# ABSTRACT

Timothy W. Mudd, BUTTS, BOOKS, BUSES, AND BETTER INSTRUCTION: HOW A PRINCIPAL CAN DEVELOP ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS INTO EQUITY-CENTERED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS BY JUGGLING TASKS TOGETHER (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023.

The study aimed to build the capacity of assistant principals to identify and support teachers in using equitable classroom practices. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) study in a rural North Carolina school district included a team of the principal and two assistant principals as co-practitioner researchers (CPR) to study how the principal could develop the knowledge and skills of the assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Findings from the study reveal that principals can develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders by creating specific conditions and spaces, making the development of the assistant principal a priority, and juggling tasks with the assistant principal. Additionally, this study provides insight into how principals can intentionally work with assistant principals to simultaneously become better at conducting classroom observations, engaging teachers in post-observation coaching conversations, and ultimately becoming better equity-centered leaders.

Throughout three inquiry cycles, the CPR group utilized the plan, do, study, act cycle of inquiry and pushed against the current practice of assistant principals' focus on "butts, books, and buses." In addition, we utilized Community Learning Exchange axioms and pedagogies (Guajardo et al., 2016), created Assistant Principal-Networked Improvement Communities (Bryk et al., 2015), engaged in classroom observations using the Calling-On Observation Tool, and engaged teachers in post-observation coaching conversations as we studied how a principal can help assistant principals become equity-centered instructional leaders.

BUTTS, BOOKS, BUSES, AND BETTER INSTRUCTION: HOW A PRINCIPAL CAN DEVELOP ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS INTO EQUITY-CENTERED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS BY JUGGLING TASKS TOGETHER.

A Dissertation
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife.

You make me better.

I look forward to our next adventure together!

Thank you, Dr. Kelly Anne Shelton Mudd.

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# CHAPTER 1: FOCUS OF PRACTICE

"Butts, books, and buses," anyone who has been an assistant principal has probably heard that phrase. Why? Because discipline (butts), keeping up with textbooks (more recently laptops), and coordinating buses are three of the most common responsibilities of an assistant principal. Managing these tasks is a rite of passage for assistant principals, often delegated to the team's newest assistant principal. Meanwhile, a focus on equity-centered classroom instructional practices is missing from an assistant principal's typical responsibilities list.

Principals are the instructional leader of the school. As a result, they assume the majority of the instructional responsibilities. In North Carolina, the school's growth and academic performance determine the principal's salary, incentivizing the principal to control all instructional duties. It is no wonder that principals relegate assistant principals to "butts, books, and buses." The problem with this practice is that assistant principals go on to become principals. When assistant principals become principals, they are typically ill-prepared for their new job because most of their experience is with "butts, books, and buses." Assistant Principals lack the knowledge and expertise to identify effective equity-centered instructional practices and provide quality instructional feedback to teachers.

Assistant principals should have instructional responsibilities. Therefore, the Focus of Practice (FoP) of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study was to develop assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Below, I discuss the rationale for the FoP, the assets and challenges related to the FoP, the significance this study has on practice, policy, and research, and how the FoP connects to equity. I continue with an overview of the research methodologies and research questions. Finally, I conclude with this study's confidentiality, ethical considerations, and research limitations.

## Rationale

A 2001 Public Agenda survey of superintendents and principals indicated that 80% of superintendents and 69% of principals think that leadership training in schools of education is out of touch with the realities of today's districts (Farkas et al., 2001). In my experience, assistant principals also fall through the cracks in obtaining professional development focusing on instructional practices, leaving them ill-equipped to support classroom teachers. If schools of education and principal preparation programs do not adequately prepare future administrators to be instructional leaders, current district and school leaders must fill the void. To fill this void, district and school leaders can and should develop assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders.

The principal is responsible for school-wide student achievement, requiring them to ensure quality instruction occurs in every classroom. Principals must identify weak instructional practices and work with teachers to replace weak practices with more effective, equity-centered strategies. In larger schools, the principal alone cannot observe teachers, identify good equity-centered instructional strategies, and conduct meaningful feedback conversations with every teacher. Moreover, because they cannot do it well alone, it becomes haphazard, meaningless, and, unfortunately, a waste of time. Furthermore, a national survey from the U.S. Department of Education found that nearly 20% of principals leave their position every year (Goldring & Taie, 2018). With that much turnover in the principal position, students need assistant principals ready to be equity-centered instructional leaders.

These reasons clarify the FoP: Develop assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. The principal is uniquely positioned due to the close working relationship with assistant principals to solve this problem by helping assistant

principals develop the knowledge and skills needed to become equity-centered instructional leaders. By providing assistant principals with intentional instructional learning opportunities and coaching, principals can develop the next generation of effective school leaders, despite the failure of leadership preparation programs.

## Analysis of Assets and Challenges

Working with teachers and assistant principals at Green Square Middle School (GSMS), I held an informal Community Learning Exchange (CLE) to inquire into the FoP. A CLE is an opportunity for a group of people to exchange ideas about a topic of particular interest to the group. Guajardo et al. (2016) developed five axioms that ground the design of a CLE. This study relied on two axioms: (1) Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes, and (2) The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns. With these two axioms in mind, five teachers from different grade levels and subject areas and both assistant principals from GSMS engaged in a world café activity at the CLE. I posted six questions around the room, and each participant had a different color marker. Participants spent two minutes responding to one of the questions. After two minutes, participants rotated to the next question and repeated the process until they responded to all the questions. The world café activity allowed CLE participants to engage in conversations about the assets and challenges of developing assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders.

As part of the informal CLE, we completed a modified version of the fishbone originally designed by Bryk et al. (2015). While our modification changed the major and smaller bones, we kept the integrity of using the fishbone to analyze a problem or situation without assigning blame. Figure 1 illustrates the fishbone created during the informal CLE. We filled the bones
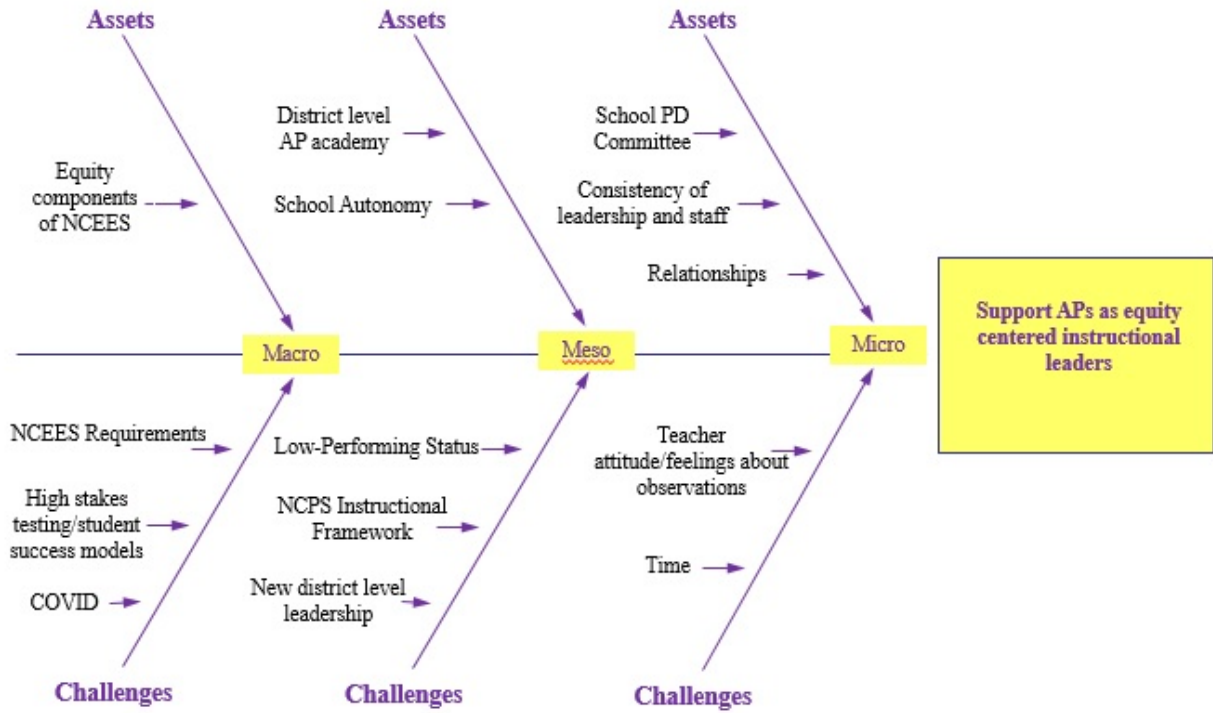
*Figure 1*. Fishbone of assets and challenges.

with the assets and challenges of developing assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

The macro-level assets and challenges of the FoP refer to the overarching policies and procedures present in the State of North Carolina and at the federal level from the United States Department of Education. The meso-level refers to the assets and challenges of the FoP within the school district of Colorful County Public Schools. Finally, at the micro-level are the assets and challenges of the FoP within the school, classrooms, and staff of Green Square Middle School, a traditional middle school within the Colorful County Public School system.

**Macro-Level Assets and Challenges**

During the CLE, we identified multiple items that could be assets or challenges to developing assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Below I discuss in more detail how high-stakes testing and student success models and the North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System (NCEES) could serve as an asset or challenge to the FoP.

North Carolina's student success model is an A-F grading system for schools. All schools in North Carolina receive a School Performance Grade (SPG). Every elementary, middle, and high school receives an SPG based on 80% academic proficiency and 20% on academic growth. Depending on the level, the State calculates the proficiency scores from End-of-Grade tests, End-of-Course tests, graduation rates, ACT scores, and high-level math completion. The State calculates the growth score using a value-added metric on End-of-Grade and End-of-Course tests. In addition, the state and federal governments label schools as low performing if they do not meet specific criteria. These low-performing designations and SPG have resulted in districts, schools, and teachers relying on test prep materials and pre-packaged interventional materials to

improve the school SPG. North Carolina's SPG system is a challenge to the FoP because 80% of the SPG comes from academic proficiency scores. This system often forces districts, schools, and teachers to focus on test prep resources and strategies instead of other more equitable instructional practices.

The North Carolina Educator Effectiveness System (NCEES) is the mandated teacher evaluation system for North Carolina public schools and, thus, teachers. But, like most one-size-fits-all systems, it does not fit any system well. First, NCEES has five standards and dozens of elements, making it time-consuming for school leaders. Second, it is stressful for many teachers who feel like they have to demonstrate every element. As a result, teachers and administrators commonly view NCEES simply as something they have to do. Finally, because NCEES is ultimately an evaluation system, it is challenging to use any part of the observation process to engage in coaching conversations with teachers.

While North Carolina's SPG system and NCEES provide challenges, they also have components that could be assets to the FoP. Eighty percent of the SPG comes from academic proficiency, while 20% of the SPG comes from student academic growth. Emphasizing the growth component of the SPG system with teachers during coaching conversations is an asset to school leaders as they work to improve equitable classroom practices. Additionally, school administrators can use a variety of equity-focused indicators within NCEES as the foundation for coaching and teacher reflection discussions.

**Meso-Level Assets and Challenges**

The meso level of the FoP refers to the Colorful County Public School (CCPS) system. Members identified the district Assistant Principal Academy and GSMS autonomy as assets during the CLE. In addition, the participants identified the District's low-performing status, the

CCPS Instructional Framework, and new District leadership as potential challenges facing the FoP.

In 2018, CCPS created an Assistant Principal Academy. Assistant Principals meet monthly for four hours and participate in activities predetermined by district leadership. The program aims to build assistant principals' knowledge and skills and prepare them for future roles as principals. The program's goals and structure evolved over the past two years and will likely evolve again with new district leadership. Since this FoP focused on developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders, having a district-level program focusing on the development of assistant principals is undoubtedly an asset, and this study should serve as a value add to the Assistant Principal Academy.

A challenge of particular concern to teachers during the CLE was the Colorful County Public School (CCPS) Instructional Framework. Since the district introduced the CCPS Instructional Framework three years ago, the district has spent considerable time and effort to ensure all teachers include all components of the CCPS Instructional Framework in all lessons. The effort involves frequent district walkthroughs, observation protocols, and teacher professional development. Aligning the data-based observations and coaching conversations to the CCPS Instructional Framework was challenging and a necessary step to ensure teachers were not overwhelmed.

Another challenge was that Colorful County Public Schools had new leadership. With new leadership comes the uncertainty of district-level change. There was uncertainty about the potential changes in the district at large. As a result, ensuring the FoP works and aligns with the overarching district plan was challenging.

**Micro-Level Assets and Challenges**

The micro-level analysis of the FoP focuses on Green Square Middle School (GSMS). During the CLE, we identified multiple items in place at GSMS that serve as assets or challenges that develop assistant principals' knowledge and skills in becoming equity-centered instructional leaders. The identified assets are the GSMS professional development committee, the consistency of leadership and staff, and the relationships between staff and administration. The identified challenges are teachers' attitudes and feelings about observations and time constraints.

During the CLE, all participants agreed that trust builds solid relationships. Moreover, relationships are essential to meaningful learning experiences. The GSMS administrative team worked together for three years, building solid relationships. The CLE participants believe relationships within GSMS keep teacher turnover low. This consistency allowed the administrative team and teachers to build positive, supportive, and trusting relationships. Solid relationships create the space for administrator vulnerability to learn with teachers, and these relationships are an asset to the FoP.

Teachers' attitudes and feelings toward observations challenged the FoP. While there were relationships and trust, teachers at the CLE expressed stress and nervousness when principals or assistant principals observed their classes. These feelings come from teachers wanting approval and teachers wanting principals and assistant principals to see that they are doing a good job. Nervousness also comes from the overwhelming number of frameworks and initiatives teachers feel like showing off when someone comes into the classroom. In addition, teachers at the CLE continually talked about their experience with observations from a deficit mindset. Teachers generally viewed classroom observations as just another required activity, and teachers were relieved when the process was over. Unfortunately, because CLE participants

described when a principal or assistant principal entered a room for an observation as a stressful experience and did not have many examples of how an observation had improved their teaching, this might be our biggest challenge.

Another challenge to the FoP was time. The job of an educator (teacher, principal, or assistant principal) never ends. Educators never seem to have enough time in an eight-hour workday to complete their required tasks. Educators often take work home to complete in the evening or over the weekend. During the CLE, teachers and assistant principals mentioned that finding time after an observation to provide feedback and engage in reflective conversation was challenging.

### Significance

The significance of how a principal develops assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders is broad-ranging. These areas of significance include principal preparation programs within schools of education, in-service assistant principal professional development, job descriptions, duties, and expectations of assistant principals. In addition, many assistant principals go on to be future principals; therefore, the value of this FoP extends to principal preparation, selection, and development.

### Context

This Participatory Action Research (PAR) study occurred at GSMS. Green Square Middle School is a traditional middle school serving approximately 850 students in grades six through eight. Green Square Middle School has one principal, two assistant principals, and 47 certified teachers. Over the past five years, GSMS improved from a School Performance Grade (SPG) of a D and a growth rating or did not meet growth to receiving an SPG of a C and a

growth rating of exceeding growth. Green Square Middle School exceeded growth and maintained a C SPG for the past two years.

**Practice**

This FoP pushes against the current practice of assistant principals' focus on "butts, books, and buses." Instead, it shifts the focus and challenges assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. This shift has a domino effect on other assistant principals and principal practices that is far-ranging. For example, how does a principal delegate responsibility to assistant principals, how does a principal allocate his time to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals, and how do assistant principals observe classrooms and have post-observation conversations with teachers?

**Policy**

This study has several implications for local policy changes. First, assistant principals engaged in classroom observations and coaching conversations with teachers. Potential policy implications exist for the specific observation tools currently used to evaluate teachers and administrators. Potential implications exist for the CCPS Assistant Principal Academy and other assistant principal development programs.

**Research**

The role of the principal is ever-changing. With the increased focus on high-stakes testing and student success models, there is an emphasis on the importance of instructional leadership. This study plays a significant role in educational research. It uncovers how assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. In addition, with a focus on equity, this study intends to contribute to the research on equitable classroom practices and equity-based coaching conversations between assistant principals and teachers.

Finally, this study contributes to the research on the role of the principal. It uncovers how a principal uses a distributive leadership approach to instructional leadership.

## Connection to Equity

Adopting an SPG system in North Carolina and implementing a principal salary schedule tied to school growth ratings has made instructional leadership the main focus of school leaders. Despite the emphasis on instructional leadership, many school leaders do not clearly understand how to help teachers improve classroom instruction and outcomes for all students. This study builds on Rigby and Tredway's (2015) equity work to support assistant principals in developing the knowledge and skills necessary to become equity-centered instructional leaders. As an administrative team, we used the work of Bryk et al. (2015) to support teachers in improving equitable classroom practices. While multiple frames support my focus of practice, two are particularly interesting. First, I discuss how the psychological framework affects students, teachers, and school leaders. Then I analyze how the political framework influences school improvement and reform efforts.

### Psychological Framework of the Focus of Practice

Steele (2010) discusses the influence stereotypes have on human behavior. These "stereotype threats," as Steele terms them, can have both positive and negative effects. For example, boys are positively stereotyped as better at math and science, while girls are negatively stereotyped as struggling with or uninterested in math and science. In addition, these stereotypes affect students of color, who are stereotyped as lazy and less intelligent than white students. At GSMS, where our student population is over 60% of students of color, teachers must acknowledge these stereotypes and implement strategies that help students overcome their stereotype threat. This study assists assistant principals in identifying stereotype threats during

observations and engaging teachers in coaching conversations that result in equitable classroom practices that reduce stereotype threats.

To help students overcome stereotype threats, teachers must acknowledge and overcome what McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) call "equity traps." As McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) state, "classrooms…are inequitable for children of color…some substantial portion of that inequity is caused by the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors of teachers" (p. 628). While some teachers may be aware that their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors negatively impact students of color, I believe most teachers are unaware they have or express these attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors. Therefore, I argue that school leaders must help teachers identify these attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors and implement more equitable classroom practices.

School leaders can impact teacher practice and improve student outcomes for all students by engaging teachers in reflection and conversation about equity issues. Eubanks et al. (1997) state, "Teachers are seldom, if ever, given the opportunity to do active learning and engage in reflective discourse about the effects of their work" (p. 154). This participatory action research study focuses on growing assistant principals as equity-centered instructional leaders by providing them with the knowledge and skills needed to engage teachers in reflective discourse about their classroom practices.

**Political Framework of the Focus of Practice**

Politicians pushing their preferred legislation regarding school choice, school accountability, and curriculum often develop narratives around public schools. These narratives are often negative (e.g., falling U.S. rankings compared to other countries, there are too many bad teachers that cannot be fired, etc.). Recently, more and more school leaders, teachers, and

teacher organizations are trying to deconstruct these narratives; engaging in this process requires teachers and school leaders to understand what Gutierrez (2013) refers to as the "political nature of teaching" (p. 8).

