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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR NEEDS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

by

Michael N. Smith, Jr.

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Gary Hartzell

Omaha, NE
DISSERTATION TITLE

Elementary School Principals' Perceptions of Their Needs
For Professional Development in Instructional Leadership

BY

Michael N. Smith

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Concern with elementary principals' instructional leadership behaviors has an extensive history. Although research has not resulted in a specific agreed-upon definition of instructional leadership, a range of elementary principal behaviors consistently associated with school quality has been posited. Research has been slight regarding what in-service training elementary principals may need in order to become or remain competent in performing these behaviors – no research whatsoever is available describing the needs of Nebraska’s elementary principals.

The purpose of this study was to assess Nebraska elementary principals’ perceptions of their need for further instructional leadership professional development. Relationships were examined between the Nebraska elementary principals’ perceptions and various demographic variables. The independent variables were defined as (1) the principal’s personal characteristics – age, gender, years of teaching experience, highest degree earned, age at first administrative appointment, years of experience as a principal, years in current position, and (2) the individual elementary school’s characteristics – school size, district size, grades embraced by the school, and the school’s socio-economic status.

Drawn from work by Cotton (2003) and Hallinger (1984), the Elementary
Principal Professional Development Rating Scale (EPPDRS) was created as the survey instrument. After instrument modifications guided by results from a pilot study, 176 public elementary school principals in Class A Nebraska school districts were asked to participate. A total of 116 useable surveys (65.9%) were returned.

Data analysis produced two clear-cut findings. First, as a whole, Nebraska elementary school principals do not perceive a definite need for additional training in the educational leadership activities advocated in the literature. Second, the closest the 116 responding principals came to expressing a perceived need for additional professional development was to say that they could use some further training in how to (1) interpret test data to measure academic achievement, (2) review student achievement with teachers, and (3) assist teachers in improving classroom instruction. This study’s findings may have implications for elementary principals, professional development planners, district administrators, and principal preparation institutions.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1 – Introduction...........................................................................................................1
    Purpose Statement...............................................................................................................2
    Research Questions.............................................................................................................2
    Definition of Terms............................................................................................................3
    Assumptions.......................................................................................................................4
    Delimitations......................................................................................................................4
    Limitations of the Study......................................................................................................4
    Significance of the Study....................................................................................................5
    Contributions to research....................................................................................................5
    Contributions to practice.....................................................................................................5
    Outline of the Study............................................................................................................6

Chapter 2 – Literature Review..................................................................................................7
    The Lack of a Definition of Instructional Leadership..........................................................7
    The Principal as Instructional Leader..................................................................................9
        Setting a vision, mission, and goals.............................................................................10
        Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress......................................12
        Supervising and supporting teachers and teaching..................................................13
    Management Responsibilities of the Principal.................................................................16
    Principal Professional Development...................................................................................17

Chapter 3 – Methodology.........................................................................................................19
Research Questions ................................................................. 19
Research Design ................................................................. 19
Sample ................................................................. 19
Data Collection ................................................................. 20
Instrumentation ................................................................. 21
  EPPDRS ................................................................. 21
  Validity ................................................................. 21
  Reliability ................................................................. 21
Data Analysis ................................................................. 22
  Independent variables ................................................................. 22
  Dependent variables ................................................................. 22
Statistical Techniques ................................................................. 23
  SPSS ................................................................. 23
    t-Test ................................................................. 23
    ANOVA ................................................................. 23
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents ................................................................. 23
  Age ................................................................. 24
  Gender ................................................................. 24
  Teaching experience ................................................................. 24
  Highest degree earned ................................................................. 24
  Age at first administrative appointment ................................................................. 24
  Administrative experience ................................................................. 25

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Second Finding: Interest in Training for Data Analysis and Communication

With Teachers ................................................................. 48
  Data analysis ............................................................. 48
  Teacher conferencing ................................................ 49
Implications ........................................................................ 52
  Implications for practice ............................................... 52
  Implications for research .............................................. 52
Conclusion ........................................................................ 53

References ....................................................................... 54

Appendix A: Survey Instrument ......................................... 70
Appendix B: Online Letter to Principals ............................. 75
Appendix C: Mailed Letter to Principals ............................ 77
Appendix D: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval of Study ........................................ 79
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Analysis for Grades Embraced Within Respondent’s School</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Analysis of Individual Survey Questions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Analysis of Demographic Information</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Introduction

President George W. Bush signed H.R. 1, the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" (NCLB), into law in January, 2002. The act is designed to close the achievement gap between high performing schools and low performing schools utilizing accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind. This act increases local administrative and educational agency accountability for student achievement. The NCLB deems instructional leadership behaviors as essential and requires principals to have the instructional leadership skills to help teachers teach and students learn. Additionally, the NCLB argues that principals should have the instructional leadership skills necessary to help students meet challenging state-defined academic achievement standards. Federal funds are provided to local school districts through this legislation to provide meaningful professional development for teachers and principals.

While controversial as a comprehensive approach to school improvement, the research supports the NCLB assertion that there is a connection between student achievement and a principal's instructional leadership capability. There is considerable evidence that instructional leadership behaviors make a positive difference in a school's performance (Deal & Peterson, 1998; Edmonds, 1982; Fullan, 1998; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Levine & Lezotte, 1990).

While there is substantial evidence that the instructional leader of the school is an important factor in the teaching and learning process (Andrews & Soder, 1987), there is little consensus in defining the leadership behaviors best facilitate this process.
Nevertheless, researchers have identified a range of principal behaviors consistently associated with school quality and pressure has continued to mount over the last two decades for training principals in these (Hallinger, 1992; Iwanicki, 1999; Koch, 1982).

**Purpose Statement**

The research and opinion literatures regarding professional development activities relating to instructional leadership largely have been developed without the direct involvement of elementary principals in the field, and completely without participation by Nebraska’s elementary principals. That is, no one has directly asked practicing principals what they perceive their professional development needs to be. This study began to fill that void by investigating how elementary school principals perceive their readiness to engage in instructional leadership behaviors and to what extent they perceive themselves needing additional professional development in order to become competent to perform these behaviors.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were drawn from the literature and used to guide the study:

1. What do Nebraska elementary school principals perceive as their professional development needs relating to instructional leadership?

2. Is there a relationship between varying personal and institutional demographics and Nebraska elementary principals’ perceptions of their professional development needs?
Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were used:

**Administrative Certification**: The necessary licensure required to assume the responsibilities of a building principal.

**Class A**: School districts containing the 28 largest high schools in the state of Nebraska.

**Elementary School**: A public school containing any combination of grades pre-kindergarten through eight.

**Instruction**: The methodology by which students are taught.

**Instructional Leadership**: The behaviors and activities primarily associated with the supervision and direction of the educational program. Instructional leadership refers to actions undertaken with the intention of developing a productive and satisfying working environment for teachers and desirable learning conditions and outcomes for children (Smith & Andrews, 1989).

**Manager**: One of the roles that school administrators perform that directly relates to the completion of business tasks. Managerial tasks include, but are not limited to, maintaining student discipline, processing and completing paperwork, developing and monitoring budgets, checking and maintaining school facilities, and other such efforts.

**Principal**: The chief administrator of a public elementary school.
Assumptions

Because there is no agreed-upon single set of literature-defined instructional leadership behaviors, this study assumed that the behaviors listed in the research literature are a proxy for an operational definition of instructional leadership and do describe at least the core of behaviors in which effective elementary school principals to some greater or lesser extent engage. The instrumentation used in the study identified and described these essential behaviors of the elementary principal’s instructional leadership role. This study also assumed that the principals surveyed are (a) competent and (b) honest.

Delimitations

This study was limited to the population of public school elementary principals in Nebraska. Because there are many different configurations of administrative teams established in school districts throughout Nebraska, the sample was limited to those principals in elementary schools in Class A school districts. Finally, because of the differing philosophies and guidelines governing private and public elementary schools, this study included only public school principals.

