relationships with others from the perspective of an assistant principal. The group-generated topic related to the relationship between the principal and the assistant principal was examined through the lens of an assistant principal. Clearly the overall theme of the community emerged as establishing and nurturing the assistant principal role, despite the direction provided by the researcher towards principal preparation.

This study shows that further research is needed on the identity and development of assistant principals. The assistant principal is a unique position.

They are positioned in a school as leaders, but follow and implement the lead of the principal. Their leadership is limited to the extent to which their principal allows, and this varies. When evaluating teachers, principals and assistant principals serve together as colleagues drawing from similar instructional evaluation expertise, yet the principal also evaluates the assistant principal denoting the assistant principal a subordinate role. The assistant principal is a colleague, leader and subordinate. This multiplicity complicates their identity.

**Community from a process.** This intervention is an example of a CoP developed from an existing construct. In this study, a CoP was jumpstarted from a PLC. In the education sector, the professional learning community has been a commonly accepted medium for professional development (Fullan, 2006). Several factors interdependently contributed to community development. First, the community was deliberately formed. It did not emerge organically, rather the researcher played an active role in nurturing the community's development from a PLC to a CoP. The researcher assembled the participants into a PLC, which was a familiar construct to the participants. Then, through leadership, coordination, and catalyzing behaviors fostered the coalescence of a CoP. Additionally, the researcher used conversation protocols in order to compel participation, support idea exchange by means of that participation, and assist in maintaining topical discussion focus.

The transition from PLC to CoP appears to have affected the participants and the community in two ways. First, the community embraced a domain slightly different from the topic originally provided with the PLC. As the

members identified themselves as assistant principals, their discussions were from this perspective as opposed to participating as if they were principals. Second, participation and membership in the community became valuable. When the intervention started, participants affirmed the value of the group and the topics. Over the course of the intervention, the members shifted from value affirmation to value assignment. This is especially evident when members expressed regret over having missed a discussion, shared that a topic had not been taught in their preparation coursework, or when needs that emerged from the community were addressed.

Whether called a leader, a manager, a catalyst, a coordinator, or a jumpstart, it appears as though accelerated CoP development relies on certain roles. These roles include member recruitment and topic identification, which must be related, value added, and have a semblance of structure for interaction. Nuances of semantics are the discrete differences among the different role titles from the other studies. The jumpstart described in this study simply asserts that there are roles to be filled, but does not tether those roles to one person.

### **Overall Conclusion**

The role of the assistant principal is complicated, and it needs to be made explicit beyond assisting the principal. Participants in this cycle of research consistently discussed topics from the vantage of the assistant principal, despite preparation and topics that were specific to principals. Perhaps the learning curve for being an assistant principal is steeper than expected. In an age of



accountability, every effective expeditious professional development mode should be considered.

When the members of the APPL community (nee group) pursued information, exchanged ideas and needs not provided by the expert set, the topic became spontaneous. This spontaneity assisted in the CoP development and identified a need for the school district. School districts could orchestrate professional learning communities intended to become communities of practice. In so doing, school districts could also benefit from the emerging topics as a needs analysis for ongoing professional development. According to this study, implementing PLCs with the intent of CoPs developing could be the catalyst by which assistant principals would be more effective in their present roles, and possibly better equipped to become principals.

Recall from the first chapter a comment made by one of the researcher's administration certification instructors. In this comment the instructor quipped that administration students would all learn to be principals, but the first job available would be that of an assistant principal. This round of research, seven years later, found his statement to still be true. It appears that the job of an assistant principal deserves some exploration and training of its own.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERSTATE SCHOOL LEADERS LICENSURE CONSORTIUM  
STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

### **Standard 1**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.**

### **Standard 2**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.**

### **Standard 3**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.**

### **Standard 4**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.**

### **Standard 5**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.**

### **Standard 6**

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by **understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.**

(Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996)



APPENDIX B

THE 21 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL LEADER

1. Affirmation
2. Change Agent
3. Contingent Rewards
4. Communication
5. Culture
6. Discipline
7. Flexibility
8. Focus
9. Ideals/Beliefs
10. Input
11. Intellectual Stimulation
12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
14. Monitoring/Evaluating
15. Optimizer
16. Order
17. Outreach
18. Relationships
19. Resources
20. Situational Awareness
21. Visibility

(Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p.42)

APPENDIX C  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL




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Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

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**To:** Kathleen Puckett  
FAB

**From:**  Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 01/13/2010

**Committee Action:** Exemption Granted

**IRB Action Date:** 01/13/2010

**IRB Protocol #:** 0912004646

**Study Title:** Assistant Principal to Principal

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