In addition to deconstructing narratives about public education, teachers and school leaders must operate within (or more accurately, overcome) the guidelines of reform policies implemented by politicians. While there are, and have been, many good reform ideas in theory, there is a long history of failure in reform policies and ideas enacted by politicians. These reforms usually fail because politicians lack actual knowledge of how schools work. In addition, there is typically considerable pushback from teachers and school leaders, who are often left out of the process (Bryk et al., 2015). This study aims to correct the issues typically found in school reform measures by including school leaders and teachers in the improvement process. Assistant principals will work with a small group of teachers in Assistant Principal Network Improvement Communities to diagnose problems using data-based observation tools and then meet to co-design solutions to address those problems.

In the following section, I provide an overview of Participatory Action Research and the purpose of this study. I then provide the research questions that guide this study and the theory of action that supports it. Finally, I explain the FoP in detail and the proposed study activities.

### Participatory Action Research Design

Participatory Action Research (PAR) differs from traditional qualitative research in that the research participants control the study. Building on and combining the ideas of group dynamics, organizational learning, and thematic research, PAR uses cycles of inquiry to address a particular problem within an organization or community. The cycles of inquiry include developing a plan, acting to implement the plan, studying the effects, reflecting on the impact of

adjusting the plan, and taking additional action (Herr & Anderson, 2014). For these reasons, as a current principal, I chose to design a PAR study.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The overarching research question was: How does a principal develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders? In addition, the study is further guided by three sub-questions:

- How do assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to help teachers identify equitable classroom practices?

- How do assistant principals collaborate with teachers to implement equitable classroom practices?

- How does the process of supporting assistant principals build my capacity as an educational leader?

**Theory of Action**

Personal experience related to the FoP indicated a need to equip assistant principals with the knowledge and skills required to become equity-centered instructional leaders. The theory of action was: *IF* assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders, *THEN* assistant principals may coach teachers to increase equitable classroom practices resulting in more equitable outcomes for students and a principal succession pipeline of better-prepared assistant principals.

**FoP Description**

The teacher has the most significant impact on individual student performance. To continue making the necessary improvements in student achievement, the principal must ensure that good teaching occurs in every classroom and replace poor instructional strategies with more

effective ones. The principal alone cannot provide this type of instructional leadership and coaching to every teacher in the building. To see school-wide improvement in instruction, principals must share some of the instructional responsibilities with assistant principals. For these reasons, the FoP became clear: Develop assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders.

**Study Activities**

The FoP is to develop assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Guajardo et al. (2016) assert that those closest to the problem are best suited to find solutions. Therefore, this PAR study proposes several activities that specifically and intentionally bring the people closest to this work together. With that in mind, I created a Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) group that consisted of the principal and two assistant principals at Green Square Middle School. The CPR group engaged in three PAR cycles beginning in Fall 2021 to explore how to collaboratively build the assistant principal's capacity to coach teachers on equitable classroom practices.

Each assistant principal created an Assistant Principal Network Improvement Community (AP-NIC) with three teachers. Each AP-NIC met regularly to identify equitable classroom practices and co-create a plan of action. In addition, the CPR group and the AP-NICs utilized the improvement science Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle described by Bryk et al. (2015). Figure 2 below is a timeline of the three PAR cycles of inquiry.

<div align="center"><strong>Confidentiality, Ethical Considerations, and Limitations</strong></div>

This study worked with current educational practitioners in the field, so maintaining confidentiality and addressing ethical considerations was vital. Therefore, before starting this
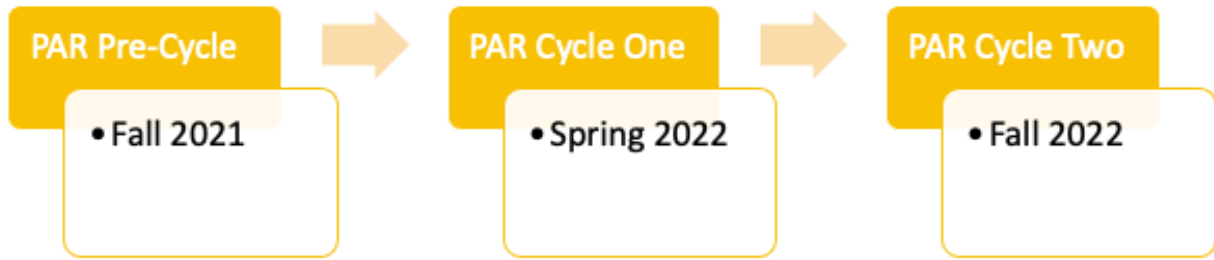
*Figure 2*. PAR cycle timeline.

study, I received approval from the East Carolina University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A) and completed a CITI certification program (see Appendix B). In addition, it was important to be clear about the limitations of the results of this study.

The participants in this study were adults who participated voluntarily. I met with participants individually, invited them to participate, explained how I would protect their identity, and had them sign a consent form (see Appendix C). Protecting the identity of the participants and securing collected data was a priority during this study.

## Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the study and provided the rationale behind the study. Principals must ensure that good teaching occurs in every classroom every day. To do this, principals must help teachers replace poor instructional practices with more effective strategies. Still, without more time in the day or the ability to clone themselves, principals cannot give individual teachers the instructional feedback needed to improve equitable classroom practices. In addition, current leadership preparation programs are not adequately preparing assistant principals; therefore, principals must provide in-service opportunities for assistant principals to develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders.

I conducted a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) with select staff from GSMS to examine the FoP, its context, assets, and challenges. Specifically, we wanted to learn about the knowledge and skills needed for assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. The fishbone highlights the assets and challenges identified during the CLE. The identified assets and challenges are part of the foundation of the research design discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, while I discuss the school context in Chapter 4.

The following chapters provide more detail about the PAR study. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical, normative, and empirical research surrounding the focus of practice. Chapter 3 details the research design and methodologies used, while Chapter 4 provides the context of this PAR study, including a description of the school and participants. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the two cycles of inquiry (PAR Cycle One: Spring 2022 and PAR Cycle Two: Fall 2022). Finally, Chapter 7 discusses key claims and a framework that emerged from the study.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The assistant principal is positioned to support the principal but, in many cases, is not given instructional responsibilities or has not received the preparation to take on instructional responsibilities. Oleszewski et al. (2012) call for "a new generation of leaders who can transform schools and provide instructional leadership unlike previous generations" (p. 264). Currently, school principal preparation programs are not adequately preparing graduates to step into principal or assistant principal roles and be instructional leaders (Farkas et al., 2001); therefore, it is incumbent upon current principals to develop the knowledge and skills of their assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on the roles of school leaders and what is necessary to develop assistant principals as equity-centered instructional leaders. As a result, I reviewed the literature in three key areas, as illustrated in Figure 3. First, I examined the literature on current and traditional school leaders, including principals and assistant principals. Next, I reviewed the literature regarding the different ways to build capacity. Finally, I reviewed the literature on equitable classroom practices, specifically academic discourse and culturally responsive teaching.

## Role of School Leaders

Leadership is important. It matters in nearly every sector of today's society. Education is no different. Leithwood et al. (2004) found that school "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5). A recent synthesis of research by Grissom et al. (2021) argues that school leaders are the lynchpin to improving student achievement in schools. They determined that the impact of school leaders "may not have been stated strongly enough" (p. 91). Because of their effects on
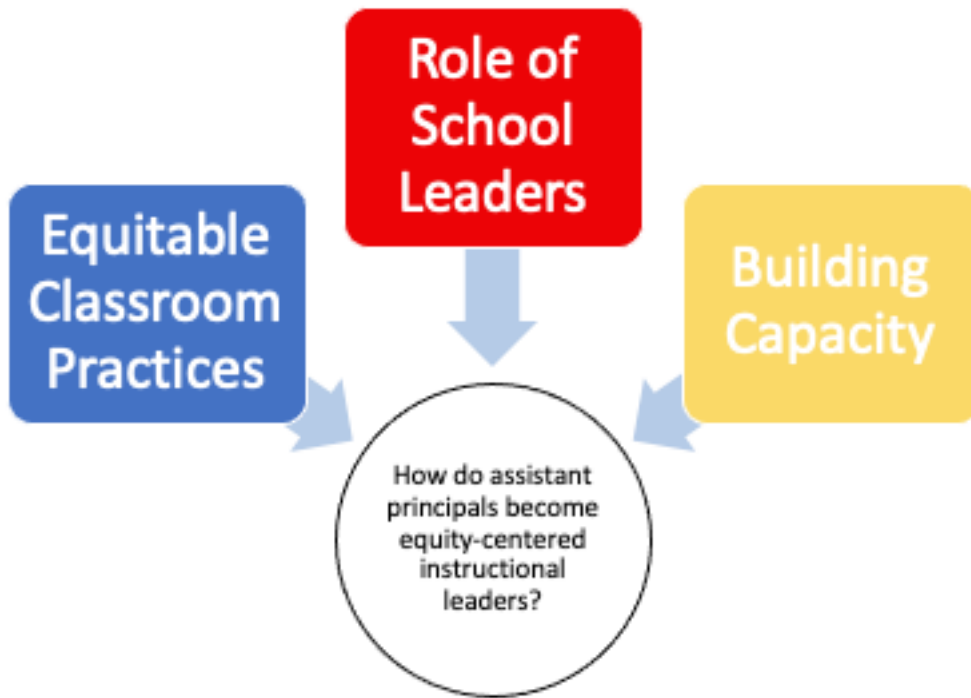
*Figure 3*. Literature bins impact on the FoP.

student learning, school leaders have come under more scrutiny from parents, lawmakers, and researchers.

Due to new policies and recent research, changes have occurred in what school leaders need to know, how school leaders allocate their time, and what outcomes school leaders are expected to achieve (Grissom et al., 2021). Similarly, Catano and Stronge (2007) studied the expectations of school leaders and determined that they must juggle a long list of competing tasks. They also determined that school leaders "will likely experience a significant amount of role conflict and role overload as they fulfill the perceptions of what they are expected to accomplish" (p. 328). Having to balance the competing interests of parents, teachers, and policymakers, plus the increased scrutiny created by high-stakes testing, school performance grades, and a focus on equitable outcomes, it is no wonder that burnout, overload, and turnover are high among school leaders (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Friedman, 2002; Grissom et al., 2021).

School leaders oversee the school's entire operation; as a result, some reformers and researchers extend the sphere of leadership past the principal and assistant principal to teachers, school-based teams, and others who can share the responsibility (Kafka, 2009). This PAR study focuses explicitly on how the principal develops the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to be equity-centered instructional leaders. Therefore, I review the relevant literature on the role of the principal and then discuss the limited literature on the role of the assistant principal.

**Role of a School Principal**

The role of a school principal has not always existed in schools. Early one-room schoolhouses typically had a single teacher or schoolmaster who answered directly to the local community. Over time, schools became larger as populations increased. As a result, one-room schoolhouses gave way to grade-level classes. With multiple teachers in the building, one of

them assumed "principal teacher" responsibilities. The principal teacher was responsible for assigning classes, managing discipline, maintaining the grounds, and teaching. As schools grew, the principal teacher eventually shed teaching responsibilities and became solely the principal (Kafka, 2009).

According to Kafka's (2009) historiography of the principalship, by the 1920s, the role of the principal looked similar to today. Through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, principal authority and prestige grew as a result of increasing district bureaucracy, the work of early principals to fight for authority, the establishment of national professional organizations for principals, expansion of their supervisory role over teachers, and by establishing themselves as local leaders. As a result, principals "were expected to lead and instruct teachers, to monitor students, to communicate with the district, and to work with parents and members of the wider community" (p. 324).

While Kafka (2009) argues "the role of the principal has not radically changed" (p. 329), other researchers paint a different picture. For example, Catano and Stronge (2007) argue that principals historically managed school operations and had limited responsibility for academics and instruction. However, Grissom et al. (2021) argue that changes in educational policy over the years have changed the principal's role and altered expectations, specifically, high-stakes testing and accountability. In addition, Grissom et al. (2021) argue that implementing educator evaluation systems at the state and local level is possibly causing the most significant shift in the role of school principals by changing how and to what extent principals engage with classroom instruction.

The growth of school choice legislation and policies is causing another major shift in the role of the principal. For the first time, principals find themselves competing with public charter

schools, requiring them to think about marketing and promoting their schools to maintain enrollment. In addition, an increased focus on equitable outcomes requires principals to shift their focus to new data points and find ways to communicate the success of underrepresented students in their schools (Grissom et al., 2021).

While there may not be a consensus within the research on whether the role of the school principal has changed dramatically over time, most researchers agree that the role of the school principal is multifaceted and ill-defined. For instance, school principals must choose to divide their time between an extensive list of responsibilities daily, including building operations, finances, community or parent relations, district functions, student affairs, personnel issues, planning and goal setting, instructional leadership, and professional growth. Because these responsibilities are essential, principals learn to allocate their time differently based on their context and personal preferences (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Farkas et al., 2001; Friedman, 2002; Goldring et al., 2007; Grissom et al., 2021; Kafka, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Spillane, 2013; Woulfin & Weiner, 2017). In addition, Catano and Stronge (2007) contend in their mixed-methods analysis of principals that "defining the role of the school principal is a difficult task due to a complex set of job responsibilities, skills necessary to perform the job and [personal] values" (p. 383).

To further support how school principals are stretched between responsibilities, Goldring et al. (2007) conducted a mixed-methods study of 46 principals from elementary, middle, and high schools to determine where principals allocated their time. Goldring et al. (2007) surveyed principals and asked them to complete daily logs to track the amount of time they spent in nine different categories:

1. building operations,

2. finances and financial support,

3. community or parent relations,

4. school district functions,

5. student affairs,

6. personnel issues,

7. planning/setting goals,

8. instructional leadership, and

9. professional growth.

Of the nine areas, the researchers found that principals spent most of their time in just two areas: student affairs (attendance, discipline, counseling, hall/cafeteria monitoring) and instructional leadership (monitoring/observing instruction, school restructuring of reform, supporting teachers' professional development, analyzing student data or work, modeling instructional practices, teaching a class).

Furthermore, Goldring et al. (2007) categorized the 46 principals into three groups based on how they allocated their time. The largest group they titled Eclectic Principals. These principals distribute their time more evenly across the different activities than the other two groups. The Eclectic Principal group is consistent with the literature and the work of Catano and Stronge (2007), that the work of the principal is fragmented and might not have a clear focus. Goldring et al.'s (2007) second group are the Instructional Leaders. As the name implies, this group spends most of its time on instructional leadership. The final and smallest group of principals is Student-Centered Leaders. These principals spend the most time on student affairs.

Goldring et al. (2007) did not study if one group of principals was more effective; however, they argue that principals are fragmented between instructional and managerial

activities and should focus more on instructional leadership. In addition, the school context influenced how the principal allocated their time. Eclectic Principals were more likely to work in elementary schools and less disadvantaged schools. Principals in more disadvantaged schools were more likely to focus on student affairs or instructional leadership.

As Goldring et al. (2007) argue, the school context will influence how the principal leads. While there is no one size fits all approach to the role of the principal, Grissom et al. (2021), in their empirical analysis of the research since 2000, identified four domains that produce positive school outcomes. They are:

1. Engaging in focused interactions with teachers,

2. Building a productive climate,

3. Facilitating collaboration and professional learning communities, and

4. Managing personnel and resources strategically (p. xv)

The meta-research concludes that instructional and managerial tasks are two areas where principals spend their time. Goldring et al. (2007) were surprised to find that principals spent as much time as they did on instructional leadership; however, they, along with others (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004), argue that principals should spend more time on instructional leadership. A major problem with this recommendation is that principals and researchers do not have a clear understanding of what that entails (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004; Rigby & Tredway, 2015).

What is clear is that school principals are important. Leithwood et al. (2004) established that principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student learning. Grissom et al. (2021) confirmed Leithwood et al.'s (2004) finding and went a step further, stating the effects of the principal have been understated. In addition, Grissom et al. (2021) quantify the impact of

effective principals as adding additional student learning equivalent to 2.9 months in mathematics and 2.7 months in reading. Furthermore, they found that replacing a below-average principal with an above-average principal would positively affect student learning greater than 70% of mathematics interventions and 50% of reading interventions. Not only are effective principals important for student achievement, but they also have positive impacts on student absenteeism, school discipline, and teacher job satisfaction (Grissom et al., 2021).

The literature on the impact and importance of school principals is clear on two points. First, the role of the principal matters for student and school performance (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004). Second, the role of the principal is complex and full of overwhelming responsibilities (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Farkas et al., 2001; Friedman, 2002; Goldring et al., 2007). Principals are called on to "accomplish great things with little support, and to be all things to all people" (Kafka, 2009, p. 328), but principals are limited by time and attention (Goldring et al., 2007). It is no wonder then that one of the leading causes of burnout among principals is work overload (Friedman, 2002). This burnout results in principals becoming younger, having less experience, and staying at the same school for shorter tenures, disproportionately impacting the highest need schools (Grissom et al., 2021).

**Role of an Assistant Principal**

Like the principal, the role of the assistant principal has not always existed but has become more prevalent in recent years. Goldring et al. (2021) found that between 1990-91 and 2015-16, the number of assistant principals increased by over 80% from 43,960 to 80,590 and that the number of schools with an assistant principal increased from about one-third to over one-half, but no data or research provides the exact number of assistant principals currently in the United States. Despite the increase in the number of assistant principals, there is limited research

on the role. In addition, knowledge gaps exist in many areas of the role, including how principals decide which tasks to assign to assistant principals, what are the most effective approaches to prepare and develop assistant principals, and how assistant principals can best advance equity for students and teachers (Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002).

According to Goldring et al. (2021), "policymakers, practitioners, or researchers have not reached consensus about what the assistant principal role should entail" (p. 1). Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) determine that the assistant principal is necessary for education despite the lack of clarity around the role. While there is no standard job description for assistant principals, many list similar duties and responsibilities as the principal but specifically note that they assist or help the principal. In practice, most principals assign duties to the assistant principal focused on student discipline, administrative tasks, management, and instructional leadership (Brown & Rentschler, 1973; Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012).

While it is recognized that assistant principals perform many duties, Oleszewski et al. (2012) reviewed studies of assistant principals. They found that student discipline/management was consistently one of the top duties from 1970-2011, while instructional leadership did not appear until the 2000s. In a quantitative study of 125 assistant principals in Maine, Hausman et al. (2002) grouped assistant principal responsibilities into seven categories: 1) instructional leadership, 2) personnel management, 3) interactions with education hierarchy, 4) professional development, 5) resource management, 6) public relations, and 7) student management. Assistant principals reported spending most of their time on student management and the least amount of time on instructional leadership and resource management.

More recent studies demonstrate an increase in the amount of time some assistant principals spend on instructional leadership. For example, in a mixed-methods study of 581 assistant principals in Alabama, Searby et al. (2017) found that a surprising 61% of assistant principals spent 50% or more of their time on instructional leadership tasks. While VanTuyle (2018) found that while instructional leadership tasks were a significant responsibility for most assistant principals, student discipline was still the primary responsibility for most.