Limitations of the Study

Four limitations affected this study.

1. The survey response website URL was e-mailed to respondents. The completion of the surveys was based on each respondent's willingness to volunteer to complete the survey on-line. Thus, the results of the survey may not be truly representative of the population.
2. The respondents provided a snapshot of those who served in an administrative capacity during the 2003-2004 school year. Considering the predictions that a large number of educators will exit the profession for retirement in the next few years, the total population of administrators could look considerably different in the near future.

3. The report may reflect some of the researcher's biased opinions, since the researcher's experiences as a current elementary school principal may have some influence on data interpretation.

4. Professional development can take place in many different forms. Historically, in-service activities have been provided as workshops or seminars. The respondents’ perception of the traditional, or typical, forms of professional development may have impacted the results of this study. A clear definition with examples of different types of professional development may have provided different results for this study.

Significance of the Study

Contributions to research. There is very little empirical research available specifically related to instructional leadership professional development activities. This study contributed to the research literature associated with instructional leadership at the elementary level.

Contributions to practice. The results of this study may have implications for administration training and for principal-level in-service professional development programs in Nebraska and other states.
Outline of the Study

Chapter 2 of this proposal presents a review of literature relative to instructional leadership and professional development for elementary principals. Additionally, chapter 3 presents the research design of the study and describes the methodology and procedures that will be used to gather and analyze the data for the study. Chapter 4 presents data analysis and chapter 5 of this dissertation presents the interpretations of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study is to determine two things:

(a) what do Nebraska elementary school principals perceive as their professional development needs relating to instructional leadership;

(b) if there is a relationship between varying personal and institutional demographics and Nebraska elementary principals’ perceptions of their professional development needs.

To provide a foundation for this study, the instructional leadership behaviors and elementary principals’ professional development needs were researched and reviewed.

The Lack of a Definition for Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is rarely defined in concrete terms. Few studies in this area have detailed policies, practices, and behaviors of the elementary principal. This limitation has implications for both research and practice. The lack of a clear definition of instructional leadership has been noted by several researchers. A lack of conceptual clarity regarding the instructional leaders’ role has raised questions relating to whether the focus is on instruction or leadership (Duke, 1982). Researchers concerned about the definition of instructional leadership have tried to determine who should fulfill the leader’s role (Rallis, 1988). A preponderance of evidence indicates that a specific image of a successful instructional leader does not exist (Dwyer, 1984; Iannaccone & Jamgochian, 1985).
Some common threads emerge from studies relating to instructional leadership functions and behaviors. Characteristics that isolate the specific functions of principals were identified in four studies: Bartell’s 1990 study in which “outstanding principals of the year” were asked to describe their instructional leadership beliefs and behaviors, Evans and Teddlie’s 1995 survey study of 472 teachers in 53 schools, Hipp’s 1996 survey/interview study in ten middle schools in Wisconsin, and Johnson and Asera’s 1999 study of nine high-performing elementary schools in poor urban communities. These characteristics include:

- measure academic achievement
- create an orderly school climate
- articulate the curriculum
- support the instructional staff
- establish high expectations
- plan collaboratively
- provide instructional leadership, and
- provide support for parents.

The role of the principal is further characterized as having three main functions: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and developing a climate for learning in the school (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). Other essential components associated with successful principals include high visibility, expertise in curriculum and instruction, high expectations, program analysis and evaluation, and innovation (Farley, 1985).
Ginsberg (1988) believes that the role of instructional leader has yet to be fully understood by the educational community. While principals may embrace what they perceive as the role, the lack of a clear and widely accepted definition of instructional leadership, coupled with present preparation programs inhibit success. Another significant obstacle to achievement, Ginsberg argues, is the present generation of principals who have a limited grasp of curriculum and instruction.

The Principal as Instructional Leader

Several studies argue that effective principals spend a great deal of time in educational leadership activities. Gottfredson and Hybl (1987), reported that principals said the most important aspects of their job, in terms of time spent, were staff direction, observation and feedback, planning and action for school improvement, personnel management, and keeping-up-to-date. Administrators in Vak’s (1982) study noted that approximately 43% of their time was spent supervising instruction through classroom observations and post-observation conferences. Bartell and Willis (1987) asked principals to rate 20 items as to their degree of responsibility. The top four items listed were evaluating teacher performance, providing a supportive climate for teachers, articulating goals to the staff, and providing an orderly environment for learning.

Several tasks identified as critical to the success of the school principal were documented in four studies:

- Bates’ 1993 case study of a small, rural alternative school
- McEwan’s 1998 survey and interview study of highly effective instructional leaders
• Rutherford’s 1985 study of elementary and secondary principals that included observations of and interviews with principals, interviews with teachers, and interviews with key central office staff members
• Wendel, Hoke and Joekel’s 1996 study of the perceptions of 491 school administrators who were identified by their colleagues as “outstanding.”

The composite results argue for:

• setting high expectations for students and staff
• modeling high professional standards
• establishing and maintaining vision, mission, and goals
• maintaining positive interpersonal relationships
• maintaining a visible presence
• providing emotional support to students
• establishing an internal communications system
• interviewing candidates for teaching positions
• mentoring new teachers
• complying with mandated educational programs
• marshaling resources
• using time well
• evaluating their results, and
• continuously monitoring progress.

Setting a vision, mission, and goals. Short and Spencer (1989) found that teachers displaying a high level of helpfulness toward students and each other were
noted in schools where they perceived their leaders to be effective. These principals were also believed to be very involved in supervising, evaluating, and in communicating school goals. Students, however, thought that effective leadership was present in situations where teachers tended to be less approachable and more formal. The students distinguished successful principals as individuals who encouraged teachers to maintain friendly, student-centered classroom environments.

Instructional leadership research has tended to argue for five types of leadership traits: (1) technical, (2) human, (3) educational, (4) symbolic, and (5) cultural (Sergiovanni, 1995). The technical characteristics of instructional leadership deal with the customary practices of management. These would include the topics usually covered in an administrative theory course, such as planning, time management, leadership theory, and organizational development. The human component includes all of the interpersonal aspects of instructional leadership necessary for communicating, motivating, and facilitating roles of the principal.

The technical and human leadership skills are not exclusive to schools. Effective leaders, regardless of the setting, need planning and time management skills. They should also have the ability to organize and coordinate. Additionally, effective leaders should be skilled in providing support and encouragement, in helping to build consensus, and in fostering interpersonal communication (Sergiovanni, 1995).

Taken together, Johnson and Holdaway's 1991 multi-dimensional study of 112 Canadian principals and their superintendents and selected teachers, Larsen's 1987 survey study of principals and teachers in 76 high- and low-achieving elementary
schools in California, McCallum's 1999 examination of four British primary schools with high literacy achievement, and Short and Spencer's 1990 study of principals and students in 16 secondary schools described effective principals engaging in the following behaviors:

- establishing and maintaining a positive school culture
- leading the school improvement process
- establishing a norm of continuous improvement
- recognizing student and staff achievements
- reviewing student achievement
- supervising classroom instruction
- setting goals, and
- maintaining school/community relations.

Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress. Sergiovanni (1995) argues that the instructional aspects of the principal's role, include teaching, learning, and implementing curricula. The symbolic and cultural characteristics are the most subtle in terms of description and understanding. They are derived from the instructional leader's ability to become the symbol of what is important and purposeful about the school as well as to articulate the values and beliefs underlying the organizational culture.

Sergiovanni (1995) contends that these educational, symbolic, and cultural leadership characteristics are specific to and vary with the school setting. A principal who is an instructional leader must be knowledgeable in learning theory, effective
instruction, and the curriculum. He or she must also be able to effectively communicate
to students, teachers, and parents what is important in the school. Additionally, the
instructional leader must be skilled in the actual construction of a positive school
culture (Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1995). Five tasks of supervision were
identified as having a direct impact on instructional improvement. The tasks include
direct assistance, group development, staff development, curriculum development, and
action research. The integration of these tasks aligns teachers' needs with the school's
goals (Glickman, 1985).

Seven characteristics of elementary principals have been identified that effect
improvement in students' learning (Roueche & Baker, 1986). These attributes include
the ability to be flexible, to work cooperatively, to be committed to students, to
acknowledge the efforts of staff, to solve problems in a collaborative manner, to
delegate tasks and responsibilities, and to focus on teaching and learning.

The elementary principal has become a key figure in bringing about needed
change in education due to the public's demand for increased academic achievement
(Blome & James, 1985; Donaldson, 1986; Dwyer, 1984; Hodgkinson, 1982; Notar,
1987; Smith & Andrews, 1989). This can be seen as an opportunity for principals to
demonstrate the instructional leadership that will renew public confidence in schools
(Lynn, 1994).

Supervising and supporting teachers and teaching. There are many
responsibilities regarding the supervisor's role in education. Pajak (1989), in
conjunction with a team of doctoral students and faculty from the University of
Georgia, conducted a multi-dimensional study to identify elements of outstanding supervisory practice in education. Their study utilized two separate questionnaires and a follow-up telephone interview. The first survey was mailed to a national sample of 1,629 individuals while the second survey was mailed to 987 from the original sample. Finally, 12 participants were randomly selected to participate in a telephone interview. They found the following items, listed in order of importance, to be key to instructional leadership:

- Communication
- Staff Development
- Instructional Program
- Planning and Change
- Motivating and Organizing
- Observing and Conferencing
- Curriculum
- Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Service to Teachers
- Personal Development
- Community Relations
- Research and Program Evaluation.

Sparks and Hirsch (1998) concur with these findings. They believe that effective instructional leaders focus their efforts on the dealings inside of the classroom (Sparks & Hirsch, 1998). They spend time not only observing in classrooms but also

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coaching teachers. They provide professional development as well as other resources to classroom teachers. Effective instructional leaders expect great teaching from teachers and high achievement from students. They also challenge principals to rethink their beliefs about learning and teaching and encourage them to be risk-takers as part of the school improvement process.

Additional responsibilities were identified in four studies: Bamburg and Andrews’s 1991 comparison of 10 high-achieving and 10 low-achieving elementary schools; Binkowski, Cordeiro and Iwanicki’s 1995 study of two high-performing and two low-performing elementary schools; Firestone and Wilson’s 1989 study of 300 elementary and secondary schools in Pennsylvania; and Leitner’s 1994 study of relationships among principals’ instructional management behaviors, students’ socioeconomic backgrounds, and student achievement in 27 elementary schools. The behaviors include:

- leads professional development of certified staff
- assists teachers in improving classroom instruction
- supports staff by being accessible
- protects classroom instructional time, and
- provides resources to certified staff.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) compliance requirements have also placed increased pressure on schools across the country; including performance expectations for schools in both reading and mathematics. Nebraska principals face additional accountability demands through the School Based Teacher-led Assessment
and Reporting System (STARS). Nebraska is quite unique in its implementation of the STARS program for many reasons. For instance, school districts have been provided a greater amount of control in terms of accountability, the establishment of local standards, and the reporting of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). The state also requires all 4th grade students to participate in a statewide writing assessment. Results from the writing assessment are reported annually on the State of the Schools Report for districts as well as for individual buildings. These accountability requirements innately call for principals to provide additional support to classroom teachers.

Management Responsibilities of the Principal

The conflict that principals face in their roles as instructional leaders and supervisors was summed up by Rallis and Highsmith (1986). They found that it is almost impossible to be an instructional leader and maintain the managerial functions required by supervisors (Bowser & Like, 1981). They believe that the principal has taken on too many responsibilities similar to a business manager. These practices force principals to neglect the instructional leadership functions of their job.

Principals have had a difficult time transitioning from management roles to instructional leadership roles. A whole new set of expectations and competencies have been developed for principals transitioning to the role of instructional leader (Iwanicki, 1999). This transition for principals has been difficult due to vast new responsibilities added to their current job descriptions (Hallinger, 1992). One important factor is that elementary principals are generally the only administrator in the building. They are
solely responsible for carrying out all duties associated with the principalship, including both managerial and instructional leadership tasks.

The role of the instructional leader is different from that of the manager in terms of being a visionary and innovator. One way to become a leader is "to find out where people are going anyway and get out in front" (Blanchard & Bowles, 1998, p. 41). This suggestion is one way to lead, however there are times when the instructional leader must act as a change agent. There is an art to creating a vision that involves changing from a current practice to a new innovative practice (Kline & Saunders, 1993). Kline and Saunders (1993) found that this evolution requires the leader to be cognizant of the organizational culture. Elementary school leaders guide their staff to follow a vision of unified goals (Guzzetti & Martin, 1984).

Instructional leadership is one of the most critical roles that an elementary principal performs. The responsibilities of the principal involve staff development and provide the guidance necessary to assist buildings in meeting their visionary goals. Theories centered on instructional leadership are constantly changing in order to address the key issues of teaching and learning. Other terms may be used to represent instructional leadership, but eventually the responsibilities associated with those terms create an up-to-date theory of instructional leadership.

Principal Professional Development

Research is lacking in the area of professional development for elementary principals. The research and opinion literature regarding professional development activities relating to instructional leadership has been developed without the direct
involvement of the elementary principals in the field. Of the few studies available, the research method of self-report is typically employed. This subjective method leads to a wide variety of responses (Campbell, Corbally, & Nystrand, 1983). Additionally, very few, if any, longitudinal studies exist regarding the professional development of elementary principals. The described weaknesses leave a gap in the research in the area of professional development.

Instructional leadership of elementary principals has an extensive history. Although sufficient research has not resulted in a specific definition of instructional leadership, a range of principal behaviors consistently associated with school quality can be extracted from the literature. Research is, however, lacking in regard to the professional development needs of elementary principals in Nebraska, specifically in the area of instructional leadership. If elementary principals are to truly serve as instructional leaders, they must have a clear understanding of the skills necessary to perform in this capacity. This evaluation will focus on determining the professional development needs of elementary school principals in Nebraska in regard to instructional leadership. The purpose of this study and the specific methodologies associated with the study will be addressed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter outlines the research questions, research design, sample, data collection, instrumentation, and the methods of data analysis.

Research Questions

The following research questions drawn from the literature were used to guide the study:

1. What do Nebraska elementary school principals perceive as their professional development needs relating to instructional leadership?
2. Is there a relationship between varying personal and institutional demographics and Nebraska elementary principals’ perceptions of their professional development needs?

Research Design

Class A elementary school principals throughout Nebraska were surveyed about their perceptions of specific professional development needs relating to instructional leadership. Response data were aggregated and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program to generate both descriptive and inferential statistics. No individual principal’s responses were identifiable in the final product.

Sample

A total of 176 public elementary school principals in Class A school districts throughout Nebraska were asked to participate in this study. A total of 116 surveys (65.9%) were returned. A response rate of 50% or above is considered acceptable in
this type of research (Babbie, 1975; Diem, 2002). The professional development needs of Class A principals differ from principals of other school districts. Due to the limited number of administrators in smaller school districts, additional responsibilities are placed on building principals as compared to their counterparts in larger school districts. In addition, Class A school districts have administrative resources at their district offices that other school districts do not have (e.g. curriculum directors and trainers, directors of assessment, directors of elementary education, etc.). The Nebraska Department of Education database and website were queried to obtain a list of elementary school principals to participate in this study. Additionally, the Nebraska Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) was asked to provide a database of e-mail addresses of participating elementary school principals. Remaining e-mail addresses were obtained from school district representatives.