Despite the lack of clarity around the position, or maybe because of the eclectic nature of the job, the assistant principal role is vital to school success. A 2018 National Association of Elementary School Principals survey revealed that 62% of principals said the number of assistant principals assigned to their building was insufficient to meet all students' needs. Recent studies also show that specific assistant principal duties positively affect student outcomes related to English language arts achievement, reduced discipline referrals, and school climate (Goldring et al., 2021). In addition, the assistant principal role is the most common training ground for aspiring principals, with nearly 80% of principals having previously been an assistant principal; however, the fragmented nature of the assistant principal role is not adequately preparing them for the principal role (Goldring et al., 2021; Grissom et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Searby et al., 2017).

Because of the importance of the assistant principal position, it is time to clarify the responsibilities and duties of the assistant principal. Oleszewski et al. (2012) argue, "the role of the assistant principal needs to be reconfigured" (p. 281). Others urge the assistant principal's role to be more instructionally focused (Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Searby et al., 2017; VanTuyle, 2018). Likewise, assistant principals themselves

want to take a more active role in instructional leadership. Searby et al. (2017) found that over 95% of assistant principals were very ready or somewhat ready to serve as instructional leaders.

## Building Capacity

One of the biggest questions in education today is how schools can improve students' outcomes. Much research has looked at how schools can improve, from Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to professional development and teacher training to using data to create interventions and supports. The research is clear, to effectively implement any school-wide change, leadership matters (Harris, 2004; Rigby & Tredway, 2015; Spillane et al., 2004). However, much of the research focuses on a single heroic school leader. Unfortunately, these extraordinary, heroic leaders are limited and cannot sustain their work while operating in isolation. (Leverett, 2002; Militello et al., 2009; Park & Datnow, 2009; Spillane, 2005) Therefore, more focus needs to be paid to other leaders in the school, building their capacity to effect change. Organizational leaders are the individuals who create the conditions for developing capacity at the school level, that is, the principal (Huggins et al., 2017; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

The authors of the literature define capacity in various ways. In addition, researchers discuss capacity as it relates not just to individuals but also to groups, organizations, communities, and others (Huggins et al., 2017). In this study, I use Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) definition of personal capacity. According to Mitchell and Sackney, personal capacity is "an amalgam of all the embedded values, assumptions, beliefs, and practical knowledge that principals carry with them and of the professional networks and knowledge bases with which they connect" (p.17). To this end, I continue the literature review by investigating four ways of

building school leaders' capacity: Equity-Centered Leadership, Distributive Leadership, Principal as Coach, and Learning Communities.

## Equity-Centered Leadership

Rigby and Tredway (2015) studied ten principals over three years. They created a "road map" with "specific examples of what equity in leadership practice looks like" for principals who want to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership" (p. 343). Rigby and Tredway (2015) conclude that principals need an equity frame, or an intentional structure, to guide their decisions intentionally and systematically when they encounter inequities. To do this, school leaders must engage in conversations about identity, model an equity frame for staff, create norms and protocols for equitable conversations, and share the research with others. Leverett (2002) agrees that others inside the organization must share the equity work. He calls for "many leaders in many different roles" and says that leaders must engage others at all levels of the organization to become what he calls "Equity Warriors" (p. 1).

## Distributed Leadership

Like many complex organizations, schools and school systems typically have a leadership hierarchy. In my experience, the principal is at the top of the hierarchy, although they report to a supervisor at the district level. Below the principal is assistant principals. Below them are sometimes instructional coaches and teachers below them. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that good schools have good leaders, and in an attempt to study and replicate their success, researchers have studied the impact of school leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004). Despite this work, there are gaps in the research, and there is little research on the "how" of school leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Spillane et al., 2004).

Spillane et al. (2004) provide an overview of how researchers have traditionally studied school leadership. According to Spillane et al. (2004), researchers have studied school leaders through various lenses, including the leaders' traits, the leaders' behaviors, contingency theory, cognitive tradition, and institutional theory. Building on the previous research, Spillane et al. (2004) contend that "in order to understand leadership practice, leaders' thinking and behavior and their situation need to be considered *together*, in an integrated framework" (p. 8). This framework they called the distributed leadership perspective. It is a different way to think about school leadership because it "shifts the unit of analysis from the individual actor or group of actors to the web of leaders, followers, and situation that give activity its form" (p. 10) Spillane et al. (2004) created the distributed leadership perspective similar to what Anhee-Benham and Napier (2002) describe in their description of the native view of leadership. The native view of leadership is a process within a particular context, bound by time and place, where the focus is shifted away from a single leader to the community and its leadership practices.

Distributed leadership is not a new idea, but it has been gaining a lot of attention as a tool to improve student achievement (Harris, 2004; Huggins et al., 2017; Spillane, 2005). Despite Spillane et al. (2004) creating a defined distributed leadership framework, researchers have no consensus on the definition as it has both theoretical and normative interpretations (Harris et al., 2007). Many researchers use distributed leadership interchangeably with terms like "shared leadership," team leadership," "democratic leadership," "collaborative leadership," and others (Harris, 2004; Harris et al., 2007; Huggins et al., 2017; Spillane, 2005). While distributed leadership has both theoretical and normative interpretations, "in a normative or applied sense distributed leadership is concerned with the active distribution of leadership authority and agency" (Harris et al., 2007).

Spillane (2013) argues that a distributed perspective of leadership is preferred to the "dominant perspective that privileges the thoughts and actions of the individual school leader" (p. 39). Heck and Hallinger (2009) conducted a longitudinal study of 195 elementary schools over four years to examine the effects of distributed leadership on academic achievement in mathematics. They found a reciprocal effect between distributed leadership and academic capacity; where distributed leadership was stronger, academic capacity was higher. In addition, the impact of distributed leadership also increased growth rates in mathematics (growth rates in other subjects were not studied). According to Heck and Hallinger (2009), an increase of one standard deviation in capacity results in a 40% increase in school mathematics growth.

Additional benefits of distributed leadership include the ability to build leadership capacity. Harris (2004) says, "distributing leadership equates with maximizing the human capacity within the organization" (p. 14), and Dimmock (2012) agrees, saying, "distributing, sharing, and extending leadership in a school has the potential to increase its organizational capacity" (p. 98). However, while distributed leadership has the potential to build capacity, it does not just happen—certain conditions must exist. The school principal is critical in creating the conditions that build capacity throughout the school (Goldring et al., 2021; Harris, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Huggins et al., 2017; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Park & Datnow, 2009; Searby et al., 2017; Spillane et al., 2004).

In a qualitative study of six principals in two different states, Huggins et al. (2017) identified three dispositions of principals who used distributed leadership to facilitate capacity building: They make an intentional commitment to the development of others, they understand that capacity building is a process, and the principals have a high tolerance for risk-taking.

Huggins et al. (2017) elaborate by stating that making a commitment to building capacity is necessary because relinquishing responsibility to others will make certain tasks more difficult and time-consuming. In addition, commitment is necessary because, as Harris (2012) argues, principals will need to undergo a personal transformation and develop new skills and approaches.

Commitment alone is not enough; intentionality is also important. For example, Leithwood et al. (2007), in their qualitative study of leadership distribution in a large district in Southern Ontario, found that planful alignment, that is, when distributed leadership has been given thoughtful consideration as to which individuals carry out certain tasks, had the largest positive organizational change. Spillane (2005) agrees that what is important is not that leadership is distributed but how leadership is distributed. Additionally, Harris et al. (2007) argue that improvement is not guaranteed by distributive leadership because "much depends on the way in which leadership is distributed, how it is distributed, and for what purpose" (p. 345).

Second, principals must understand that capacity building is a process. As leadership is distributed, people will make mistakes, but that is a necessary part of the process in order to learn. The principal must understand that distributing leadership to the assistant principal may cause tasks to take longer than if the principal completed them alone. Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) encourage principals to practice patience when mentoring and distributing leadership to assistant principals.

Finally, principals must have a certain tolerance for risk to allow others to take on leadership roles. This risk can come in two forms; first, principals have to be okay with other leaders taking the lead on projects they will ultimately be responsible for. Secondly, principals have to be with other leaders appearing or being more effective than they are. To distribute leadership to others, principals must get comfortable relinquishing some power to others within

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the school. This is a risky and difficult proposition for principals who are used to controlling these activities (Harris, 2004, 2012).

**Principal as Coach**

As I discussed previously in this chapter, principals and assistant principals have various roles and responsibilities that seldom overlap. Because assistant principals typically do not engage in the same tasks as principals, they are not prepared for if and when they become a principal (Brown & Rentschler, 1973; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Searby et al., 2017). Brown and Rentschler (1973) surveyed 120 elementary and secondary administrators, and "almost to a person it was agreed by the participants in the workshop that the assistant principal is often not prepared to assume the principalship" (p. 38). The most common reason provided by participants was that the principals give little thought to preparing assistant principals.

In an empirical study of the relationships between principals and assistant principals, Wong (2009) identified three models: chief assistant, partner, and mentor-learner. The primary relationship between the principal and the assistant principal was the chief assistant, while the mentor-learner was the least identified. Oleszewski et al. (2012), in their review of the literature on the development of assistant principals, confirmed that assistant principals are primarily chief assistants. Concluding that while the job duties of the assistant principal vary, "it is most common for the assistant principal to be subordinate to the principal" (p. 273).

The fact that assistant principals are subordinate to principals is not necessarily problematic or even surprising to most. What is problematic is the lack of coaching or mentor-learner relationships between principals and assistant principals. Many within the field of education have argued that principals need to take more of a coaching or mentor-learner role with their assistant principals (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013;

Marshall & Davidson, 2016). In addition, assistant principals have a desire for coaching and mentoring. Searby et al. (2017) sent surveys to every assistant principal in Alabama. Of the assistant principals who said they were "somewhat ready" or "not ready" for a principalship, 61.5% indicated the need for coaching in "improving the instructional program," 55.5% in focusing on learning, 49.5% in setting direction, and 47.5% in developing people (p. 416).

As Searby et al. (2017) showed, many assistant principals need coaching around instructional leadership; however, many researchers have discussed how a coaching or mentoring relationship between principals and assistant principals does not happen often or naturally (Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Searby et al., 2017; Wong, 2009). Principals must intentionally develop a coaching relationship with their assistant principals. Hilliard and Newsome (2013) argue that principals need to get to know their assistant principals and provide professional development in areas they need improvement.

When principals have engaged in coaching assistant principals, it has been beneficial. Searby et al. (2017) found that assistant principals who indicated they felt "very ready" or "somewhat ready" for principal positions were more likely to have engaged in one-on-one mentoring with their principals. In the same study, 64.9% of assistant principals found one-on-one mentoring from principals to be "effective" or "highly effective" (p. 417). Given the effectiveness and potential of coaching to build the knowledge and skills of assistant principals, Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) state, "the principal has a professional responsibility to train the assistant principal and to promote personal and professional growth" (p. 74). Atul Gwande (2011) argues, "coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance" (p. 53).

**Learning Communities**

Collaborative learning teams among educators have become common in schools since the 1990s. Schools regularly refer to these teams as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and typically organize them by teacher type, grade level, or subject area taught. Recently, other collaborative learning teams often used in the business and professional world have become more common in schools.

Since they became common in schools, PLCs are considered one of the more effective ways to improve instructional practices and student outcomes (DuFour et al., 2008; Woodland, 2016). Professional Learning Communities are more than just a group of teachers working together. According to DuFour et al. (2008), PLCs are:

> educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of
> collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students
> they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that
> the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning
> for educators (p. 14).

While drawing on improvement science, Woodland (2016) agrees with DuFour et al. (2008), saying that PLCs are "collaborative, networked communities" that use "systematic collective inquiry" to improve the quality of teacher instruction and student outcomes (p. 506).

Bryk et al. (2015) provide a history of failed reform efforts in schools and argue that for schools to improve, they need to learn fast and implement well. To do this, they argue for the use of Networked Improvement Communities (NICs). Bryk et al. (2015) define a NIC as "an intentionally designed social organization with a distinctive problem-solving focus; roles, responsibilities, and norms for membership; and the maintenance of narratives that detail what it

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is about and why affiliating with it is important" (pp. 195-196). There are four characteristics present in NICs. First, they have a common, well-specified aim. Second, they are guided by an understanding of the problem, they understand the system that produced the problem, and they share an idea about how to fix the problem. Third, they use improvement research to develop, test, and refine interventions. Finally, they are organized to scale and spread quickly throughout the field and organization.

Another type of collaborative learning team used in educational settings is a Community of Practice (COP; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Communities of Practice are "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2011; p. 1). According to Wenger (2011), there are three defining characteristics of a COP. First is a domain of interest, as all members are committed to the domain and have competence in the domain. The second is a community. A COP is not just a group of people; for it to be a community, the members must interact and learn together. Finally, is the practice. The members of the community must be practitioners with a shared practice. Farnsworth et al. (2016) point out that a COP differs from a NIC because a COP focuses on the learning of the participants. Communities of Practice is a theory of what learning is, but Farnsworth et al. (2016) acknowledge that it can inform how learning should be.

Research shows that capacity building and professional learning are most successful when conducted collaboratively (Teague & Anfara, 2012); therefore, principals need to create collaborative learning communities. Regardless of the type of learning community used, they all require strong relationships among their members. Whether creating a PLC, a COP, or a NIC, it is clear that there has to be a certain level of trust and respect for the learning community members to create a common purpose and shared commitment. (Whitcomb et al., 2009).

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## Equitable Classroom Practices

Researchers have shown that teachers treat students differently, students know it, and it negatively impacts student performance (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007; Weinstein, 2002). In her qualitative research, Weinstein (2002) describes how students see their position in the classroom from the students' perspective. In Weinstein's research, students describe hurt feelings, hopelessness, and reduced effort because of teachers' differential treatment and low expectations. Teachers primarily direct differential treatment and low expectations to students of color. In their quantitative meta-analysis, Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) found that teachers had more positive expectations for white students than for students of color, teachers made more negative referrals (e.g. special education and disciplinary) for students of color than white students, and teachers directed more positive and neutral speech to white students than students of color while directing the same amount of negative speech to all students. Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) conclude their study by saying, "Teachers' expectancies...are likely to contribute to a less than fair classroom climate and limited educational opportunities for African American and Latino/a students" (p. 271).

In addition to being treated differently in the classroom, students of color are more likely to have a negative experience in school (Weinstein, 2002). Current classroom practices are inequitable for students of color (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). In addition, current classroom practices result in students of color being suspended at higher rates, completing high school at lower rates, and enrolling in college in lower numbers than their white counterparts (de Brey et al., 2019). A change needs to occur within our classrooms to create an equitable environment and improve the outcomes for students of color.

Hattie (2008), in his comprehensive study of over 800 meta-analyses of what contributes to student achievement, found that about 95% of what teachers do is effective at improving student achievement; as a result, very few improvements are ever made in education because school personnel has some evidence that what they are doing is having a positive effect. Hattie argues that to increase student achievement and close the gaps between white students and students of color, we should not be looking for what works, but we should be looking for what works best. Equitable classroom practices are the practices that work best; they are practices that include all students in learning and lead to above-average or excellent outcomes for all students, specifically students of color, allowing them to catch up to their white peers. In addition, equitable classroom practices create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students, require and value the contributions of all students, and create high expectations for all students (Delpit, 2006; Eubanks et al., 1997; Gay, 2018; Gutiérrez, 2013; Hammond, 2015; Hattie, 2008; Kleinfield, 1975; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lemov, 2015; Muhammed, 2018; Steele, 2010). In this section, I review the literature on equitable classroom practices that are effective for all students, specifically focusing on academic discourse and culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Academic Discourse**

Traditional teaching methods involve a teacher, or expert, at the front of a room "teaching" information or skills to a group of students who lack the knowledge of the teacher. Freire (2000) described this approach as "fundamentally narrative" and coined it "banking" education (p. 71). However, a different approach to teaching that is more dialogic has gained more traction in the last 20 years (Resnick et al., 2018). The term Academic Discourse has many names and researchers often use these names interchangeably: dialogic teaching, academically

productive talk, dialogic pedagogy, argumentation, and accountable talk (Michaels et al., 2007; Resnick et al., 2018).

It is important to note that not all conversations between students in school qualify as academic discourse. In addition, as mentioned above, academic discourse has different names, but researchers generally agree on the main features. According to Michaels et al. (2007), there are three features: 1) accountability to reasoning, 2) accountability to knowledge, and 3) accountability to the learning community. To ensure they are effective and promote learning, all three features must be present. Accountability to the learning community involves listening to the ideas of others, asking questions to clarify, and building on the ideas of others. Accountability to reasoning is using logic to draw conclusions and using discussion to self-correct. Accountability to knowledge, the hardest of the three features, relies on facts or text evidence in conversations with fellow students (Michaels et al., 2007). Similarly, Zwiers and Crawford (2011) identify five core conversation skills, called conversation moves, present in academic discourse: 1) elaborate and clarify, 2) support ideas with examples, 3) build on and/or challenge a partner's ideas, 4) paraphrase and 5) synthesize.

The achievement gaps that exist between white students and students of color, wealthy students and low-income students, and native English speakers and English Language Learners demonstrate that current classroom practices are not working for all students. Research shows that academic discourse is an equitable classroom practice that can improve outcomes for diverse students (Michaels et al., 2007). However, rich academic discourse in schools is rare, and low-income and students of color are even less likely to be in classrooms where academic discourse happens. Conversations develop higher-level skills, strengthen comprehension, and help students develop skills desired by potential employers (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Similarly, in their

review of the literature, Resnick et al. (2018) classify the positive effects of dialogic pedagogy into four categories: 1) better initial learning, 2) better retention, 3) better transfer of knowledge to other subjects, and 4) better performance in general intelligence.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Current mainstream teaching methods developed from White Eurocentric, middle-class norms and values (Gay, 2018). Based on the struggles of minority students previously discussed in this chapter, it is clear that these traditional methods are not the most effective for educating low-income or minority students. According to Gay (2018), "teaching is most effective when ecological factors, such as prior experiences, community settings, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic identities of teachers and students, are included in its implementation" (p. 28). That is when teaching is culturally responsive.

Until at least the 1960s, teachers viewed students' non-dominant languages and cultures as a deficit that had to be overcome. Part of the purpose of schooling was to eradicate the culture and language of students of color and replace them with the dominant culture and language: White, Eurocentric culture, and Dominant American English. In the 1970s and 1980s, schools slightly shifted their approach to diversity. They began to replace deficit approaches with different approaches. These new approaches viewed the culture and languages of students of color as equal to but different than the dominant culture and language required for schooling. While other approaches seem like an improvement, the implicit expectation was that students of color would convert to the dominant culture and language. More recently, resource pedagogies, such as culturally responsive teaching, have gained traction. These new pedagogies place the culture and language of students of color and their families as assets teachers should use to help students access learning (Paris, 2012).

Ladson-Billings based her 1994 work, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, on her ethnographic study of nine teachers in California. She developed the original framework for culturally relevant pedagogy based on the data collected through teacher interviews, teacher observations, video recording lessons, and collective analysis. According to Ladson-Billings' (1994) research, culturally relevant pedagogy accomplishes three things: it yields academic success for all students, it helps students accept and affirm their cultural identity, and it develops criticality in students that challenge inequities. In addition, Ladson-Billings identifies three broad propositions regarding how to define effective teaching.