Data Collection

This survey was conducted during the summer of 2004 utilizing an on-line survey technique. An e-mail requesting participation in this study was sent to individuals in mid-June. The attached letter included a link to a specific web address where the survey was located. A reminder e-mail was sent to participants after 3 weeks to encourage the nonrespondents to complete the survey. A second reminder was sent to continued nonrespondents after 3 additional weeks. A total of 76 responses (43.2%) were collected after the second reminder. Finally, a paper copy of the cover letter and survey were mailed to the remaining principals during the first week in August. The final tally of returned surveys totaled 116 or 65.9%.
Instrumentation

Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale. The questionnaire contained a total of 37 items. A review of existing literature was conducted and identified the 37 instructional leadership behaviors that most often appeared in the research reports. The behaviors included in this survey were grouped into three key areas for data analysis purposes: setting a vision, mission, and goals; monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress; and supervising and supporting staff and teaching.

The survey was separated into two sections. Section A asked principals to rate their personal need for further professional development for each of the listed behaviors. Subjects were asked to respond to the items using a 5-point Likert scale. Section B asked principals to respond to specific demographic questions. Demographic information gathered from the survey was studied in order to identify factors that may influence principals’ perceptions of instructional leadership behaviors.

Validity. A panel of twelve elementary school principals was asked to preview the survey in order to provide content validity and to refine necessary questions. The principals met for a one-hour period in a school setting to discuss individual survey items. Two items were removed from the survey due to repetition. Two additional items were rewritten to provide clarity to the reader.

Reliability. A pilot test of the instrument was conducted to obtain an estimate of reliability. Reliability testing was conducted for Section A using Cronbach’s Coefficient Alpha in order to establish internal consistency for the items included in the
subscales: Setting a vision, mission, and goals (α=0.95); (2) Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress (α=.92), and (3) Supervising and supporting staff and teaching (α=.97).

**Data Analysis**

**Independent variables.** The independent variables were defined as (1) the principal’s:

- Age
- Gender
- Years of teaching experience prior to assuming an administrative position
- Highest degree earned
- Age at first administrative appointment
- Total years of experience as a principal
- Number of years in the respondent’s current position

and (2) as the following school characteristics:

- Size of student population in the school
- Size of student population in the district
- Grades embraced by the school program
- School’s socio-economic status (SES).

**Dependent variables.** The dependent variables were defined as the perceptions of elementary principals regarding their professional staff development needs relating to instructional leadership.
Statistical Techniques

**SPSS.** The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. Survey responses were tallied, and frequencies and percentages were obtained for each question and area studied. Two methods of statistical analysis were incorporated: the independent t-test and the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Because multiple statistical tests were conducted, the significance level was set at .01 to help control for Type I errors.

**t-Test.** The independent t-test was used to compare two groups (e.g., male/female) on a dependent variable (principals’ perceptions) in order to answer research questions relating to demographics.

**ANOVA.** The ANOVA was used to examine the difference between more than two groups on a dependent variable in order to answer research questions relating to demographics (e.g., age, population of school, experience as a teacher, experience as principal, and highest educational attainment).

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Demographic data were gathered from each respondent. Principals were asked to submit: (a) personal data for age, gender, years of teaching experience prior to assuming an administrative position, highest degree earned, age at first administrative appointment, total years of experience as a principal, and number of years in the respondent’s current position; and (b) school characteristics for the size of student population in their school, size of student population in their district, grades embraced...
by their school program, and their school's socio-economic status (SES). Tables 1-11 provide a summary regarding each of the demographic (independent) variables.

**Age.** In order of highest frequency, the data indicated that 45 respondents (38.8%) were between 50 and 56 years old, 23 (19.8%) were between 43 and 49 years old, 19 (16.4%) between 36 and 42 years old, 18 (15.5%) were between 27 and 35 years old, and 11 (9.5%) were between 57 and 64 years of age. A total of 48.3% of the respondents indicated that they were between 50 and 64 years old.

**Gender.** The data indicated that 76 respondents (65.5%) were female, and 40 respondents (34.5%) were male.

**Teaching experience.** The majority of respondents (n=47, 40.6%) indicated that they had been teachers for 9-14 years. The second largest category (n=33, 28.4%) indicated that they had 3-8 years of teaching experience. A total of 28 respondents (24.1%) indicated that they were classroom teachers for 15-20 years. The smallest category (n=8, 6.9%) indicated that they had 21-26 years of teaching experience.

**Highest degree earned.** The majority of respondents (n=85, 73.3%) indicated that they had a master's degree. A total of 16 respondents (13.8%) indicated that they had a specialist's degree. Just 15 respondents (12.9%) indicated that they had a doctoral degree.

**Age at first administrative appointment.** The data indicated that 36 respondents (31.0%) were between 30 and 35 years old at their first administrative appointment, 30 (25.9%) were between 42 and 47 years old, 23 (19.8%) between 36 and 41 years old, 17
(14.7%) were between 25 and 29 years old, and 10 (8.6%) were between 48 and 53 years of age.

**Administrative experience.** The majority of respondents \((n=47, 40.5\%)\) indicated that they had been administrators between 1-5 years. The second largest category \((n=35, 30.2\%)\) indicated that they had between 6-10 years of administrative experience. A total of 18 respondents \((15.5\%)\) indicated that they were principals for 11-15 years. A total of 10 respondents \((8.6\%)\) indicated that they had been administrators for 16-21 years. The smallest category \((n=6, 4.3\%)\) indicated that they had between 22-36 years of administrative experience.

**Current position.** The majority of respondents \((n=56, 48.3\%)\) indicated that they had been in their present position between 1-4 years. The second largest category \((n=40, 34.5\%)\) indicated that they had 5-8 years in their current position. A total of 13 respondents \((11.2\%)\) indicated that they were principals in their current buildings for 9-13 years. The smallest category \((n=7, 6.0\%)\) indicated that they had between 14-25 years of administrative experience in their current position.

**School population.** The largest group of principals indicated that they had a student population of 330 to 429 students \((n=38, 32.8\%)\). The second largest category \((n=35, 30.2\%)\) had 230 to 329 students within each school. A total of 19 principals indicated that they lead schools with 130 to 229 students \((16.4\%)\). Fifteen principals indicated that they had between 430-529 students \((12.9\%)\). Only 9 \((7.7\%)\) principals reported that they had a student population of 530 to 850 students.
District population. The largest group of principals indicated that they had a district population of 20,001 to 48,000 students (n=40, 34.5%). The second largest category (n=35, 30.2%) had 4,000 to 7,000 students within each district. A total of 28 principals indicated that they lead schools with 7,001 to 12,000 students (24.1%) within their districts. Only 13 (11.2%) principals reported that they had a student population of 12,001 to 20,000 students in their districts.

Grades within school. Data collected regarding the grades embraced within respondent’s school program are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Analysis for Grades Embraced Within Respondent’s School Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PK</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social-economic Status. Respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of students within their buildings who qualify for free/reduced lunch. The majority of
respondents \((n=45, 38.8\%)\) indicated that they had between 26 and 50\% of their
students on free/reduced lunch. The second largest category \((n=40, 34.5\%)\) indicated
that they had 0 to 25\% of their student population on free/reduced lunch. Twenty-three
respondents \((19.8\%)\) indicated that their student population had between 51 and 75\% of
their students on free/reduced lunch. The smallest category \((n=8, 6.9\%)\) indicated that
they had 76 to 100\% of their student population on free/reduced lunch.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data generated from this study.
Additionally, chapter 5 presents the interpretations of the findings, conclusions, and
recommendations for further study.
Chapter 4

Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to investigate elementary school principals’ perceptions of their professional development needs. Thirty-seven behaviors linked to effective instructional leadership were identified and utilized to create the Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale (EPPDRS). The 37 identified behaviors were grouped into three key task areas: (1) Setting a vision, mission, and goals (questions 1-12); (2) Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress (questions 13-20), and (3) Supervising and supporting staff and teaching (questions 21-37).

The EPPDRS asked respondents to rate each item using a 5-point Likert scale: 1= no need, 2= little need, 3= some need, 4= definite need, and 5= extreme need. The EPPDRS was administered to a sample of 176 elementary school principals of Class A school districts in Nebraska. Participants were asked to self-rate their need for professional development relevant to each of the identified behaviors. A total of 116 surveys (65.9%) were returned.

Data Analysis: Research Questions

Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized to answer the two research questions proposed for this study. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized for data analysis. Survey responses were tallied, and frequencies and percentages were obtained for each question and area studied. Two methods of inferential statistical analysis were incorporated: the independent t-test and the one-way
analysis of variance (ANOVA). The independent t-test was used to compare two
groups (e.g., male/female) on a dependent variable (principals' perceptions) in order to
answer research questions relating to demographics. The ANOVA was utilized to
examine the difference among more than two groups on a dependent variable in order to
answer research questions relating to demographics (e.g., age, population of school,
experience as a teacher, experience as principal, and highest degree earned). Because
multiple statistical tests were conducted, the significance level was set at .01 to help
control for Type I errors.

Research Question 1: What do Nebraska elementary school principals perceive
as their professional development needs relating to instructional leadership?

The means and standard deviations were computed for the key task areas. Each
of the key task areas was ranked below the extreme and definite need indicators. The
large standard deviations indicate that there was large variance between respondents’
perceptions. The key task area of monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student
progress (M=3.03, SD=0.95) was identified in the some need area. The key task areas
of supervising and supporting staff and teaching (M=2.87, SD=1.01) and setting a
vision, mission, and goals (M=2.76, SD=0.99) were identified in the range between
little and some need.

The mean and standard deviation for each of the questions was calculated to
determine whether specific areas of need were evident (see Table 2). Each of the
questions ranked below the extreme and definite need indicators.
Table 2

Analysis of Individual Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establish a shared school vision, mission, and goal(s)</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Create an orderly school environment for learning</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Maintain a visible presence throughout the school</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Establish a positive school culture</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Facilitate the school improvement process</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Establish an internal communication system</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Establish an external communication system</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Act as a change agent</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Act as a problem solver</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Act as a decision maker</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Establish a norm of continuous improvement</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Recognize student achievements</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Knowledge of curriculum</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Establish a collegial environment that supports collaborative efforts</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Interpret test data to measure academic achievement</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Establish high expectations for student performance</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Review student achievement with teachers</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Evaluate curricular programs</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Evaluate assessment programs</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Comply with mandated educational programs</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Task Area: Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Task Area: Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
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</table>
(Table 2 Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21. Apply appropriate time management skills</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Provide opportunities for professional development of certified staff</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Establish high performance standards for teachers</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Model high performance standards</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Mentor new teachers</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Select quality teachers</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Establish an environment that supports staff innovation</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Maintain positive interpersonal relationships with certified staff</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Maintain positive interpersonal relationships with classified staff</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Be accessible to teachers</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Provide emotional support to staff</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Provide emotional support to students</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Create an environment that supports teacher autonomy</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Protect classroom instructional time</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Provide resources to the instructional staff</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Recognize teacher achievements</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Task Area: Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.01</td>
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</table>

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Research Question 2: Is there a relationship between varying personal and institutional demographics and Nebraska elementary principals’ perceptions of their professional development needs?

An independent t-test or one-way ANOVA, as appropriate to the demographic category, was run to determine whether a relationship exists between specific demographics and elementary principals’ perceptions of their professional development needs. A significant relationship (p < .01) was not detected between any of the demographics and key task areas. Table 3 presents the analyses for the responses in each of the demographic areas.

Summary

The results of the descriptive and inferential statistics indicated that elementary principals did not have a need for additional professional development in any of the key task areas. Additionally, a need for further professional development was not specified for any of the individual instructional leadership behaviors included in the survey. An analysis of demographic variables indicated that a significant relationship did not exist between any of the demographics and the key task areas. Chapter 5 of this dissertation presents the interpretations of the findings along with conclusions and recommendations for further study.
Table 3

Analysis of Demographic Information
(ANOVA, except for gender = t-test)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>4, 111</td>
<td>.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>4, 111</td>
<td>.969</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>1.350</td>
<td>4, 111</td>
<td>.256</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (t-test)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
<td>2.528</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>.115</td>
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<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>0.631</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>.429</td>
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<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>.364</td>
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<td><strong>Teaching Experience</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
<td>1.333</td>
<td>3, 112</td>
<td>.267</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>0.761</td>
<td>3, 112</td>
<td>.519</td>
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<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>0.899</td>
<td>3, 112</td>
<td>.444</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Degree Earned</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
<td>1.609</td>
<td>2, 113</td>
<td>.205</td>
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<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>2.032</td>
<td>2, 113</td>
<td>.136</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>1.784</td>
<td>2, 113</td>
<td>.173</td>
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<td></td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>p</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>First Administrative Appointment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
<td>1.231</td>
<td>4,111</td>
<td>.302</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>0.623</td>
<td>4,111</td>
<td>.647</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>4,111</td>
<td>.474</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative Experience</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
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<td>4,111</td>
<td>.760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>0.443</td>
<td>4,111</td>
<td>.777</td>
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<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>0.661</td>
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<td>.621</td>
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<td><strong>Years in Current Position</strong></td>
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<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
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<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
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<td>.879</td>
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<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>3,112</td>
<td>.918</td>
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<td><strong>Student Population in School</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
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<td>.090</td>
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<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
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<td><strong>Student Population in District</strong></td>
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<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
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<td>3,112</td>
<td>.437</td>
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<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>3,112</td>
<td>.606</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td>3,112</td>
<td>.510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 3 Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Socio-Economic Status</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting a vision, mission, and goals</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td>3, 112</td>
<td>.415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress</td>
<td>0.558</td>
<td>3, 112</td>
<td>.644</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervising and supporting staff and teaching</td>
<td>1.188</td>
<td>3, 112</td>
<td>.318</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

How much and for what kind of instructional leadership professional development do elementary principals feel a need? According to the results of this study, the principals of Nebraska Class A elementary schools do not feel that they need much (professional development) and what they do feel they need is in a concentrated area.

Drawn from work by Cotton (2003) and Hallinger (1984), combined and modified for this specific survey project, the Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale (EPPDRS) was created to gather data for this study. The EPPDRS identifies specific literature-advocated educational leadership behavior practices and asks respondents to rate their need for further professional development in a given practice by marking their perceived need level on a 5-point Likert scale: 1=no need, 2=little need, 3=some need, 4=definite need, and 5=extreme need. The survey was originally made available online to 176 principals. A written survey was sent to non-respondents following two e-mail requests for participation. A combined total of 116 usable surveys (65.9%) was returned.

Variables

The dependent variable was the principals' perceptions of their instructional leadership behavior professional development needs. The independent variables were (1) the principal's:
• age,
• gender,
• years of teaching experience prior to assuming an administrative position,
• highest degree earned,
• age at first administrative appointment,
• total years of experience as a principal,
• number of years in the respondent's current position; and

(2) the following school characteristics:

• student population in the school,
• student population in the district,
• grades embraced by the school program, and
• socio-economic status (SES) as expressed in the percentage of students in the free and reduced lunch (FRL) program at the school.

As the following discussion of the findings, their implications, and suggestions for research and practice shows, the results were surprising and interesting.

Findings

Data analysis produced two clear-cut findings. First, as anyone could predict, some individual respondents reported an extreme need, for additional professional development in a variety of educational leadership practices advocated in, but collectively -- regardless of personal, professional, or school demographics -- Nebraska's Class A elementary school principals did not report any felt definite need, let alone any felt extreme need, for additional training in the educational leadership
practices identified in the literature. This response was surprising and contradicts the abundant literature arguing that principals do, indeed, need additional professional development across a range of instructional leadership dimensions.