First, culturally relevant teachers held positive, inclusive beliefs about themselves and their students. These teachers were part of the community, had an unwavering belief that all students can learn, and saw teaching as an art and a way to give back to the community. Second, culturally relevant teachers valued and encouraged social interactions. Teachers created a strong connection that empowered students. In addition to strong teacher-student relationships, these teachers created strong student-student relationships that encouraged students to learn together and created a community of learners. Finally, culturally relevant teachers viewed knowledge as dynamic and active. These teachers created scaffolds to help all students learn. In addition, they do not limit knowledge to standardized tests; rather, they take a multifaceted approach to assessment. In addition, these teachers encouraged students to take a critical approach to learning, identifying curriculum, strategies, and resources that are not equitable (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Gay (2018) built on Ladson-Billings' (1994) culturally responsive work defining culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of

reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 37). In addition, Hammond (2015) connected culturally responsive teaching and neuroscience to develop the Ready for Rigor Framework.

In her book, *Other People's Children,* Delpit (2006) describes a "culture of power" in schools and classrooms. Delpit (2006) argues that the culture of power benefits white, middle-class children who have learned this culture and disenfranchises other students who are not a member of the culture of power. Similarly, Gutierrez (2013) argues that education, specifically mathematics education and the subject of mathematics in general, is political and holds undue power and privilege that negatively impacts students of color. While Calabrese Barton et al. (2020) calls for a justice-oriented framework that "restructure[s] power relations in classrooms" (p. 477).

Paris (2012) takes a more critical stance of Ladson-Billings and others who advocate for a culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy, arguing they do not go far enough in affirming students' cultural and linguistic identities. Paris (2012) calls for a "culturally sustaining pedagogy" that:

> has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. That is culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster - to sustain - linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. (p. 95)

As mentioned previously, there are achievement gaps between low-income and students of color and middle- and upper-class and white students. Conventional reform efforts are inadequate; therefore, currently underperforming students need a new approach to catch up (Gay, 2018). According to some, schools need to implement a culturally responsive teaching approach.

Hammond (2015) calls this approach "a serious and powerful tool for accelerating student learning" (p. 3), and Gay (2018) says it "is a means for unleashing the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students" (p. 21).

Hammond (2015) urges teachers to "think of culturally responsive teaching as a mindset, a way of thinking about and organizing instruction to allow for great flexibility in teaching" (p. 5). The foundational belief of the culturally responsive mindset is that all children can learn at high levels (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995). Suppose teachers have not already developed this strong belief in the ability of all students. In that case, Hammond (2015) encourages teachers to openly reflect on and challenge any bias they may have by identifying their cultural frame of reference, widening their cultural aperture, and identifying their key triggers. This will allow the teacher to expand their ability to see the differences in other cultures and avoid what Gay (2018) calls cultural blindness.

Researchers and practitioners of culturally responsive teaching agree that culturally responsive teachers develop strong, positive student-teacher relationships (Calabrese Barton et al., 2020; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Hattie, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Kleinfield (1975) coined the term "warm demander" to describe effective teachers' relationships with their students. The warm demander combines personal warmth and active demandingness to push students beyond their comfort zone. While many have continued to use the term warm demander, Gay (2018) refers to the same student-teacher relationship as culturally responsive caring. After observing thousands of classrooms, Lemov (2015) refers to it as Warm/Strict.

Culturally responsive teachers have also served to develop critical learners. Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that teachers must help students identify and understand current and historical inequities and critique and challenge them. Muhammed (2018) says, "As long as

oppression is present in the world, youths need pedagogy that nurtures criticality" (p.138). Many English Language Learners, low-income students, and students of color are not taught critical thinking skills; as a result, they have become dependent on the teacher to tell them what to do and what to learn (Hammond, 2015). Yet, conversely, culturally responsive teachers strive to develop the critical thinking skills of their students and encourage them to take a critical view of current power structures (Delpit, 2006), social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Muhammed, 2018), and educational practices (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Paris, 2012).

Culturally responsive teachers validate and recognize students and help them develop their cultural identity. For many years, students of color learned that their cultures and languages were inferior to the culture of white Americans and English (Paris, 2012). For this reason, academic success for these students comes at the expense of their cultural and psychological well-being (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive teachers recognize the expert knowledge that students have obtained from their lived lives, validating and empowering every student in front of the class (Calabrese Barton et al., 2020; Delpit, 2006).

Despite the documented benefits of culturally responsive teaching, it can be challenging for teachers to begin implementing culturally responsive teaching practices in their classrooms (Neri et al., 2019). One reason for this difficulty is the confusion and lack of understanding many teachers have about culturally responsive teaching and its efficacy (Hammond, 2015; Neri et al., 2019). Another challenge educators face with culturally responsive teaching is the perception that racial and cultural differences among students are not important to learning (Gay, 2018; Neri et al., 2019).

## Conclusion

I provided an overview of the three literature bins: Role of School Leaders, Building Capacity, and Equitable Classroom Practices. At the beginning of this chapter, Figure 3 showed how I believed these bins impact the FoP. After reviewing and analyzing the literature, avoid emerged in the research about how assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. This study aims to add to this under-researched void represented by the white space in Figure 4.

The concept is simple: IF assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders, THEN assistant principals may coach teachers to increase equitable classroom practices resulting in more equitable outcomes for students and a principal succession pipeline of better-prepared assistant principals. Unfortunately, in practice, it is not so simple. As I discussed in this chapter, the roles of principals and assistant principals are multi-faceted and complex. Add to that the research of Hattie (2008), which showed that nearly every practice teachers employ works, and Bryk et al. (2015), who documented the difficulties schools have had in reforming their practice, and it is clear that this is not as simple as it seems. Yet, despite the difficulties, we must try to solve this problem.

The following chapter provides more detail on how this emerging framework (see Figure 5) addresses the void identified in the research. But, first, I explain the methodologies used during this participatory action research study and identify the proposed study activities that will take place. Finally, I identify the study participants.
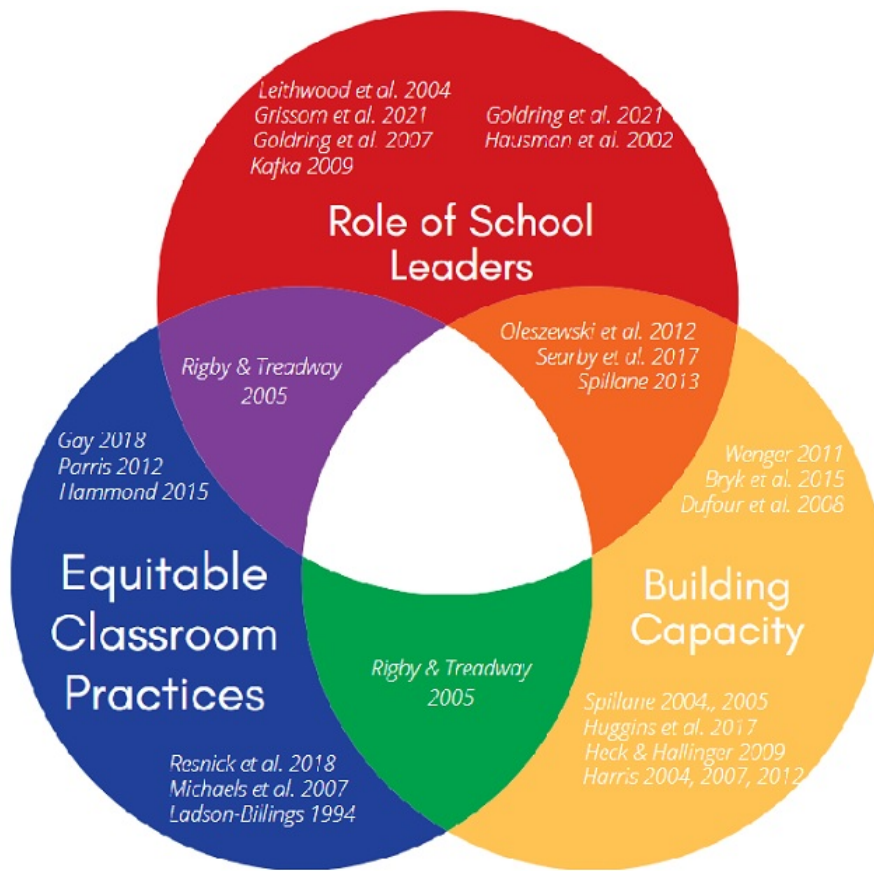
*Figure 4*. Literature bin void and opportunity.
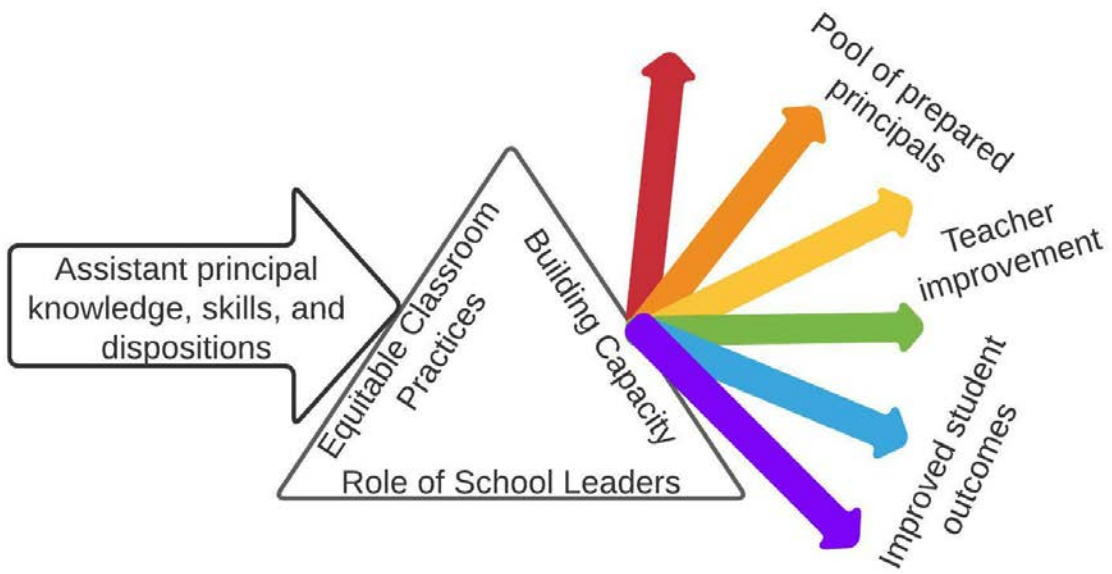
*Figure 5*. Emerging conceptual framework.

**CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this participatory action research (PAR) study, I examined how a principal develops the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. As the research shows, the principal's job is complex and challenging. The principal alone cannot consistently enact the changes needed to ensure equitable outcomes for all students (Leverett, 2002; Searby et al., 2017). Furthermore, with high principal turnover, assistant principals must develop the knowledge and skills to become effective principals. Therefore, assistant principals must become equity-centered instructional leaders for schools to improve student outcomes (Goldring et al., 2021). The focus of practice for this study was how the principal develops the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders.

To achieve the intended result, I supported assistant principals in developing the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. This study was grounded in the theory of action: *IF* assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders, *THEN* assistant principals may coach teachers to implement equitable classroom practices resulting in more equitable outcomes for students and a principal succession pipeline of better-prepared assistant principals.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodologies used in this study, provide an overview of the cycles of inquiry embedded in the PAR process, and describe how I selected and worked with participants. Next, I share the research questions and detail the data collection and analysis process. Finally, I discuss the study's limitations, validity, and ethical considerations.

## Qualitative Research Process

I used essential characteristics of Creswell and Creswell's (2018) qualitative research foundations in this study. First, I collected data in a natural setting. This onsite data collection

allowed me to see how participants behaved and acted within their context. Second, I was a key instrument in the data collection process. I examined documents, observed behavior, and conducted Community Learning Exchanges (CLE) instead of relying on questionnaires or instruments developed by others. These multiple data sources are another key component of the qualitative research process. I used inductive data analysis to organize the data into categories and themes (Saldaña, 2016). Once themes emerged, I used deductive data analysis to determine if I needed additional evidence to support the themes. The inductive and deductive data analysis process formed a repeating cycle of inquiry and analysis that guided the study forward over three cycles and 18 months (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe the qualitative research process as emergent. Based on the data analysis process, "some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field" (p. 182). One of the goals of qualitative research is to learn about the problem from participants. This participant-centered approach required me to focus on the meaning the participants held about the issue, and it also required me to reflect on my role in the study and how my background shaped it. These features allow qualitative researchers to create a holistic account of the problem. The complex picture made from many factors is not always linear but works to demonstrate how the factors interact in the real world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

**Participatory Action Research**

In traditional qualitative research, "knowledge flows away from the community, oftentimes into the academic community" (hunter et al., 2013, p. 16). Because information only flows in one direction, traditional research methods do little to enhance or inform the participants. On the other hand, participatory Action Research (PAR) offers a more collaborative

approach that democratizes information. The researcher works with and engages the community to find answers to a common problem. Engaging collaboratively in cycles of inquiry, they apply those answers to improve their practice and start the inquiry process again (hunter et al., 2013).

I selected participatory action research for this study because it democratized information, engaged the community, and focused on inquiry cycles to solve problems. The participants and I were practitioner-researchers because we were insiders to the setting we were studying. Due to the collaborative nature of participatory action research, the other researchers and I formed a co-practitioner research group that deliberately and systematically engaged in cycles of inquiry (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Throughout this PAR study, the CPR group used improvement science methodologies, network improvement communities (NIC), and Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms and methodologies.

### *Improvement Science*

In chapter 1, I shared the use of a modified version of the Bryk et al. (2015) fishbone to analyze the assets and challenges of the FoP. During the three cycles of inquiry, we used the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) improvement cycle described by Bryk et al. (2015), which is further elucidated in the action research cycles section below. During each PDSA cycle, the CPR group focused on the three improvement questions: What specifically are we trying to accomplish? What change might we introduce and why? How will we know that a change is an improvement? Additionally, the CPR group used the power of networked improvement communities (NIC) to implement and study the changes during PAR Cycle One.

*Network Improvement Communities*

A NIC is a community with the power to accelerate group learning by growing practical knowledge through disciplined inquiry (Bryk et al., 2015). According to Bryk et al. (2015), a NIC has four essential characteristics:

- focused on a well-specified common aim

- guided by a deep understanding of the problem, the system that produces it, and a shared working theory to improve it

- disciplined by the methods of improvement research to develop, test, and refine interventions

- organized to accelerate their diffusion out into the field and effective integration into varied educational contexts

During the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One, the CPR group operated as a NIC. At the same time, each assistant principal created an Assistant Principal Networked Improvement Community (AP-NIC) with selected teachers in PAR Cycle One. Figure 6 shows how I structured the NICs in the study. Unfortunately, at the end of PAR Cycle One, CPR group members moved to different schools; therefore, we could not continue using AP-NICs in PAR Cycle Two.

*Community Learning Exchange*

At its core, a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) is an opportunity for a group of people to exchange ideas about a topic of particular interest to the group (Guajardo et al., 2016). The CLE methodology directly aligns with using NICs in this PAR study. During the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One, the CPR group and other participants participated in CLEs. Guajardo et al. (2016) developed five axioms that guide each CLE:
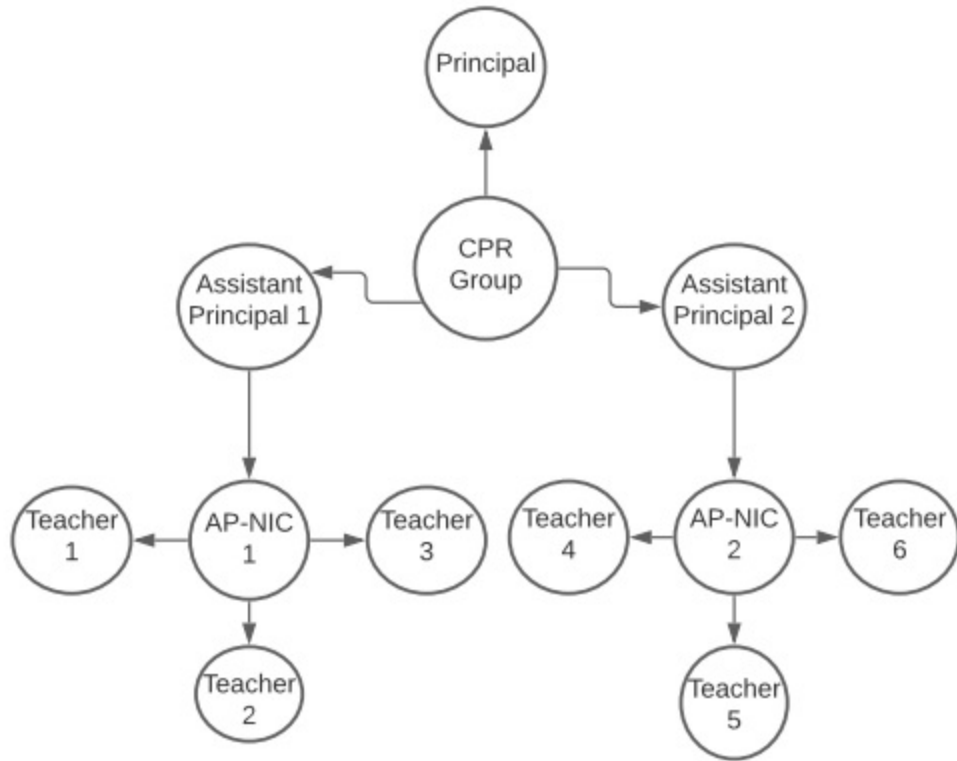
*Figure 6*. NIC structure.

1. Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes.

2. Conversations are a critical and central pedagogical process.

3. The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.

4. Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process.

5. Hope and change are built on the assets and dreams of locals and their communities.

The CPR group utilized CLE pedagogies of Gracious Space (Hughes & Grace, 2010), Opening Circles, Personal Narratives, and Journey Lines (Guajardo et al., 2016) in their monthly meetings. I collected artifacts and evidence from each CLE to assist in answering the research questions.

**Research Questions**

The overarching research question of this PAR study was: How does a principal develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders? In addition, I conducted PAR study activities to answer the following sub-questions:

- How do assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to help teachers identify equitable classroom practices?

- How do assistant principals collaborate with teachers to implement equitable classroom practices?

- How does the process of supporting assistant principals build my capacity as an educational leader?

**Action Research Cycles**

In this study, PAR activities occurred over three cycles of inquiry. The goal of each PAR cycle was to use the CLE methodologies to engage the CPR group in the PDSA cycle of inquiry.