Second, as a group, the closest the 116 responding principals came to expressing a perceived need for additional professional development was to say that they could use some further training in three inter-related areas: (1) how to interpret test data to measure academic achievement ($M=3.40$, $SD=1.20$); (2) how to review student achievement with teachers ($M=3.31$, $SD=1.18$); and (3) how to assist teachers in improving classroom instruction ($M=3.37$, $SD=1.12$). Interestingly, these questions represent key issues in education at the current time, driven by the accountability movement and legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) or the School Based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) of Nebraska.

**Interpretation and Discussion of Findings**

Given the variance in Nebraska schools and principals, the literature’s conclusion that many principals are deficient as instructional leaders, and the current accountability pressures in education, it’s appropriate to assess why this study produced the findings that it did. There are at least four possible reasons for the first result, and at least two for the second.

**First Finding: No Felt Need for Educational Leadership Practice Professional Development**

There probably are multiple reasons why this study did not produce evidence that principals feel a definite need for instructional leadership behavior professional
development. First may be the differences in perspective between this study and previous research. Second could be the nature of schools and the current educational scene; third, the nature of principals and the principalship. Last, of course, could be the labeling of categories on the Likert scale which may have encouraged respondents to select responses toward the middle of the scale for this study.

**Differing perspectives.** Research regarding professional development activities relating to instructional leadership largely has been developed without the direct involvement of elementary principals in the field. That is, very little has been done to directly ask practicing principals themselves what they perceive as their professional development needs. McCay (1998), for example, in a qualitative case study of six elementary school principals identified several conditions that seemingly would address principals’ learning needs. Qualitative studies, however, by their nature are not easily generalized. Other studies (e.g., Clough, 1991; DuFour, 2000; ISLLC, 2000; Keller, 2000; London & Sinicki, 1999; NSDC, 2000) similarly examined such things as quality staff development, nontraditional forms of staff development, and individualized professional development, in each case, the researcher(s) concluded what training the principals needed.

This study sought to develop an alternate perspective by directly asking principals what they felt about their instructional leadership training needs. The results indicate that elementary principals have a different take on their problems and skills. Of course, one study focusing on the principal’s perspective is not enough to counter the existing research. It does, however, raise interesting questions and provides
sufficient reason for undertaking additional studies that go directly to school principals for measures of what professional development they think they need.

Schooling and the current scene. Several factors associated with today’s schools may have reduced the likelihood of finding statistically different responses among Nebraska’s Class A district elementary principals. For instance, virtually every principal finds similar challenges at the forefront of improvement efforts in all schools. NCLB compliance requirements have placed increased pressure on schools across the country, including performance expectations for schools in both reading and mathematics. Nebraska principals face additional accountability demands through the School Based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). The State requires all fourth grade students to participate in a statewide writing assessment. Results from the writing assessment are reported annually on the State of the Schools Report for districts as well as for individual buildings. Each of these survey items is geared to improving student performance on standardized tests, perceived by both the state and federal government education departments as key indicators of student mastery relating to academic standards. The push to comply with accountability standards has reduced differences between principals in terms of the issues that command their time and attention.

The leadership structure of many of today’s schools may also have had an impact on this study’s results. Some principals may have team leaders, department chairs, coordinators, specialists, or curriculum leaders who handle many of the items...
inquired about in this study. Consequently, the principals may not perceive a strong need for personal training in these areas.

A third factor affecting the findings of this study may be rooted in the principals' experience. Previous training relating to instructional leadership behaviors — both pre-service and in-service — may have addressed some of the items covered in this survey. Nebraska is quite unique in its implementation of the STARS program in that it includes a certain amount of professional development training. Thus, Nebraska principals may have a diminished need for training since they have recently had training opportunities in different aspects of instructional leadership.

The nature of the principalship and of principals. The nature of the principal's job may provide another reason why some of Nebraska's elementary principals are not seeking intensive professional development. They simply may not have the time for it.

Management responsibilities tend to consume a great deal of time and interfere with instructional leadership behaviors of elementary school principals. Since the 1980s studies have found that effective principals are involved with teachers and with the instructional program, while typical principals are "drowned in a sea of administrivia" (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982, p. 330). Portin, Shen, and Williams in 1998 found the same thing that Rallis and Highsmith (1986) found a dozen years before: that it is almost impossible to be an instructional leader and execute the managerial functions required of supervisors. They believe that principals have been required to take on too many responsibilities similar to a business manager. These practices force principals to neglect the instructional leadership functions of their job.
Even 20 years ago, Bloom (1986) found that principals were required to complete too much paperwork and tended to neglect the function of assisting teachers in educational problems.

Several time-consuming tasks identified as critical to the success of the school principal were documented in additional studies conducted by Bates (1993), McEwan (1998), Rutherford (1985), and Wendel, Hoke, and Joekel (1996). These tasks included:

- maintaining positive interpersonal relationships
- maintaining a visible presence
- providing emotional support to students
- establishing an internal communications system
- interviewing candidates for teaching positions
- mentoring new teachers
- complying with mandated educational programs
- marshaling resources
- evaluating their results, and
- continuously monitoring progress.

The results of this study may be an indication that the respondents are well prepared to serve as instructional leaders and, indeed, may do so. Or it may be that most know how to do what the literature calls for them to do, but do not have the time because managerial imperatives command their immediate attention.
The recruitment and retention of qualified administrators has become an increasing concern for school systems across the nation (Bell, 2001; ERS, 1998; Gates et al., 2000; IEL, 2000; Tirozzi & Ferrandino, 2000). Doud and Keller (1998) estimate that there is a turnover rate of more than 40% each year. Approximately 10% of the principals who leave their jobs each year quit voluntarily for a variety of reasons (Davis, 1997). A number of principals entered the position wanting to work with teachers, but found the workload and burden of managerial tasks prevented them from providing instructional leadership (Johnson, 2005). Johnson's 2005 study of principals exiting the profession found that evening meetings and activities cut into time with family, mediating conflicts became exhausting, and mounds of paperwork kept administrators from helping children. Additionally, Bruckner (1998) found that school administrators deal with constant pressures from many different directions: school boards, community groups, teachers, parents, and students.

A diminishing pool of qualified candidates for the principalship is another concern facing superintendents and school boards (IEL, 2000; Jones, 2001; McAdams, 1998). Fewer and fewer teachers are choosing to seek administrative positions in schools (Barker, 1996; Cusick, 2003; ERS, 2000; Fenwick, 2000; Groff, 2001; Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, & Doughty, 2002). Cusick's 2003 study of the principal shortage in Michigan found that the main reason for the decline in qualified principal candidates is the changes in the job itself, which have made it less attractive. The number of responsibilities beyond instruction – school improvement, annual reports, accountability, gender and equity issues, mission statements, goals and outcomes, staff
development, curriculum alignment, dealing with personnel issues, ordering supplies, coordinating bus schedules, monitoring all areas of the school, working as the liaison between the school and the community, and accreditation – has increased geometrically (Cusick, 2003; DiPaola & Tscharnien-Moran, 2003; Groff, 2001). Although many responsibilities have been added, principals have not been relieved of the other duties that have traditionally been a part of their job such as building maintenance and repair, maintaining a safe and secure environment, responding to teacher and staff requests, conducting legally required teacher evaluations, managing the budget, and maintaining discipline (Murphy, 1994; Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998; Sergiovanni, 2001; Whitaker, 1998). Many of the duties that principals face are not identified as positive factors in job satisfaction (Rayfield, 2002). Principals in Portin, Shen, and Williams’ 1998 study of changes in the principalship perceived their role had changed in significantly problematic ways: delegation of decision making from districts to schools, mandates of state reform legislation, truancy legislation, increased diversity, conflict-filled interactions with parents, legally sensitive special education, and expanded external relations.