During the inquiry cycle, the group collected and analyzed data throughout the process to plan and implement the activities for the next cycle, study the next cycle of data, and act again. The process was cyclical and repetitive, with the resulting data informing the next phase of the inquiry cycle (Bryk et al., 2015)

The study ran from Fall 2021 – Fall 2022 (Table 1). The PAR Pre-Cycle focused on relationship building within the CPR group, identifying equitable classroom practices, and understanding the CLE axioms. PAR Cycle One focused on implementing and studying the theory of action: *IF* assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders, *THEN* assistant principals may coach teachers to implement equitable classroom practices resulting in more equitable outcomes for students and create a principal succession pipeline of better-prepared assistant principals. Specifically, each assistant principal invited teachers to participate in an Assistant Principal-Networked Improvement Community (AP-NIC). The AP-NICs provided assistant principals an opportunity to put their learning from CPR meetings into practice. Assistant principals used their learning to plan and facilitate the AP-NIC meetings on identifying equitable classroom practices and engaging in the PDSA cycle to implement them in the classroom.

## Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis

Qualitative studies involve collecting multiple data types, including text and image data, observations, interviews, and audiovisual or digital materials. I collected this data over time "by talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). In this PAR study, I used multiple methods of data collection. Specifically, I collected artifacts from Community Learning Exchanges, documents from AP-

Table 1

*PAR Improvement Cycles*

| Research Cycle | Time Period | Activities |
|---|---|---|
| PAR Pre-Cycle and Context | Fall 2021 | Monthly CPR group CLE |
| PAR Cycle One | Winter 2021-Spring 2022 | Weekly AP-NIC meetings<br>Monthly CPR group CLE |
| PAR Cycle Two | Spring2022-Fall 2022 | Project CLE with all participants<br>Monthly CPR group CLE<br>Weekly AP-NIC meetings |

NIC meetings, and reflective memos. I analyzed these various pieces of data to inform our inquiry of the FoP and answer the research questions.

**Participants**

The PAR participants were teachers and administrators at Green Square Middle School (GSMS), including me. I purposefully selected the participants in this study to help me understand the problems and questions as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Because this study focused on building the knowledge and skills of assistant principals, I invited the two assistant principals from GSMS to participate. The assistant principal participants completed consent forms (see Appendix C) before participating. In the PAR study, I was the lead researcher working with the two assistant principals as co-practitioner researchers; together, we comprised the Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) group.

The assistant principals in the CPR group learned from the CPR meetings and replicated the process with a group of teachers in an Assistant Principal-Network Improvement Community (AP-NIC). Due to the equity-centered focus of the study, the CPR group purposefully selected teachers for the AP-NICs based on student performance on state End-of-Grade math tests. Teachers whose student data demonstrated gaps in achievement between Black and White students were the preference. The teacher participants also completed consent forms (see Appendix C) before participating. I aggregated the data collected from participants in AP-NIC meetings and CLEs and did not share any personal or identifying information about the participants. A fuller account of each participant is provided in Chapter 4.

**Data Collection**

I collected qualitative data throughout the PAR study. Specifically, I collected artifacts from Community Learning Exchanges, meetings, and reflective memos. Table 2 lists the study's research questions and the collected data.

*CPR and Study Community Learning Exchange (CLE) Artifacts*

During each PAR cycle, the CPR group met multiple times. I planned each CPR group meeting using CLE pedagogies, and the CPR group answered and discussed specific questions during each CPR group meeting (see Appendix D). In the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One, I took notes during each CPR group meeting to capture our discussion. During PAR Cycle Two, I recorded the CPR meetings and had the recording transcribed.

In addition to CPR group meetings, I planned and facilitated two CLEs. CLE participants created individual and collective artifacts through conversation, reflection, and exploration. These artifacts included notes, journey lines, and chart paper with written reflections and ideas that captured the group's collective thinking (Guajardo et al., 2016). I analyzed and coded all of the artifacts from CPR group meetings and CLEs using Saldaña's (2016) open coding during the data analysis process.

*Documents*

In each PAR cycle, we held regular CPR group and AP-NIC meetings. These meetings produced both public (agendas and meeting minutes) and private (written reflections and notes) documents. These documents allowed me to see the language and words of the participants and highlight data that the participants found important (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I coded these documents using Saldaña's (2016) open coding process.

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Table 2

*Research Questions and Data Collection*

| Research Question | Proposed Data Collection | Triangulated With |
|---|---|---|
| 1. How do assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to help teachers identify equitable classroom practices | CPR group meetings<br>Documents<br>Reflective mems (AP) | Member checks<br>Reflective memos (self) |
| 2. How do assistant principals collaborate with teachers to implement equitable classroom practices? | Project CLE<br>Reflective memos (AP)<br>Reflective memos (self)<br>Documents | Member checks |
| 3. How does the process of supporting assistant principals build my capacity as an educational leader? | Reflective memos (self) | Reflective memos (AP) |

*Reflective Memos*

In addition, all members of the CPR group wrote reflective memos. The assistant principals wrote reflective memos at the end of each PAR cycle, while I wrote reflective memos at least monthly during each cycle. These memos were reflective notes on observations, conversations, and realizations during the PAR cycle(s). I coded the memos to help determine themes within the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). I structured the memos (see Appendix E) around open-ended questions allowing the writer space to reflect openly.

**Data Analysis**

I used Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five-step data analysis method. First, I organized and prepared all of the data for analysis. This included cataloging, sorting, arranging data into different types, and typing or rewriting notes, minutes, and memos. Next, I got a general sense of the data by reading and looking at the data together. After completion, I began coding the data. Saldaña (2016) defines a code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). By using the open coding method described by Saldaña (2016), I applied meaning to the data. Creswell and Creswell's (2018) fourth step of the data analysis process is to generate descriptions and themes. I developed descriptions of codes during each PAR cycle, and the themes emerged as I analyzed and compared the data from each cycle.

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**Study Limitations**

</div>

As the school principal and primary researcher for the PAR study, I came to the study with biases and positionality. My position as a school principal and its related power required me to take special measures to ensure that all participants were comfortable participating and speaking out during the study. Therefore, before participation, all assistant principal and teacher

participants gave informed consent without any coercion or sense of obligation; in addition, all participants could terminate consent at any time during the study without reprisal. The measures taken to address positionality also reduced bias.

This PAR study closely examined two assistant principals and their local context. Therefore, the size and context limit the findings and outcomes of this study. As a result, the outcomes of this study may not be generalizable to other contexts; however, other researchers and practitioners can replicate the process used in the study in different contexts.

**Internal Validity**

Guba and Lincoln (2000) posit that a research study's trustworthiness and internal validity involve establishing credibility, dependability, and confirmability. I included multiple validity measures in this PAR study to ensure validity and reliability. Validity measures include prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, referential adequacy, bias clarification, and rich, thick descriptions of context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gerdes & Conn, 2001).

This study included three cycles of inquiry over 18 months. This prolonged engagement allowed me to dig deeper and uncover unknown information. More time in the field with the participants yielded more accurate findings. In addition, I clarified my potential biases and provided rich, thick descriptions of the context in which the study took place. Creswell and Creswell (2018) argue that "good qualitative research contains comments by the researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background" (pp. 200-201). Providing this clarification and painting a detailed image of the study setting make the results more realistic and richer, adding to the findings' validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Finally, I utilized member checks to ensure the CPR group CLE participants had the opportunity to clarify their comments and ensure I correctly understood what the participants

intended (Gerdes & Conn, 2001). Member checking is the process of returning analyzed data to the study participants for review to ensure the accuracy of the data and conclusions (Birt et al., 2016). I triangulated the data using the multiple data sources explained in this chapter and member checks. Having multiple data sources to support the themes and findings of the study adds to the validity.

**External Validity**

This PAR study occurred within East Carolina University (ECU), Project I[4], and Colorful County Public Schools. As a result, the outcomes of this study may be generalized to the scope of work at other schools with similar contexts; however, the outcomes of this study should not be generalized to other organizations without similar contexts. While the findings and outcomes of this study should not be generalized to other contexts, the process used to engage in the study are methodologically sound and can be transferred and replicated in any context. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research intends not to generalize the findings to places outside of those under study. The value of this study lies in the particular description and themes developed during the study.

## Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations

The participants in the study were all adults and site-based practitioners committed to developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. As a result, the security of the data collected and the confidentiality of the participants were of the utmost importance in this study. I confidentially met with each potential participant to ask if they were interested in participating in this study. Each CPR member signed a consent form before participating in the study. I protected the confidentiality of the school and members of the CPR group by using pseudonyms. I presented the data in a non-judgmental way

and used transparency with the CPR group and the school district. All appropriate consent for the study was in place before initiating the research.

I am the lead researcher for this study; however, I am also the principal of Green Square Middle School, where the study occurred. The participants of this study were all employees of Colorful County Public Schools. As this study's principal and lead researcher, I was aware of and addressed certain ethical considerations. I ensured that all participants gave informed consent to participate without any coercion or sense of obligation. In addition, participants could terminate consent at any time during the study without consequence. In addition, participants reviewed the data and findings of this study before completion to ensure I accurately captured the work and thoughts of the participants.

Participants were required to sign consent forms approved by East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C). In addition, I received CITI certification (see Appendix B) and consent from my district to approve this research study (see Appendix F). I informed participants that their participation was voluntary. Data security and the confidentiality of the participants were a priority for the study. To ensure confidentiality, I used measures advocated by Creswell & Creswell (2018), including locking important and personal papers and data files in a cabinet, password protecting all electronic forms of data collection, and sharing data and copies of reports with the CPR group for transparency, improvement, and reflection.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the methodological approach for the PAR study, including the inquiry action research cycle, CLE methodology, and the research questions. In addition, I also explained the reasoning behind the methods chosen. This chapter provides a research design and methodology to answer the overarching research question: *How do assistant principals develop*

*the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders?* This chapter also includes a review of the data collection and analysis process, the limitations of the research, and ethical considerations. In the next chapter, I present the first PAR cycle with the site-based CRP group and the first set of data in which I developed a coding system that lends itself to a set of categories. In later chapters, I use the same process and data analysis to determine emergent themes and study findings.

**CHAPTER 4: PAR PRE-CYCLE**

This participatory action research (PAR) study focuses on developing assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Using a Co-Practitioner Research (CPR) group and Community Learning Exchange (CLEs) pedagogies and axioms, I aim to build the capacity of assistant principals to identify and support teachers in using equitable classroom practices. This chapter describes the context of both the place and people involved in this PAR study, including the process I used to establish a CPR group and gather data. Then, I discuss the process and content that emerged from the data collection and how these categories connect to the research questions and emerging framework. Finally, I explain how the findings from this cycle informed the plan for the next cycle of inquiry.

**PAR Context**

To effectively implement the activities of this PAR study, it is vital to understand the context in which the study takes place. Where the PAR study takes place and the people involved in it can all impact the study differently; therefore, it is important to acknowledge and be aware of these potential impacts throughout the study. In this section, I describe the location of the PAR study, including the school and the surrounding community. Then I describe the participants of the CPR group.

**Place**

Green Square Middle School was the crown jewel of Small Town, a small two-traffic light town in northeastern North Carolina. As of the 2020 census, the population of Small Town was 3,342; while small, this represents a nearly 30% increase in population in the 20 years since Green Square Middle School opened. Despite the increase in population, the level of diversity has remained unchanged, with 88% of the population White and 11% of the population Black.

The school was a traditional middle school serving approximately 850 students in grades six through eight since 1999. Green Square Middle School (GSMS) was one of six middle schools in Colorful County and had been one of the county's highest-performing middle schools based on state End-of-Grade proficiency test scores since its inception. Furthermore, GSMS had developed a reputation as a well-to-do, White school. While that may have been true at one time, changing demographics within Colorful County and school redistricting have created different demographics of students attending GSMS. For the 2020-2021 school year, Green Square Middle School's student population was approximately 51% Black, 10% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% American Indian, and 34% White. In addition, approximately 60% of GSMS students qualified for free- or reduced-price lunches. Despite the changing demographics inside the school building, the community immediately surrounding it largely had not changed and was still predominantly White and politically conservative.

In 2020-2021, Green Square Middle had 62 certified and classified instructional staff members. The staff identified as 67% White, 29% Black, 3% Hispanic, and 3% Native American. Five staff members were categorized as non-traditional teachers entering the field with an undergraduate degree in something other than education. We had a veteran staff with only one beginning teacher within the first three years of teaching.

Small Town was also at the center of a possibly unprecedented transition within Colorful and neighboring Visible counties. In the early 1990s, the state of North Carolina forced Colorful County Schools (CCPS) to merge with Big City Schools, creating the Unified School (UFS) system. Big City sits in both Colorful and Visible counties, so when UFS was created, students who lived on the Visible County side of Big City attended school under the supervision of Colorful County personnel. This continued until the late 2010s, with regular disagreements

between the UFS Board of Education, the Colorful County Commissioners, the Visible County Commissioners, the Big City Council, and the Visible County Board of Education.

In the late 2010s, some politicians and school board members in Colorful County began to push for a "demerger" of the school system. These politicians and board members wanted to create a new Colorful County school system with only students from Colorful County, forcing Visible County to absorb the students currently attending UFS schools but living in Big City on the Visible County side. Eventually, state legislators passed legislation that allowed UFS to change the school system's name to Colorful County Public Schools (CCPS), dropping Big City from its name. In addition, a clause in the legislation says that if Visible County Schools fails to pay CCPS the required per-pupil funding for any capital expense, then the demerger is automatically triggered on July 1 of the following calendar year. This clause was important because CCPS was building a new 700-student elementary school in Small Town. This school would not serve any students living on the Visible County side of Big City, yet Visible County Schools was responsible for sending money to CCPS for the construction of this school based on the number of students living in Visible County within the CCPS attendance zone. At this time, Visible County had made all required payments; however, this could change at any moment triggering a demerger. Based on information from both school systems, a demerger of a school system like this has never happened before.

**People**

As a school with an experienced teaching staff and higher student performance than other middle schools in the district, the administration at GSMS fought complacency among the teaching staff. Providing coaching and professional development to 62 instructional staff was impossible for the principal alone. Therefore, one of the first tasks of the PAR Pre-Cycle was to

establish a CPR group with assistant principals. The CPR group consisted of two assistant principals from GSMS and me (the principal). I was the lead researcher working with the Co-Practitioner Researchers (CPRs) in this PAR study.

Assistant Principal Smith (AP Smith) was a veteran assistant principal with five years of experience as a middle school assistant principal at two different schools. AP Smith and I have worked together at GSMS for four years. Before becoming an assistant principal, AP Smith taught Career and Technical Education (CTE) for 12 years at the middle and high school levels. AP Smith had experience in multiple school districts, including charter school experience. In addition, AP Smith was from another small community near Small Town. AP Smith attended K-12 schools in the area and had relationships with many of the families of GSMS students from childhood. AP Smith had always been around educators, including AP Smith's mom, who was still a bus driver at GSMS today. AP Smith's experiences around educators led her into the teaching profession. The desire to help people become better learners and have a larger impact led AP Smith to get a Master's degree in Executive Leadership and become an assistant principal.

Assistant Principal Jones (AP Jones) was a first-year assistant principal. AP Jones moved to North Carolina from upstate New York for college and settled in the area after graduation. AP Jones and I began our teaching careers in the same year at the same high school. AP Jones taught high school English for six years before transitioning out of the classroom into an Instructional Technology Facilitator role. After a few years of working with teachers in the Instructional Technology Facilitator role, AP Jones decided to return to school to complete the administrative add-on license. I hired AP Jones at GSMS out of a large pool of qualified candidates, mainly

because of her experience in multiple roles and her desire to improve student learning and the classroom experience for all students.

I was also a member of the CPR group and the lead researcher. I was in my 6th year as the principal at GSMS. My time at GSMS was my first experience with middle school as an educator; I served three years as a high school assistant principal and seven years teaching various high school math courses from Pre-Algebra to Advanced Functions and Modeling. My entire professional career has been with Colorful County Public Schools (formerly Unified Public Schools). I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science from Clemson University. I began my career in education as a Teach For America corps member in 2006. Since I did not have an education degree, I entered and completed the Lateral Entry Process to teaching, thus receiving my teaching certification in high school mathematics. While teaching, I also coached high school soccer and basketball. This led to me pursuing and receiving a Master's Degree in Athletic Administration from Western Kentucky University. Shortly after, I realized I would not be happy focusing on athletics and decided to pursue a degree in school administration to have a larger educational impact on the students in our community. I received a Master of School Administration Degree from North Carolina State University, leading me to my current position. My experience getting to my current role as a principal involved a lot of learning by doing and teaching myself; as a result, as a current principal, I wanted to provide a different experience for the assistant principals I worked with.

## PAR Pre-Cycle Process

The PAR Pre-Cycle took place in the Fall 2021 semester. The Pre-Cycle included several activities, starting with the creation of the CPR group. I met with AP Smith and AP Jones individually to discuss the PAR study and invited them to participate as part of the CPR group.

The Pre-Cycle focused on building relationships within the CPR group, identifying equitable

classroom practices, and understanding the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms. This

occurred over the course of two CPR meetings and with the help of reflective memos.

**CPR Meetings**

The CPR team met twice during the Pre-Cycle, once in November 2021 and once in

December 2021. I planned and facilitated the CPR meetings using CLE pedagogies such as

Gracious Space (Hughes & Grace, 2010), Opening Circles, Personal Narratives, and Journey

Lines (see Appendix C). The focus of the November 2021 meeting was to build and strengthen

relationships among the CPR members and explore the CLE axioms and protocols. We started

with a conversation about creating a Gracious Space. Next, we shared a Personal Narrative about

the best learning experience we have ever had. CPR team members then created and shared a

Journey Line of significant moments throughout our careers in education as a student and

educator. We concluded by discussing the five CLE axioms developed by Guajardo et al. (2016):

1. Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes.

2. Conversations are a critical and central pedagogical process.

3. The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local

   concerns.

4. Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process.

5. Hope and change are built on the assets and dreams of locals and their communities.

After discussing the axioms, I tasked CPR group members to reflect on the CLE axioms and

choose the one axiom each thought would be most important as we engaged in this PAR study.

The December 2021 CPR meeting started with an opening circle where members shared

their chosen CLE axiom from the previous meeting. The three of us then went on a learning walk

through the school. The learning walk aimed to identify and discuss equitable classroom practices. We briefly observed several classrooms, and as we walked around the school, we discussed what we saw and if the classroom practices we observed were equitable. The CLE pedagogies we engaged in contributed to our strengthening relationship as a CPR group and provided the groundwork for the PAR study. We concluded the meeting with two tasks: to reflect on the two CPR meetings, the CLE axioms, and what we saw during the learning walk, and to identify a group of teachers that would benefit from and be willing to participate in the PAR study.

**Reflective Memos**

Additionally, CPR group members completed reflective memos during the PAR Pre-Cycle. I gave CPR members a reflective memo template (see Appendix E) that asked them to engage in the experience, reflect on the experience, contextualize the experience, and plan for the future. The CPR group members completed two reflective memos, one after each CPR meeting. I also completed multiple reflective memos throughout the PAR Pre-Cycle. Some of the memos were assignments for graduate school courses, while others were self-reflection after CPR meetings.

## Data Collection and Analysis: Coding and Developing a Codebook

During the PAR Pre-Cycle, I analyzed data from several different sources. First, each CPR meeting provided artifacts that I used as evidence, including the Journey Lines, Personal Narratives, and transcriptions of the meeting conversations. I also collected and analyzed my reflective memos and the CPR group's reflective memos. Finally, I used open coding to inductively code the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña, 2016) as it was collected.

I printed any artifact that was in electronic form, reviewed each piece of data, and used a yellow highlighter to identify words, phrases, or information I thought was important. After completing the first round of highlighting, I analyzed the highlighted sections and assigned a single word or short phrase to each highlighted section. These became codes. The codes were written in the margins of the documents and were descriptive of the information. I completed the first coding process as I collected the data.

After completing the first coding process, I set the data aside and did a second read after several days had passed. I completed the second read of each artifact and used a pink highlighter to identify words, phrases, or information that now seemed important after additional meetings, reflections, and data collection. I then analyzed the highlighted yellow and pink sections and completed a deductive coding process where I used the previously developed codes to assign codes to the data (Saldaña, 2016). I also wrote these codes in the margins of the documents.

Once I completed the second coding round, I compiled the codes into a codebook. First, I entered the codes into an excel spreadsheet along with the source of the code. Table 3 shows a portion of my initial codebook. I sorted the spreadsheet alphabetically by code to determine how many times each code appeared in the data. Next, I created a new spreadsheet (see Table 4) where I tallied how many times each code appeared and from what source and created a brief description of the code. This new frequency spreadsheet allowed me to make sense of the codes and see emerging categories of related codes (Saldaña, 2016). I discuss the emergent categories in the next section.

Table 3

*Initial Codes and Sources*

| Code | Source |
| --- | --- |
| access | ap memo |
| build relationships | ap memo |
| coaching | journey line |
| delegation | ap memo |
| educators | journey line |
| improve student learning | CPR meeting |
| investment | CPR meeting |
| opportunity to learn | ap memo |
| phone calls | ap memo |
| small talk | ap memo |
| support teachers | CPR meeting |
| want involvement in instruction | ap memo |
| admin tasks | ap memo |
| build relationships | ap memo |
| collaboration | ap memo |
| different | ap memo |
| educators | CPR meeting |
| improve teaching practices | ap memo |
| lead teachers | CPR meeting |
| opportunity to learn | ap memo |

Table 4

*Initial Code Frequencies*

| Code | Define | Memos | CPR Meeting | CLE | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| access | | 1 | | | 1 |
| admin meetings | Formal admin team meetings | | 1 | | 1 |
| admin tasks/responsibilities | Administrative tasks assigned to APs | 14 | 2 | | 16 |
| being open | APs being open to helping teachers/open door policy | 2 | | | 4 |
| best practices | | 1 | | | 1 |
| celebrates all | | 1 | | | 1 |
| check-in on well-being | APs checking-in on teachers' well-being | 4 | 2 | | 6 |
| collaboration | | 1 | | | 1 |
| committees | An opportunity for an AP to give feedback during committee meetings | 2 | | | 2 |

**Emergent Categories**

Throughout the PAR Pre-cycle, I examined data and artifacts produced by the participants of the CLE. I coded the raw data for similarities and relationships and grouped similar and related codes into categories. While numerous categories began to emerge, three categories emerged with greater consistency: equity, how assistant principals build relationships, and the tasks assistant principals want to do.

**Equity**

The data from the Pre-Cycle indicates CPR members believe equity is important in their work with teachers. Three specific areas of equity frequently emerged: (1) opportunity to learn, (2) including all students, and (3) increased student engagement. Table 5 shows all the equity category codes and their frequency.

***Opportunity to Learn***

Ensuring that students have the opportunity to learn is an idea that frequently appeared during the Pre-Cycle, particularly in the reflective memos of CPR group members. CPR group members highlighted their desire to work with teachers to implement practices that meet students where they are and provide the student the opportunity to engage with the content. One CPR member stated, "all students should be provided the tools they need to achieve academic success." Unfortunately, that is not always what happens in the classroom. During the learning walk conducted during the December 13, 2021, CPR meeting, CPR group members observed several classrooms. After visiting one class where it was evident that many students were struggling with the lesson, one CPR member commented, "teachers have to have everything in place for a student to learn." The data is clear that CPR group members want to help teachers

Table 5

*Equity Codes and Frequency*

| Category | Code | Memos | CPR Meeting | CLE | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Equity | opportunity to learn | 5 | 2 | | 7 |
| Equity | includes all students | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Equity | increase student engagement | 3 | | 1 | 4 |
| Equity | access | 1 | | | 1 |
| Equity | celebrates all | 1 | | | 1 |
| Equity | collaboration | 1 | | | 1 |

ensure students have the opportunity to learn, but they did not discuss how or when they would support teachers in this area.

*Includes All Students*

The data shows that CPR group members believe the opportunity to learn must extend to include all students in the class or school. CPR group members frequently discussed the idea of including all students in the learning process in memos and during CPR meetings; however, the most powerful example came from one CPR member's journey line. The CPR member, a teacher at the time, described an encounter with a community member. The community member was in disbelief that students in the CPR member's class at the local public high school could learn advanced math. The CPR member said, "in that moment, I realized that if this person doesn't believe all students can learn, how many other people share that belief, and how many of those people are working in schools." That encounter led to the CPR member seeking a degree in school administration and becoming an administrator. While all CPR group members had a strong feeling that learning must include all students, there was no discussion on how they used their roles to ensure that was happening.

*Increase Student Engagement*

Increasing student engagement was the final code within the equity category that emerged as important. The importance of student engagement was highlighted perfectly in an exchange between two CPR members during a CPR meeting. One CPR member pointed out "not every student always wants to learn." Another CPR member agreed but added that it is the teacher's responsibility to help motivate and engage those students in the learning process. The teacher has to "focus on individual student backgrounds and abilities" to meet students where they are and engage them in the learning process. The CPR group identified student engagement

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as a key to ensuring equity within the classroom but again stopped short of discussing specific actions to help teachers improve student engagement.

*Summary*

The data and artifacts collected and analyzed during the Pre-Cycle show that CPR group members believe equity is important. Specifically, there is an emerging consensus around (1) the opportunity to learn, (2) including all students, and (3) increasing student engagement. The data shows that CPR group members have an equity disposition; however, CPR group members stopped short of discussing the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure equity within classrooms and the school. Therefore, the CPR group should focus on the knowledge and skills necessary to improve classroom equity during the next PAR cycle.

**How Assistant Principals Build Relationships**

The data from the Pre-Cycle indicates CPR members believe building relationships is important in their work with teachers. Three specific ways CPR group members went about building relationships with teachers emerged: make time to build relationships, small talk, and check in on well-being. Table 6 shows the codes and their frequencies in the how assistant principals build relationships category.

*Make Time to Build Relationships*

The members of the CPR group acknowledge the importance of relationship building in their work with teachers; however, they indicated the challenge was finding time to focus on relationship building. Assistant Principal Jones reflected in their memo that they enjoy building strong relationships as that is the foundation of a positive working environment, but it has been hard to do because they are dealing with frequent interruptions like discipline issues, parent concerns, phone calls, middle school drama, coverage schedules, and the countless incidents that

Table 6

*How Assistant Principals Build Relationships*

| Category | Code | Memos | CPR Meeting | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| How Assistant Principals Build Relationships | make time to build relationships | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| How Assistant Principals Build Relationships | small talk | 6 | | 6 |
| How Assistant Principals Build Relationships | check-in on well-being | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| How Assistant Principals Build Relationships | personable | 3 | | 3 |
| How Assistant Principals Build Relationships | get to know teachers | 1 | 1 | 2 |

just pop up. Despite the challenges, Assistant Principal Smith set a goal of "making more time to get to know the teachers." The data indicate that CPR members understand the importance of relationship building and are committed to making the time to build relationships.

*Small Talk*

Members of the CPR group indicated it was important to make time to build relationships with teachers, but they also mentioned it was important to build those relationships around things other than school. For example, AP Smith said I like "getting to know the teachers by making small talk." Another CPR member added that you have "to get to know the teachers and their families." Members of the CPR group attributed small talk, these brief conversations with teachers about topics other than school, with making teachers more open to doing things, feel more comfortable approaching administration with issues or problems, and produce higher quality work.

*Check-in on Well-being*

Another key way that CPR members expressed they build relationships with teachers was simply by checking in with the teacher. While CPR members said this was a typical practice, they adjusted it over the past year due to the stress everyone has been under due to COVID-19. One CPR member explained it by saying, "COVID-19 has changed my interactions. Checking in on teachers more often has become a thing for me." Members of the CPR group expressed being busy every day but acknowledge that a quick check-in is an easy way to show teachers that you notice them, and that has become more important this year with the stress everyone has been feeling.

*Summary*

CPR group members understand the value and importance of building strong

relationships. Specifically, there is emerging consensus around (1) making time to build

relationships, (2) small talk, and (3) checking in on well-being. The data shows that CPR group

members understand how building relationships positively impacts their work with teachers. The

reflective memos and conversations during CPR meetings show the foundation of positive

relationships between members of the CPR group and school staff. These relationships are

important as CPR group members converse with teachers about their classroom practices.

Members of the CPR group acknowledged the impact of COVID-19 on their relationships with

staff; this impact should be considered further in PAR Cycle One as it could continue to impact

the work of the CPR group.

**Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do**

The data from the Pre-Cycle indicates CPR members believe there is a disconnect

between the tasks assistant principals want to do and the tasks assistant principals have to or get

to do. Both emerged as categories, but since this study is about building assistant principals'

capacity to be equity-centered instructional leaders, I focused on the tasks assistant principals

want to do. Three specific tasks assistant principals want to do emerged from CPR group

members: involvement in instruction, supporting teachers, and giving feedback. Table 7 shows

all of the codes in the tasks assistant principals want to do category and their frequency.

*Involvement in Instruction*

The members of the CPR group expressed a desire to engage in more instructional

activities through their roles. For example, AP Smith, who has been an assistant principal for five

years, said she wanted "a chance to be more instructional throughout the day." This desire seems

Table 7

*Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do*

| Category | Code | Memos | CPR Meeting | CLE | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do | want involvement in instruction | 4 | 3 | | 7 |
| Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do | support teachers | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do | give feedback | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do | improve teaching practices | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do | provide PD | 2 | | | 2 |
| Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do | improve student learning | | 1 | | 1 |
| Tasks Assistant Principals Want To Do | model effective practices | | | 1 | 1 |

to indicate that assistant principals do not have the chance or enough of an opportunity to be instructional. That is despite the fact that many assistant principals enter the profession, as AP Jones indicated, to "encourage and support teachers to improve their instructional practices."

*Support Teachers*

Conversations with CPR group members and their reflective memos indicate a strong desire to support teachers. Both assistant principals indicated that a desire to support teachers was one of the main reasons they became an assistant principal. The reality of being an assistant principal is proving to be different. Despite a strong desire to support teachers, both assistant principals do not feel they have enough time to support them. AP Jones listed several ways they had planned to support teachers this semester: provide feedback, provide more professional development, help them reflect on their classroom practice, etc.; however, they indicated that countless daily incidents seem to pop up and distract them from being able to support teachers as much as they want.

*Give Feedback*

It is clear that assistant principals and teachers have daily conversations; however, assistant principals do not focus the discussion and their feedback on instruction, more specifically, equitable classroom practices. CPR members identified the formal teacher evaluation process required by the state as the primary way they give feedback to teachers. The formal teacher evaluation process occurs 2-4 times a year, depending on the teacher's experience level. In the final reflective memo of the PAR Pre-Cycle, one assistant principal said, "I need to have more discussion and instructional conversations with teachers." To become equity-centered instructional leaders, assistant principals must become comfortable giving teachers feedback and maximize the impact of their meetings with teachers by improving the feedback they give.

Assistant principals seem to want this to happen, as one assistant principal stated, "If something would come out of that conversation, that is what I want."

*Summary*

Assistant principals have specific tasks they want to be involved in. Specifically, there is emerging consensus around involvement in instruction, supporting teachers, and giving feedback. The data shows that CPR group members want to be involved in instructional tasks; however, they are not always successful for different reasons, including being too busy. Addressing why assistant principals cannot engage in the tasks they want will be a focus of PAR Cycle One.

## Reflection and Planning

Planning and engaging in the PAR Pre-Cycle was undoubtedly a learning experience. I had never undertaken a project of this magnitude before. In my reflection on the PAR Pre-Cycle and planning for PAR Cycle One, I realized that I gained and developed skills as a practitioner-researcher, learned about the data collection and coding process, and developed my skills as a leader of equity.

### Reflections on Leadership

Leading CPR group members through the PAR Pre-Cycle caused me to reflect on my practice as a school leader. My reflections highlighted some areas of strength and showed me areas I needed to improve. In addition, regularly writing reflective memos and asking others to reflect caused me to integrate reflection more frequently into my leadership practice.

I have received feedback previously that I do not always seem personable or approachable. Over the past few years, I have intentionally tried to be more personable with staff, students, and parents. The CPR group identified relationships between administration and

teachers as a strength and an asset while analyzing the assets and challenges. It was a pleasant affirmation of my work and an important reminder about the importance of building relationships.

My reflection on the PAR Pre-Cycle also identified areas of continued growth. First, conducting a research study while also being a full-time practitioner is hard. I often found myself falling behind in the study or at work. The PAR Pre-Cycle highlighted my need to be intentional in my time management. Additionally, conducting CPR group meetings using the CLE pedagogies of Gracious Space (Hughes & Grace, 2010), Personal Narratives, and Journey Lines highlighted how awful my meetings at work were. It was difficult at first for me to take a step back during meetings and allow other CPR group members the time and space to engage in meetings on their terms; however, the CLE pedagogies helped me to step back. In reflection, I noticed the engagement and quality of the CPR Meetings were much higher than the engagement and quality of staff meetings or PLC meetings I planned at work. As a result, I added the CLE pedagogies to my leadership toolkit and began implementing them more regularly during meetings I facilitated at work.

**Planning for PAR Cycle One**

During the PAR Pre-Cycle, the CPR group developed and built relationships with each other and developed a common language and understanding of equitable classroom practices and the CLE axioms. In addition, I collected and analyzed data during the PAR Pre-Cycle. I then began to organize the data into a codebook for further analysis.

The relationship building and development of a common language and understanding within the CPR group was important because assistant principals in the CPR group were asked to replicate many of these things during PAR Cycle One with their AP-NIC groups. At the end of

the PAR Pre-Cycle, assistant principals identified the teachers that participated in the AP-NIC groups and invited teachers to continue participating in the AP-NICs for PAR Cycle One. Assistant principals also planned their first AP-NIC meeting using the protocols and CLE axioms used during CPR meetings.

I reflected on my data collection and analysis process. As I collected more data during the PAR Pre-Cycle, I realized some of my codes were more like categories, and some of my categories were more like themes. Part of my planning for PAR Cycle One included reviewing and discussing the coding process with my coach and other research practitioners to understand the coding process better. I went back and checked the data from the PAR Pre-Cycle. During this review, I re-coded and re-categorized the data based on my better understanding of the differences between codes, categories, and themes.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided the context in which this study takes place. I also discussed the activities conducted during the PAR Pre-Cycle, including the data collection and analysis process and development of my codebook. Finally, I reflected on my practice and leadership as a research-practitioner and highlighted the planning steps for PAR Cycle One. In the next chapter, I present the data collected during PAR Cycle One and discuss the themes beginning to emerge from the data.

**CHAPTER 5: PAR CYCLE ONE**

In PAR Cycle One, the CPR group engaged in a complete plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycle of inquiry described by Bryk (2015). The CPR group used the data collected in the PAR Pre-Cycle to continue studying the theory of action: If assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders, then assistant principals will coach teachers to implement equitable classroom practices resulting in more equitable outcomes for students and create a principal succession pipeline of better-prepared assistant principals. First, I describe the process used by the CPR group and the actions I took to collect data. Next, I present the data collected from PAR Cycle One and explain my coding process to identify themes emerging from the data. I also reflect on my learning as a research-practitioner. Finally, I discuss the focus and activities of the final PAR cycle.

**PAR Cycle One Process**

The PAR Cycle One took place in the Spring 2022 semester. The CPR group continued their work from the PAR Pre-Cycle to study how a principal can develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Table 8 shows the frequency and dates of the CPR group meetings, reflective memos, AP-NIC meetings, and Community Learning Exchange (CLE) during PAR Cycle One. The CPR group planned activities during CPR meetings, and assistant principals conducted those activities independently or during AP-NIC meetings. After discussion and analysis, the CPR group would enact new activities and engage in another PDSA cycle.

**CPR Meetings**

The CPR group met monthly during PAR Cycle One. I planned and facilitated the CPR meetings using CLE pedagogies like in the PAR Pre-Cycle; however, these meetings shifted to

Table 8

*Activities: PAR Cycle One*

| Activity | January | February | March | April | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Meetings with CPR group | 1<br>1/4/22 | 1<br>2/23/22 | 1<br>3/14/22 | 1<br>4/4/22 | 4 |
| Principal reflective memos | 1<br>1/18/22 | 2<br>2/4/22<br>2/17/22 | 2<br>3/1/22<br>3/14/22 | 3<br>4/1/22<br>4/14/22<br>4/26/22 | 8 |
| AP reflective memos | | 1<br>2/14/22 | 1<br>3/14/22 | 1<br>4/26/22 | 3 |
| AP – NIC Meetings | 1<br>1/5/22 | 1<br>2/1/22 | 1<br>3/2/22 | 1<br>4/6/22 | 4 |
| Community Learning Exchange | | 1<br>2/4/22 | | | 1 |

implementing a plan, do, study, act cycle to investigate how a principal develops the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Table 8 shows the dates and frequencies of the CPR meetings. Meetings lasted an hour and were recorded. I used a transcription service to transcribe the meetings, then coded the transcriptions using deductive coding, as explained by Saldaña (2016).

**Reflective Memos**

During PAR Cycle One, CPR group members and I completed reflective memos. Table 8 shows the dates and frequencies of the reflective memos. For the reflective memos, CPR group members responded to questions that required reflection on the activities completed during PAR Cycle One (see Appendix D). I coded all the memos for data analysis.

**AP-NIC Meetings**

During the PAR Pre-Cycle, CPR group members identified three teachers within an academic department who wanted to participate in an Assistant Principal – Network Improvement Community (AP-NIC). Each assistant principal participated in their own AP-NIC and met with the teachers monthly. Figure 6 in Chapter 3 illustrated how the AP-NICs are structured. I did not collect any data directly from AP-NIC meetings. However, assistant principals recorded their reflections and experiences from AP-NIC meetings in their reflective memos.