There also may be personal reasons why principals could be reluctant to identify areas of weakness. First, principals tend to resist professional development since they are expected to already be knowledgeable in all areas (Barth, 1985), a very extensive range in schools today. Change is not easy for anyone and we all resist it to some extent in the workplace (Evans, 2001). Managers are not exempt from this. Managerial resistance to change is not uncommon (Abbsi & Hollman, 1993).
Other person-based reasons are suggested in social psychology research. For example, when research respondents are busy or distracted, they tend to do self-ratings more quickly and they tend to give themselves more positive ratings than other times (Hixon & Swann, 1993; Paulhus, Graf, & Van Selst, 1989). Principals, as research abundantly illustrates, are very busy people.

Another social-psychology based reason might be that a motive in self-presentation is self-verification; that is, the desire to have others perceive us as we perceive ourselves. According to social psychologist William Swann (1987), we all are motivated to verify our self-concepts in others’ eyes. Whether our self-concepts are accurate or not is another question. Assessments of our own ability are generally self-serving (Dunning, 1993; Kunda, 1990). People do not generally count up their success and failures to form a self-impression as much as they actively interpret them to fit positive self-views (Dunning, 2001; Kunda, 1990; Miller & Ross, 1985).

A third possible reason drawn from social psychology research is the argument that people like to present themselves in a positive light to others and that workplace self-evaluations are most often more favorable than those made by workers’ peers and supervisors (Campbell & Lee, 1988; Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988). Additionally, research evidence indicates that power level and positive self-evaluations are related: the more power a person has in an organization the more likely that he or she will deliver a positive self-rating (Georgesen & Harris, 1998).

A fourth possible reason is what social psychologists refer to as metacognitive insight, which refers to the skill of anticipating the likely accuracy and error of one’s
responses (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994; Yzerbyt, Lories, & Dardenne, 1998). This lack of insight often extends to situations in which people attempt to estimate their performance on a particular task or test (Ehrlinger & Dunning, 2003).

Finally, some of these administrators may be experiencing a behavior described in Brehm’s (1956) reactance theory. We all would prefer to be asked than to be ordered. When we feel that our freedom to think, feel, and act as we want is compromised, we react negatively and try to restore our own position and definition. Sometimes, when others come on too strongly with us, we can move in a direction opposite to what they advocate. If principals feel that certain standards or behaviors are being forced upon them, they may react against that pressure.

Not one of these reasons alone, job-based or personally-based, can possibly explain why all the principals responded as they did. Together, however, some may explain why some principals answered as they did and others explain why other principals answered as they did.

Research design: Labeling categories. Then there is the possibility of measurement error. The values assigned to the different levels of the rating scale included in a self-report measure can convey information to the respondent regarding what is deemed a “normal” or average response. That is, the midpoint of the scale can inadvertently appear to represent the average response. Respondents tend to use these rating scales as a frame of reference to determine their own behavioral frequency responses. Participants in a study might interpret the question differently depending on the response alternatives provided (Schwarz, 1999). Perhaps the use of alternative
labeling choices for this study would have provided different results. It may have been
difficult for respondents to indicate that there was an “extreme” need for further
training.

This study utilized a self-report survey that was administered to principals of
Class A school districts in Nebraska. The credibility of self-report surveys is always
suspect (Pace, 1985; Pike, 1995; Turner & Martin, 1984). Self-report measures offer
several advantages; however, the accuracy of such surveys can be affected by the
respondents’ inability or unwillingness to provide accurate information in response to a
question (Aaker, Kumar & Day, 1998; Wentland & Smith, 1993). People tend to
provide accurate responses when questions are about their past behavior.
Unfortunately, respondents generally provide inaccurate information to questions that
explore sensitive areas or which tend to put them in an awkward, potentially
embarrassing position (Bradburn & Sudman, 1988). Self-report measures also allow
respondents to alter their true responses to suit their self-presentation motives. In some
cases, respondents wish to present themselves in a socially desirable way requiring
them to alter their true responses in order to appear more “normal” or acceptable to the
researcher (Victorin, Haag-Gronlund, & Skerfving, 1998).

Many survey instruments are designed in such a way that they can inadvertently
influence participants’ responses. More specifically, certain characteristics of the
measurement tool itself can compromise the validity of self-report measures (Victorin et
al., 1998). Participants’ responses to questionnaire items can be influenced by
questionable wording, format, or context. The quality of the data obtained from such
quuestionnaires is compromised (Schwarz, 1999).

Second Finding: Interest in Training for Data Analysis and Communication With Teachers

It is not surprising that the areas where principals most indicated an interest in
further professional development were (1) how to interpret test data to measure
academic achievement (M=3.40, SD=1.20); (2) how to review student achievement
with teachers (M=3.31, SD=1.18); and (3) how to assist teachers in improving
classroom instruction (M=3.37, SD=1.12). How to interpret test data is at the heart of
the accountability programs in both the state (STARS) and nation (NCLB), and
conferencing with teachers on virtually any evaluative subject is a continuing principal
challenge.

Data analysis. Intuition has long been a driving force in administrative decision
making (Creighton, 2001; Davis & Davis, 2003), and the decision making process of
principals has always had a political dimension (AASA, 2002). Data-driven decision
procedures can be a substantial challenge for administrators.

There is argument that assessment and data analysis training in administrator
preparation has been weak or non-existent (Bernhardt, 1998; Creighton, 2001).
Consequently, principals commonly underutilize the data available to them (Noyce,
Perda, & Traver, 2000). Many principals are satisfied to use limited variables, such as
test scores, attendance, and student safety records, instead of assessing a broad range of
student and staff variables and organizational practices (Reeves, 2002). For this reason,
it is quite possible that many elementary school principals do not recognize the need for further training.

Principals also need to face their own attitudes. Research evidence indicates that many school leaders see data gathering as less than the best use of their time (Bernhardt, 1998). There is evidence that indicates how principals respond to data use and data-driven decision making depends on their comfort level and their proficiency in using data (Mathews, 2002). Some principals believe that data-driven approaches neither simplify their lives nor increase their efficacy. Additionally, some school leaders are cynical and believe that data are collected only for mandated compliance reporting (Doyle, 2003).

Some principals react to data analysis with fear, distrust, and resistance (Lashway, 2002). Even when principals are accepting of data-driven decision making and data-based effectiveness measures, many struggle to incorporate the practices into their schools (McLeod & Creighton, 2001).

**Teacher conferencing.** There is research evidence indicating that supervisors and managers in both public and private sector organizations find that communicating performance appraisals to their subordinates among the most difficult of their tasks (Beer, 1988; Fried, Tieges, & Bellamy, 1992; Ilgen, Peterson, Martin, & Boeschen, 1981). Conveying evaluations to teachers can be difficult according to Rothberg and Fenner (1991). Several respondents in their study indicated that they would like evaluations to be completed by someone other than their principal or building level administrator. Respondents also indicated that principals were not trained well enough,
did not know enough about teaching, or did not know enough about their discipline or
grade level. Research shows that employees are more likely to accept as accurate those
evaluations based on objective fact and teaching evaluations are highly subjective.
Teachers' perceptions of an effective evaluation process focus on the principals'
knowledge, skills, and abilities as both experienced educator and educational leader
(Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003). Teachers' perceptions of evaluation accuracy
vary from person to person and school to school. Many teachers believe that the
evaluator should know and respect their knowledge and teaching philosophy and that
they should know a great deal about the students in a given class (Jensen, 1981).

Implementing the improvement component is one of the most challenging tasks
for the principal in the performance-based developmental evaluation process (Valentine,
“conformity with district policies rather than knowledgeable advocacy of appropriate
teaching practices” are anti-professional. Teachers are evaluated for “doing things
right”, rather than for “doing the right things” to meet the educational needs of students.
Therefore, Darling-Hammond argues, teachers cannot be held professionally
accountable for improving instruction to meet the intellectual needs of students; “they
can only be held accountable for following standard operational procedures” (p. 31).