**Community Learning Exchange**

In February 2022, I determined that our entire school staff needed to meet to ensure we were all on the same page moving forward for the remainder of the school year. So, instead of holding a traditional staff meeting where I stand in front of everyone and talk, the CPR group planned a CLE. The assistant principals and I facilitated the CLE with teachers. The CLE

included an opening and closing circle and a learning walk activity where participants walked and talked about goals for the remainder of the school year. I took notes during the CLE to capture the content shared by participants and coded my notes for data analysis.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

I collected the data from PAR Cycle One activities and used the codes developed in the PAR Pre-Cycle to code the data. I analyzed data from several sources, including CPR meeting artifacts, transcriptions of CPR meetings, reflective memos, and the CPR group members' reflective memos. I printed any artifact that was in an electronic form to review and code. I used the same process as in the PAR Pre-Cycle to highlight keywords, ideas, and phrases from the data and assigned them codes. I wrote notes in the margins of the documents. I entered the codes from the data into the codebook. In addition to using the codes established in the PAR Pre-Cycle, I also used initial coding (Charmaz, 2014) to create and record new codes in my codebook (see Appendix G).

As I updated the frequencies of the codes in the codebook, some codes fit nicely into the emerging categories from the PAR Pre-Cycle. In contrast, others were adjusted or pointed to new categories. Table 9 illustrates the codes and frequencies from the Assistant Principal Assignments category. As I engaged in the second coding cycle using pattern coding (Miles et al., 2014), I created new codes and adjusted categories. During the pattern coding process, I grouped similar codes together to identify similarities and patterns that solidified the categories and led to the emerging themes. The Assistant Principal Assignments category illustrated in Table 9 is an example of a category I adjusted after pattern coding. After the PAR Pre-Cycle, the category was named Tasks Assistant Principals Have To Do, but after adding new codes from

Table 9

*Assistant Principal Assignments*

| Category | Code | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Assistant Principal Assignments | Administrative tasks/responsibilities | 16 |
| Assistant Principal Assignments | Managerial tasks | 6 |
| Assistant Principal Assignments | Parent concerns/meetings | 4 |
| Assistant Principal Assignments | Student behavior management | 12 |

PAR Cycle One and analyzing how the codes fit together, I renamed the category Assistant Principal Assignments.

I went through multiple iterations of the pattern coding process, regrouping codes and categories until I felt comfortable that the codes and categories supported the emerging themes. Figure 7 illustrates my thinking as I identified emerging themes and the corresponding categories and codes. It is visible in Figure 7, where I marked out, adjusted, and changed codes, categories, and emerging things as I continued to analyze the data and identify patterns. On the left in green are the primary emerging categories from the PAR Pre-Cycle with some of the significant codes. In the middle in purple are some of the initial categories from PAR Cycle One, and in the middle in red are significant codes that corresponded with the categories in purple. The first emerging themes I identified from the data are in the middle in blue. Finally, on the right are the final emerging themes and corresponding categories. As an additional step, during the April 4, 2022, CPR group meeting, I shared my codebook, categories, and emerging themes with the CPR group as a form of member checking to ensure the codes, categories, and emerging themes accurately and adequately captured the work of the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One.

## Emergent Themes

After multiple rounds of coding and analyzing the data through the lens of the FoP, two themes emerged: Juggling Too Many Balls and Equity-Centered Leadership Practices. Figure 8 illustrates the emerging themes and overarching research question. I discuss each theme in more detail and explain how the theme emerged from the data.

### Juggling Too Many Balls

According to Goldring et al. (2021), the number of assistant principals has nearly doubled over the last 25 years. Despite that increase, there still are not enough assistant principals to
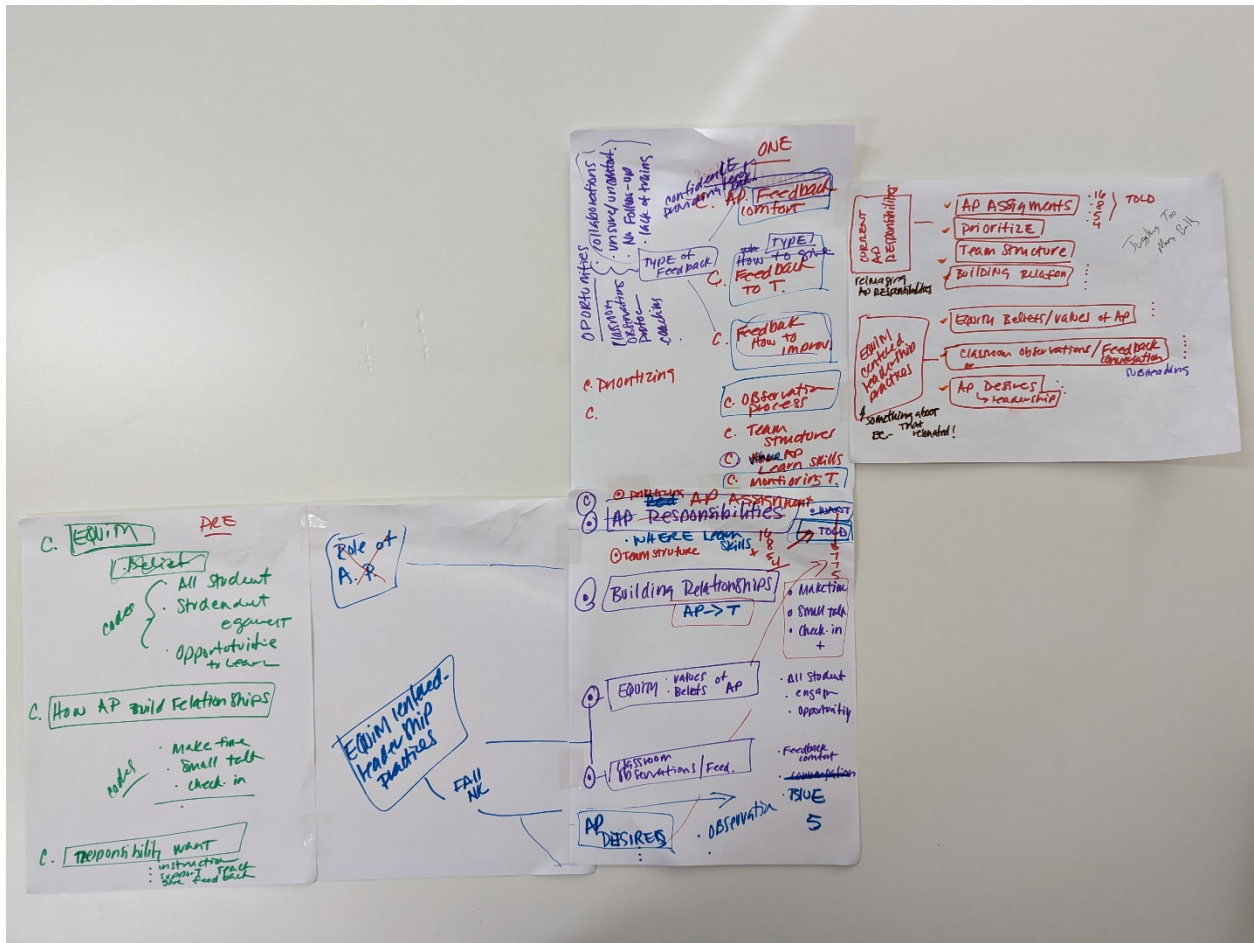
*Figure 7.* PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One emerging categories and themes.
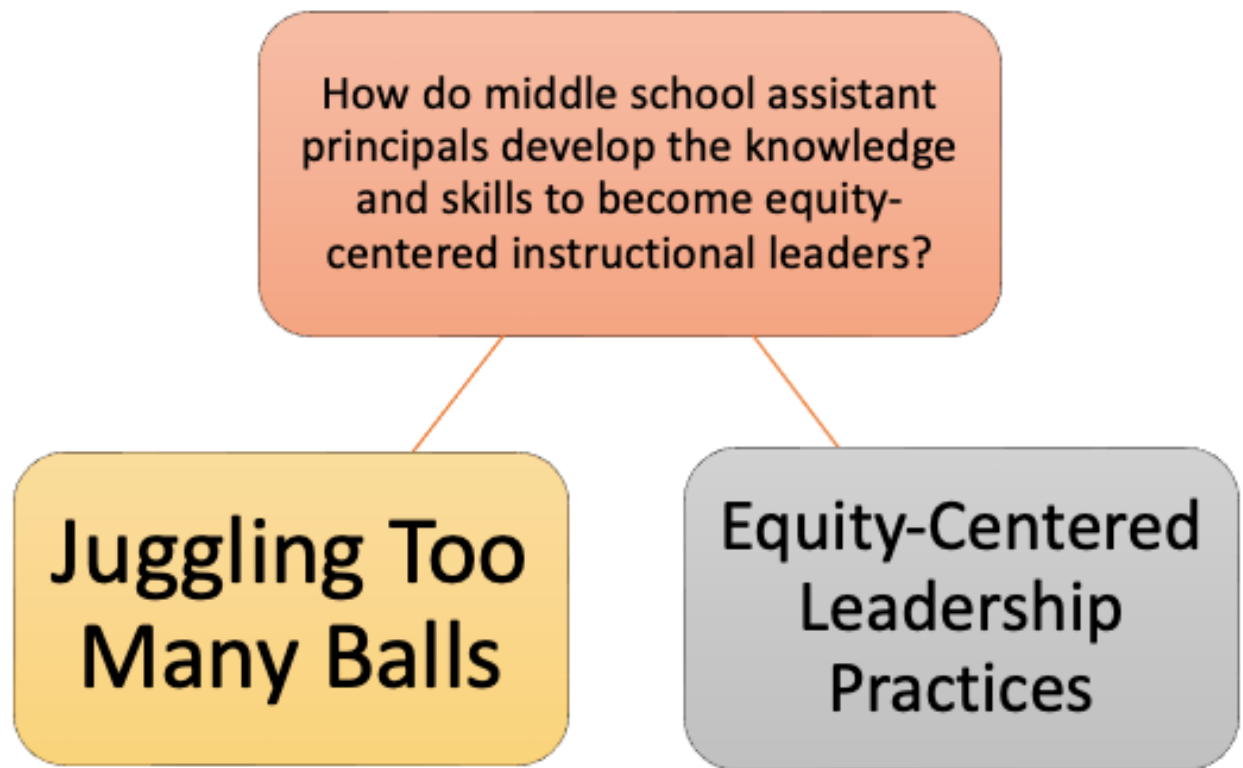
*Figure 8*. Emerging themes with research question.

sufficiently meet the needs of all students (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2018). Therefore, it is no surprise that assistant principals end up doing so many different things that they are not able to do the things they desire. I experienced this every day as an assistant principal. In one of my February 2022 reflective memos, I expressed that the assistant principals in the CPR group understood the concept and importance of focusing their time and energy on classroom instruction and equitable practices, but in practice, they were not doing it because they got pulled away to do other tasks. When analyzing the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One data, I identified four categories related to my frustration and the theme: Assistant Principal Assignments, Building Relationships, Prioritizing, and School-Wide Structures. The frequencies in Table 10 highlight the number of times each category appeared in the data. I only included categories that appeared in the data three or more times as I determined that a frequency of three was the point when a category began to stand out as important. The categories and frequencies are in my complete codebook (see Appendix G). When grouped together and viewed holistically, the data indicates that assistant principals juggle too many balls. In this section, I discuss the four categories (yellow) that support the theme (orange): Juggling Too Many Balls, which is illustrated in Figure 9.

### Assistant Principal Assignments.

The assistant principal role is a busy job. There is no set job description for the assistant principal that is consistent across schools (Goldring et al., 2021). Therefore, the assistant principal's job is typically whatever duties the principal assigns. This arrangement usually leads to the principal being responsible for instructional and other high-level tasks, while the APs focus on the less desirable duties of student discipline, inventory of books, and bus management. Tasks they generally do not want to do. As a result, the assistant principals do not get to spend as

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Table 10

*Theme: Juggling Too Many Balls*

| Category | Code | Total |
|---|---|---|
| Assistant Principal Assignments | Administrative Tasks | 16 |
| Assistant Principal Assignments | Student Behavior Management | 12 |
| Assistant Principal Assignments | Managerial Tasks | 6 |
| Assistant Principal Assignments | Parent Concerns/Meetings | 3 |
| Building Relationships | Make Time to Build Relationships | 9 |
| Building Relationships | Check-In on Well-Being | 6 |
| Building Relationships | Small Talk | 6 |
| Building Relationships | Being Open | 5 |
| Building Relationships | Influence | 3 |
| Building Relationships | Personable | 3 |
| Prioritizing | No Time | 5 |
| Prioritizing | Intentional With Time | 5 |
| Prioritizing | Time Management | 3 |
| Schoolwide Structures | Establish Process | 4 |
| Schoolwide Structures | Delegation | 3 |
| Schoolwide Structures | Establish Expectations | 3 |
| Schoolwide Structures | Establish Roles | 3 |

*Figure 9.* Juggling too many balls.

much time on teaching and learning, the tasks they want to do. The assistant principals in the CPR group expressed this sentiment frequently during PAR Cycle One, highlighted by AP Smith stating, "I don't get to do the things I want to do because of the daily countless incidents that pop up and have to be handled right at that moment." As a result of these conversations, the CPR group analyzed the distribution of responsibilities between the principal and assistant principals. I also reflected on my process of delegating responsibilities to the assistant principals. I realized that I assigned duties to my assistant principals similarly to how responsibilities were given to me when I was an assistant principal; I rotated the responsibilities each year so that assistant principals had experience with every aspect of the school. Upon more reflection, it became clear that I assigned myself more of the duties that I wanted to do, like instructional monitoring and providing feedback to teachers, and I assigned the assistant principals duties I did not want to do, like butts, books, and buses. As the CPR group studied how assistant principals are assigned tasks, it was clear that the principal is partially responsible for the ability of assistant principals to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership.

During PAR Cycle One, I transitioned to a new school, and an interim principal took over at Green Square Middle. Due to his interim role, he reassigned responsibilities to the APs in the CPR group. The interim principal assumed a more regular role in student discipline, which assistant principals indicated was the task most interfering with their schedule to get into classrooms for observations. As a result, the assistant principals were able to prioritize classroom observations and collaboration with teachers about equitable classroom practices. As AP Jones said, "the interim principal is doing more discipline and meeting with people that show up, and that allows us to get into the classroom and do more instructional stuff during the day." This

example warrants a look at the assignments of responsibilities to assistant principals in PAR Cycle Two.

### Building Relationships.

The CPR group identified building relationships as an important component of the assistant principal's work with teachers early in the PAR Pre-Cycle. As the CPR group continued the work into PAR Cycle One, building relationships continued to emerge as an important task for assistant principals to engage in. As AP Jones, a new assistant principal, indicated in the April 26, 2022, reflective memo, "I've learned I can do more than I thought, but it is a very big job. Building effective relationships has been the key for me." With the importance of relationships clear, the CPR group took specific steps to help assistant principals cultivate strong relationships within their AP-NIC groups. During AP-NIC meetings, the assistant principals used Personal Narrative and Journey Line protocols to build and strengthen relationships within the group. Both assistant principals felt that the Personal Narrative and Journey Line protocols helped them build a foundation of trust within the AP-NIC. In her March 14, 2022, reflective memo, AP Smith said that the Personal Narrative and Journey Line protocols helped her "not to always talk about school, but personal interests or commonalities."

### Prioritizing

During the PAR Pre-Cycle, the CPR group hypothesized that time management would play a role in the assistant principal's ability to develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders; as a result, one of the first tasks during PAR Cycle One was to create schedules for the APs to conduct classroom observations, coaching conversations, and PLC meetings. It quickly became apparent that scheduling tasks did not mean completing tasks. Assistant principals frequently double-scheduled themselves, were asked to do something

at the last minute, and dealt with parents, students, and teachers. As one assistant principal said, "we are putting out so many fires in the building, and that is why I can't get anything done." As the conversation continued in the CPR meeting, the CPR group realized that it was not just about making a schedule but about "sticking to it" or prioritizing equity-centered instructional leadership. When assistant principals got busy or were double scheduled, the equity-centered instructional leadership tasks like participating in PLC meetings or conducting informal walkthrough observations were the tasks that got rescheduled or missed. When asked about why the instructional leadership tasks were always the ones that the assistant principals missed, AP Smith stated, "the culture of the school and the expectations of the principal."

***School-Wide Structures.***

In addition, PAR Cycle One uncovered another factor important to assistant principals' ability to manage time effectively, thus juggling balls—school-wide structures. School-wide structures, as I define them, are the processes, procedures, expectations, and norms established within the school. It was not until halfway through PAR Cycle One that school-wide structures began to emerge as a category. When I transitioned to Blue Circle Middle School, there were no established school-wide structures for managing student behavior, student transitions, or classroom instruction. It was instantly clear to me how important the development of those structures at Green Square Middle School were over the past five years. A little over a month after starting at Blue Circle Middle School (BCMS), I wrote:

> At Blue Circle, I see that I am doing all the same responsibilities as the AP, and
> neither of us can focus on instruction. Gun on campus, long-term suspension
> paperwork, bullying investigation, and HR issues have to be investigated. Those
> keep me from getting into the classroom, and I need the AP to take on all the

student discipline and parent complaints (lack of structure and young teachers

resulted in many discipline issues).

Without the school-wide structures in place at BCMS, like a consistent discipline process, PLC

expectations, schedules, clear duties, and responsibilities for the teachers and assistant principal,

it was nearly impossible for me to engage in developing the knowledge and skills of assistant

principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. It became clear that establishing

school-wide structures is an essential component of effective time management for

administrators.

*Summary.*

Assistant principals have to juggle many balls. To become equity-centered instructional

leaders, assistant principals must learn to manage their time effectively; however, it is more than

just keeping a calendar. Assistant principals must learn to prioritize equity-centered instructional

leadership tasks. The principal must support them by being mindful of how they distribute duties

and responsibilities because the principal's expectations determine what the assistant principals

do. In addition, for assistant principals to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership, the

principal has to ensure that they delegate some of the responsibility to the assistant principals.

Finally, when school-wide structures are not in place for such things as student discipline or PLC

meetings, the principals and assistant principals cannot effectively manage the school and focus

on equity-centered instructional leadership. As I said in my January 18, 2022, reflective memo,

"At BCMS, the assistant principal and I haven't been able to start working on equity-centered

instructional leadership because the foundation, structures, and processes are not in place."

Members of the CPR group will continue to work on prioritizing their time during PAR Cycle

Two; in addition, assistant principals will assess and compare their ability to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership under a new principal.

**Equity-Centered Leadership Practices**

In the PAR Pre-Cycle, assistant principals expressed many beliefs about equity and its importance in their work with teachers. During PAR Cycle One, the CPR group built off those equity beliefs and implemented them. As a result of putting these equity beliefs into action, three related categories stood out as important to the process: Assistant Principal Desires, Equity Beliefs of Assistant Principals, and Observation-Feedback. The Observation-Feedback category has four sub-categories that stand out as important: Comfort, Improve, Professional Learning Community, and Type of Feedback. Table 11 highlights the frequency each category appeared in the data, and Figure 10 illustrates the categories and sub-categories that support the emerging theme: Equity-Centered Leadership Practices.