Research has shown that managers tend to think they give more informal
feedback than they actually do (Clampitt, 1991) and what they do know, they may not
communicate very well. The 2003 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: An
Examination of School Leadership indicated that teachers and principals perceive the
amount of feedback given by the principal in strikingly different ways. Nearly half of
the elementary principals (54%) indicated that they provided teachers feedback on their
performance on a weekly basis, but only 12% of teachers reported this to be the case.
Sixty-one percent of the elementary teachers indicated that their principals provided
them feedback just 1-4 times a year compared to the 21% of principals indicating that
they provided feedback that often. Sixty-seven percent of the principals believed that
they met one-on-one with teachers on a weekly basis, but only a quarter of the teachers
said that they met with their principal that often. Eighty-three percent of the principals
said that they visited the classroom where a given teacher was teaching, but only 25%
of the teachers said that they had had that experience.

Beyond the problems of performance appraisal feedback, principals may find it
difficult to convince teachers of the value of data. Part of the difficulty in helping or
convincing many teachers about the new approach is that it runs counter to teacher
experience and culture. Teaching is an intuitive profession (McLoed & Creighton,
2001) for most, and principals may find it difficult to get them to change. The typical
teaching career is marked by a few years' work to establish competence and secure
tenure, followed by decades of performing the same work over and over with different
students (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). While teachers cannot be directly
insubordinate, they can effectively minimize their commitment and service if they wish.
The isolation of the classroom offers teachers a large portion of self-determination
(Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986; Rosenholtz, 1989).
Implications

**Implications for practice.** Although there were individual elementary principals in this study who reported a "definite" or "extreme" need for further professional development relating to instructional leadership behaviors (Likert scale scores of 4 or 5), the overall computed means for each of the key task areas barely reached the "some" need level (Likert scale score of 3). As a result, professional development planners should take into consideration the needs of individual principals rather than looking at group demographics. Experienced principals and those new to the field may not need the same kind, depth or length of further training. Beginning and experienced professionals most often have different needs (Alvy, 1979; Hinds, Patterson, & Pfeffer, 2001; Parkay & Hall, 1992). The planning and monitoring of individual improvement plans is very time consuming; however, it is an important process that fosters staff development in a systematic, individualized fashion (Clough, 1991).

While many professional development programs have placed an emphasis on the individual’s interests, academic discipline, certificate renewal, career path and choice, there are still many "one-size-fits-all" workshops and training programs that are offered by a central agency without regard for the needs of the school or individual participants (Renyi, 1998).

**Implications for research.** This study was limited to elementary principals of Class A school districts in Nebraska during the 2003-2004 school year. Further implications for research are the following.
1. Further research needs to be carried out using a broader range of principals in Nebraska and other regions of the country. To reduce the possibility of measurement error, either this instrument should be modified or a completely new instrument should be developed, possibly relabeling the Likert scaled items. The inclusion of one or more open-ended questions would allow principals the opportunity to communicate their opinions in another format. As exploratory as principal perception is in this area, a qualitative approach might be appropriate.

2. Secondary principals might be surveyed to determine if there are similar perceptions across varying levels of school administration. The results of this study imply that principals are largely satisfied with their skills. It’s reasonable to wonder if this is also true for secondary principals.

3. A study should be conducted to identify the instructional leadership behaviors that are being addressed in principal preparation programs. Educational administration students and professors should be the focus of such a study.

Conclusion

Principals in this study did not indicate a general need for further professional development relating to the instructional leadership key task areas or individual instructional leadership behaviors. Caution should be used when interpreting these findings. Alone, the results of this study might misrepresent the actual need for future professional development. Consequently, a focus on the individual needs of elementary principals should be taken into consideration when developing professional development activities.
References


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California, The Center for the Study of Evaluation, Graduate School of Education.


APPENDIX A

Survey Instrument

Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale
### Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please indicate your personal need for further professional development for each of the following items relating to your role as an instructional leader.</th>
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<td>SCALE</td>
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</table>

#### Setting a vision, mission, and goals.

1. Establish a shared school vision, mission, and goal(s) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
2. Create an orderly school environment for learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
3. Maintain a visible presence throughout the school | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
4. Establish a positive school culture | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
5. Facilitate the school improvement process | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
6. Establish an internal communication system | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
7. Establish an external communication system | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
8. Act as a change agent | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
9. Act as a problem solver | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
10. Act as a decision maker | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
11. Establish a norm of continuous improvement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
12. Recognize student achievements | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
### Monitoring curriculum, instruction, and student progress

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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Knowledge of curriculum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Establish a collegial environment that supports collaborative efforts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Interpret test data to measure academic achievement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Establish high expectations for student performance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Review student achievement with teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Evaluate curricular programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Evaluate assessment programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Comply with mandated educational programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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### Supervising and supporting staff and teaching

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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Apply appropriate time management skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Provide opportunities for professional development of certified staff members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Establish high performance standards for teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Model high performance standards</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mentor new teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Select quality teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Establish an environment that supports staff innovation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Assist teachers in improving classroom instruction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Maintain positive interpersonal relationships with certified staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Maintain positive interpersonal relationships with classified staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Be accessible to teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Provide emotional support to staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Provide emotional support to students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>34. Create an environment that supports teacher autonomy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>35. Protect classroom instructional time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Provide resources to the instructional staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Recognize teacher achievements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Elementary Principal Instructional Leadership and Professional Development Rating Scale

**Demographic Information**

What is your current age?  

What is the current student population in your district?  

What is the current student population at your school?  

How many years have you been in your present position?  

How many years of experience did you have as a teacher before entering administration?  

What is your gender?  

_____ Male  _____ Female  

How many years have you been a principal?  

What is the percentage of your student population who qualifies for free/reduced lunch?  

What was your age when you were first appointed as principal?  

Indicate the grade levels in your school:  

_____ PK  _____ 3  _____ 7  

_____ K  _____ 4  _____ 8  

_____ 1  _____ 5  

_____ 2  _____ 6  

What is the highest degree you have earned?  

_____ Bachelor’s Degree  

_____ Master’s Degree  

_____ Ed.S. (Specialist’s Degree)  

_____ Ed.D. or Ph.D.  

PPDRS - Page 4 of 4
APPENDIX B

Online Letter to Principals
Dear Nebraska Administrator:

We would like you to complete the Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale (PPDRS) which is a self-assessment instrument that measures principals' perceptions relating to their professional development needs.

The survey that is linked to this letter contains the Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale (PPDRS). The PPDRS should take you about 10 minutes to complete. Your candid responses to the PPDRS will make it possible for us to determine the professional development needs of elementary principals in Nebraska. We will be analyzing the responses of administrators as a group, not individually. Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be completely anonymous. There will be no way to link you to your responses.

Please follow the instructions given on the survey. Please respond to every question.

Thank you for participating!

Michael Smith
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Click here to go to the survey.
APPENDIX C

Mailed Letter to Principals
Dear Nebraska Administrator:

We would like you to complete the Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale (PPDRS) which is a self-assessment instrument that measures principals' perceptions relating to their professional development needs.

The enclosed survey contains the Elementary Principal Professional Development Rating Scale (PPDRS). The PPDRS should take you about 10 minutes to complete. Your candid responses to the PPDRS will make it possible for us to determine the professional development needs of elementary principals in Nebraska. We will be analyzing the responses of administrators as a group, not individually. Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be completely anonymous. There will be no way to link you to your responses.

Please follow the instructions given on the survey. Please respond to every question.

Thank you for participating!

Sincerely,

Michael Smith
University of Nebraska at Omaha
APPENDIX D

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval of Study
June 15, 2004

Michael Smith
11708 S. 27th Street
Bellevue, NE 68123

IRB#: 208-04-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: Elementary School Principal’s Perceptions of Their Needs for Professional Development in Instructional Leadership

Dear Mr. Smith:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of three years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest Prentice, Ph.D./IRB
Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB
EDP/gdk