*Assistant Principal Desires.*

From the beginning of the PAR Pre-Cycle and continuing throughout the PAR study, assistant principals in the CPR group expressed their desire to impact teachers and students. Assistant Principal Jones indicated that one of the main reasons she left teaching for administration was her "desire and passion for leading." During PAR Cycle One, AP Jones provided more specifics about their desires, stating that she wanted to "improve student learning and the classroom experience for all" and that she wanted to "encourage teachers to become leaders." These statements demonstrate assistant principals' desire to engage in equity-centered leadership; however, simply having the desire to do something does not mean it will happen. During PAR Cycle One, I worked with the CPR group to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to engage in the equity-centered instructional leadership they desired by

Table 11

*Theme: Equity-Centered Leadership Practices*

| Category | Sub-Category | Code | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Assistant Principal Desires | | Support Teachers | 10 |
| Assistant Principal Desires | | Want Involvement in Instruction | 7 |
| Assistant Principal Desires | | Give Feedback | 6 |
| Assistant Principal Desires | | Provide PD | 3 |
| Equity Beliefs of Assistant Principals | | Includes All Students | 7 |
| Equity Beliefs of Assistant Principals | | Opportunity to Learn | 7 |
| Equity Beliefs of Assistant Principals | | Increase Student Engagement | 4 |
| Observation-Feedback | Comfort | Uncomfortable Giving Feedback | 6 |
| Observation-Feedback | Comfort | Feedback-Unsure | 3 |
| Observation-Feedback | Improve | No Follow up on Feedback | 3 |
| Observation-Feedback | Improve | Using Observation Tool | 5 |
| Observation-Feedback | Improve | Not Giving Enough Feedback | 3 |
| Observation-Feedback | Professional Learning Community | Planning During Professional Learning Community Meeting | 5 |
| Observation-Feedback | Type | Technology | 3 |
| Observation-Feedback | Type | Classroom Management | 3 |
| Observation-Feedback | Type | Time Management | 3 |

*Figure 10.* Theme: Equity-centered leadership practices.

creating the spaces and conditions necessary for development to occur. To create these spaces and conditions, we started by focusing on relationships. During CPR group meetings, I modeled the CLE Axioms with assistant principals, and we got to know each other through Personal Narratives and Journey Lines. The assistant principals then implemented those same tools with their AP-NICs to strengthen their relationships with teachers. As AP Smith indicated during the April 4, 2022, CPR meeting, "During this transition, I'm learning this job is a lot about building effective relationships." Despite this work and their desire to engage in equity-centered leadership, equity-centered leadership practices like participating in PLC meetings with teachers and engaging in observation-feedback cycles with teachers took a back seat to other tasks. As previously discussed, the interim principal reassigned duties among the principal and assistant principals to allow assistant principals to focus more on equity-centered leadership practices. The impact of reassigning duties is a crucial part of PAR Cycle Two.

*Equity Beliefs of Assistant Principals*

In PAR Cycle One, the CPR group worked to build off the equity beliefs of assistant principals identified in the PAR Pre-Cycle to build the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. In the PAR Pre-Cycle, assistant principals in the CPR group were able to articulate what equity in the classroom should look like. Assistant Principal Smith said an equitable classroom is "a classroom that includes all students," and AP Jones indicated "all students should be provided the tools they need to achieve academic success." Since assistant principals in the CPR group understood what equity looked like in the classroom, they engaged in observation-feedback cycles with teachers in their AP-NIC to build their equity-centered instructional leadership skills. In March 2022, it became clear that while assistant principals in the CPR group were engaged in observation-feedback cycles with

teachers, these cycles were not focusing on equity. As AP Smith said in their March 14, 2022,

reflective memo, "I wanted to, but never felt comfortable bringing up equity." This reflection

highlights the gap in the assistant principals' beliefs about equity in the classroom and their

capacity as equity-centered instructional leaders to coach teachers to change their practice. As a

result, I introduced the assistant principals in the CPR group to the Calling-On Observation Tool

(see Appendix H). This tool collects how often a teacher calls on students in class. The collected

data is then shared with the teacher and forms the basis for a data-driven post-observation

conference. Since assistant principals in the CPR group did not use this tool until April 2022,

there was not enough time to determine the impact. This tool and additional coaching on using

the data to provide feedback to teachers is the focus of PAR Cycle Two.

*Observation-Feedback.*

During PAR Cycle One, observation and feedback emerged as the primary way assistant

principals in the CPR group worked with teachers to identify and implement equitable classroom

practices. Assistant principals in the CPR group engaged in cycles of classroom observations and

feedback with members of their AP-NICs. In addition, assistant principals attend PLC meetings

with teachers in their AP-NICs as another opportunity to collaborate with teachers and provide

feedback. While collecting data during PAR Cycle One, the Observation-Feedback category

became so large that I began to break it down into four subcategories: Comfort, Improve,

Professional Learning Community, and Types of Feedback. In this section, I discuss the four

subcategories that emerged as important in developing assistant principals' knowledge and skills.

**Comfort.** In March 2022, when it became clear that CPR group members were still not

comfortable giving feedback to teachers and engaging in crucial conversations about equitable

classroom practices, the CPR group set out to identify how to help assistant principals feel more

comfortable conducting crucial conversations with teachers. I needed to determine why assistant principals lacked confidence. During the March 14, 2022, CPR meeting, AP Jones said, "I don't feel comfortable…I'm probably a five out of ten". Through continued discussion and investigation, it became clear that CPR group members did not feel comfortable having crucial conversations with teachers about equitable classroom practices because they did not have any quantitative data to base their feedback. To assist CPR group members with collecting data about equitable classroom practices, I shared a Calling-On Observation Tool (see Appendix H). I asked CPR group members to use the tool with a teacher during their next observation/feedback cycle. The tool requires the observer to draw a seating chart of the class, identify the race and gender of each student, and tally how each student participates in class. This allows the observer to have quantitative data to share with the teacher in a post-observation conversation. Because the CPR group started using the tool in April, there was not much time in PAR Cycle One to evaluate the effectiveness; however, AP Jones said, "I have to get better at keeping up with the tallies, but I think I am going to like having concrete data to share with the teacher." The CPR group will continue using the calling on observation tool in PAR Cycle Two to determine the extent to which it assists assistant principals in collaborating with teachers to implement more equitable classroom practices.

 **Improve**. CPR group members engaged in observation-feedback cycles with teachers in the AP-NICs. When the CPR group discussed these cycles during CPR group meetings, it was clear that the assistant principals felt they could and wanted to improve their feedback. As CPR group members indicated, "I need to have more discussion, and instructional conversations with teachers," and AP Jones said, "if something would come out of that conversation, that is what I want." Assistant principals in the CPR group have the disposition and desire to become equity-

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centered instructional leaders. Still, they lack the knowledge and skills to help teachers

implement equitable classroom practices. It is important to note that we cannot fault assistant

principals for a lack of knowledge and skills in assisting teachers in implementing equitable

classroom practices because they did not learn how to do those things during their school

administration programs; they just started doing what they knew how to do. In the April 4, 2022,

CPR meeting, the CPR group decided to do a few observations using the Calling-On observation

tool. After each observation, the CPR group compared their completed notes and data collection

tools. The group observations were necessary to ensure that all members of the CPR group used

the tool with fidelity and collected accurate data during the classroom observation. The focused

Calling-On tool helped assistant principals identify if an equitable classroom practice was used

and gave them data to share with the teacher after the observation. One assistant principal shared,

"I've not collected data in an observation before, other than writing down the time stuff happens.

I feel like this tool helped me see more of what was happening in the class." The CPR group will

continue to use the calling on observation tool in PAR Cycle Two and focus more on the

conversations and collaboration between teachers and assistant principals.

**Professional Learning Community**. CPR group members knew that PLC meetings were

an opportunity to collaborate with teachers around equitable classroom practices; however,

assistant principals were not as consistent as they would like in attending PLC meetings. To

create more consistency, we divided the PLC meetings between the assistant principals and me. I

expected the assistant principals to attend their assigned PLC meetings. Each week in our

administrative team meetings, I would ask for a report from the assistant principals about the

PLC meetings. Expecting assistant principals to be in PLC meetings one day a week required me

to do many of the tasks typically assigned to assistant principals, like student discipline

management, at least a couple of days a week. After a couple of months of regularly attending PLC meetings, assistant principals noticed teachers engaged more in the discussions on instructional practices during PLC meetings. This allowed the assistant principals to collaborate more with teachers during PLC meetings on how to implement equitable classroom practices. As AP Jones indicated, "I didn't necessarily need more time, but to be there more consistently."

**Type of Feedback**. The data from PAR Cycle One show that assistant principals in the CPR group focused their feedback to teachers on three areas: technology, time management, and classroom management. None of those feedback areas are directly focused on equitable classroom practices. While some of the feedback given to teachers provided equitable access to the class discussion for all students, the assistant principal did not explicitly frame the feedback with an equity lens. For example, during the February 23, 2022, CPR group meeting, AP Jones shared some feedback recently given to a teacher. Assistant Principal Jones suggested that a teacher use a google doc, Padlet, Jamboard, or another electronic forum where all students can add comments to the discussion as a way to ensure all students participate in the lesson; however, AP Jones did not explicitly discuss with the teacher the need for a more equitable classroom practice. Introducing the Calling-On Observation Tool assisted assistant principals in the CPR group with focusing more of their feedback on at least one equitable classroom practice. Later in PAR Cycle One, after using the Calling-On Observation Tool, AP Jones summarized their learning in their reflective memo, saying, "I am learning to be more intentional."

*Summary*

Teachers and assistant principals collaborate multiple times a day about school-related topics; however, to become equity-centered instructional leaders, assistant principals have to be able to shift these interactions into collaboration about equitable classroom practices. The

activities in PAR Cycle One created the space and conditions for assistant principals to identify

opportunities to collaborate with teachers about equitable classroom practices. Specifically, the

Calling-On Observation Tool and the assignment to PLC meetings helped assistant principals

identify examples of equitable classroom practices and take advantage of opportunities to

collaborate with teachers about equitable classroom practices. The Calling-On Observation Tool

gave assistant principals a focus during observations and walkthroughs. In addition, the tool

provided assistant principals with data to use when collaborating with teachers. The assignment

to PLC meetings gave assistant principals the freedom to participate in those meetings without

interruptions. The activities in PAR Cycle One also clarified that creating the space and

conditions for collaboration with teachers about equitable classroom practices alone is not

enough. Assistant principals must also be comfortable having crucial conversations about

equitable classroom practices and must develop the skills to facilitate these conversations.

Developing these skills and becoming more comfortable in conversations about equitable

classroom practices takes time and practice; therefore, this is a crucial component of PAR Cycle

Two.

## Leadership Reflection and Action Steps for PAR Cycle Two

In addition to studying how assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to

become equity-centered instructional leaders, I am also studying how engaging in this study

builds my capacity as an educational leader. In this section, I reflect on my leadership growth

and development as a research-practitioner, highlight my thinking from the PAR Pre-Cycle

through PAR Cycle One, and discuss the action steps that lead into PAR Cycle Two. Finally, I

conclude with what I am most eager to learn from the final data collection cycle.

I have been a principal for six years and have grown more during PAR Cycle One than in the previous five years combined. In addition to my daily duties as a school principal and lead researcher of this study, I changed positions and started in a new position as principal of a different school. The change was difficult, scary, and exciting at the same time; however, it gave me an excellent opportunity to see the impact of my leadership on the school and the shifts and changes I had made and was making. Delegating more responsibility to assistant principals is an area where my leadership shifted during PAR Cycle One. The only way for assistant principals to develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders is for the principal to delegate some of that responsibility to the assistant principals. In my reflective memo from March 1, 2022, I said, "I always thought I was pretty good at delegating responsibility to my assistant principals, but it appears I was delegating the task, not the responsibility." This became clear when I answered more questions for the assistant principals at my former school than at my current school. The tasks from PAR Cycle One, such as assigning each assistant principal a PLC meeting to attend and be responsible for supporting, exemplify how my leadership has shifted through this study.

In addition to growing as a leader, I have also grown as a research-practitioner. Participating in meetings as a research-practitioner forced me to be more aware of my role and status within the meeting. As a result, I noticed myself talking less and listening more. Listening instead of speaking made me ask more questions instead of giving my opinion. For example, during the April CPR group meeting, we discussed our experiences using the Calling-On Observation Tool to provide feedback to teachers. The assistant principals shared their experiences, and instead of giving my opinion on how they could do better like I usually do, I

kept asking them, "why do you think that happened?" Eventually, they could identify strategies to implement the next time they meet with a teacher.

While reflecting on the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One as a whole, one idea is present throughout relationships. Relationships were a focus of the PAR Pre-Cycle but not directly a part of PAR Cycle One; however, during PAR Cycle One, even though it was not studied, the importance of relationships was evident. During the CLE on February 4, 2022, teachers indicated they were ready for change and felt supported through their relationships with each other and the administration to engage in this work and try something.

The PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One focused on creating the space and conditions for assistant principals to collaborate on equitable classroom practices with teachers. PAR Cycle Two focuses on putting assistant principal learning into practice. First, CPR group members will continue to use the Calling-On Observation Tool to conduct observations and provide feedback to teachers. In addition, I will share a conversation guide that assistant principals can use to help facilitate the conversation with the teacher. Also, I will engage in a more structured process to follow up with assistant principals on the conversations they are facilitating in PLC meetings.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the activities conducted during PAR Cycle One and the themes that emerged to this point of the study. I also reflected on my practice and leadership as a research-practitioner in this study. The process of data analysis and reflection as part of the PDSA cycle generated the starting point for the next PAR cycle. In the next chapter, I present the data collected during the final cycle, PAR Cycle Two, and discuss the findings and how they fit together with the data collected in the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One.

# CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE TWO AND FINDINGS

Superintendents, other central office staff, and teachers expect school principals to be the instructional leader of a school; however, due to the complex nature of principalship, principals should not be the only instructional leader in the building. Principals need help. The principal alone cannot provide the required instructional leadership to every teacher in the building. Enter the assistant principal. The assistant principal is perfectly positioned to be an additional instructional leader in the school. In addition, assistant principals are next in line to become principals and need experience building their chops as instructional leaders to prepare them for their next role. Unfortunately, due to current practice, assistant principals are often ill-prepared to assume instructional leadership responsibilities. As a result, this PAR study set out to answer the following questions:

- How does a principal develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders?

- How do assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to help teachers identify equitable classroom practices?

- How do assistant principals collaborate with teachers to implement equitable classroom practices?

- How does the process of supporting assistant principals build my capacity as an educational leader?

In this chapter, I describe the PAR Cycle Two process, including the activities of the CPR group, data collection and analysis, and how the data from the PAR Pre-Cycle through PAR Cycle Two fit together to support answering the research questions. Then, I present the overall

findings from this participatory action research study and the supporting data. I finish with a conclusion of the PAR study.

## PAR Cycle Two Process

The PAR Cycle Two occurred from August through October in the Fall 2022 semester. During this cycle, the CPR group members were no longer all working at the same school but now spread across three different schools. This created some challenges for the CPR group in terms of holding CPR group meetings and continuing the Assistant Principal-Network Improvement Community (AP-NIC) structure; however, it also provided some benefits regarding how the work from the previous PAR Cycles would transfer to new school settings. Due to the change in schools, the CPR group determined that there would not be enough time to create new AP-NIC groups; therefore, there were no AP-NIC meetings during PAR Cycle Two. Table 12 shows the frequency and dates of the CPR group meetings and reflective memos during PAR Cycle Two.

### CPR Meetings

The CPR group met four times during this PAR Cycle, twice a month starting in September. We held most meetings virtually because the CPR members were at different schools. We had the final meeting on October 28, 2022, in person. I planned and facilitated the meetings using the CLE pedagogies. I recorded the virtual meetings and used a transcription program. I did not record the in-person meeting; however, I took notes during the meeting. I coded the transcriptions and notes using initial and pattern coding (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).

### Reflective Memos

As during the previous PAR Cycles, the CPR group members and I completed reflective

Table 12

*Activities: PAR Cycle Two*

| Activity | August | September | October |
|---|---|---|---|
| Meetings with CPR group | | 9/16/22<br>9/28/22 | 10/14/22<br>10/28/22 |
| Principal reflective memos | 8/31/22 | 9/30/22 | 10/31/22 |
| Assistant principal reflective memos | | 9/30/22 | 10/8/22 |

memos throughout PAR Cycle Two. I completed reflective memos monthly starting in August, while the other CPR group members completed monthly reflective memos beginning in September after the CPR group resumed meeting. CPR group members reflected on the activities they completed during PAR Cycle Two and responded to questions to guide their reflections about the study and their knowledge and skill development (see Appendix D). Each CPR member uploaded memos to an electronic folder housed in my Google drive. I then printed and coded the memos in the same manner as I did for the group meeting documents.

**AP-NIC Meetings**

During the previous PAR Cycles, assistant principals in the CPR group identified and met with selected teachers in an Assistant Principal-Network Improvement Community (AP-NIC). In PAR Cycle Two, the assistant principals and I were now at three separate schools. The CPR group determined it would take too long to start new AP-NICs at the new schools; therefore, the CPR group did not use AP-NICs in PAR Cycle Two. Instead, CPR group members utilized the tools and strategies they learned during the previous PAR Cycles with all teachers they worked with at their new schools. In the assistant principals' reflective memos, the assistant principals discussed the implementation and experiences of transferring the acquired pedagogies and skills into a new school environment.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

I collected the data from PAR Cycle Two activities and used the codes I developed in the previous PAR cycles to begin coding the new data. I analyzed the data from the CPR meetings and reflective memos. I printed all electronic artifacts to review and code. I highlighted key words and phrases from the data and assigned them codes. I then entered the codes into the codebook and identified the frequencies of the codes (see Appendix F).

Once I entered all the data into the codebook, I sorted the data by frequency. The two codes with the greatest frequency did not appear until PAR Cycle Two (Figure 11). The two codes are Feedback–Equitable Classroom Practices and Plan Feedback. While they are new codes, they aligned perfectly with the Observation–Feedback category; however, the frequency of these two new codes signaled a shift in the knowledge and skills of assistant principals in providing feedback to teachers.

The data from PAR Cycle Two confirmed aspects of the two emerging themes from PAR Cycle One; however, the frequency of some of the codes highlighted the importance of the Observation–Feedback category. As I analyzed the data from all PAR Cycles, separating the Observation–Feedback category from the Equity-Centered Leadership Practices theme made more sense due to the frequency of codes within the category. As I adjusted the codes and categories through deductive coding (Saldaña, 2016) to represent the data accurately, the data supported three findings. During the October 28, 2022, CPR meeting, I shared the data from PAR Cycle Two, including my codebook, categories, and findings, as a form of member checking. The findings resulted from a rigorous and detailed analysis of the data collected throughout three PAR Cycles. Members of the CPR group indicated they believed the organization of the data accurately and adequately captured the work of the three PAR Cycles.

As detailed in Chapter 2, the roles of the principal and assistant principal are complex and multi-faceted. The complexity and multi-faceted nature of the roles made it difficult for me to organize and categorize the data in a way that accurately reflected the findings of this study. The findings evolved throughout the three PAR cycles as I analyzed the data and conducted multiple inductive and deductive coding cycles. (Saldaña, 2016) Through the iterative coding process, I concluded that the difficulty in defining the findings resulted from the significant overlap
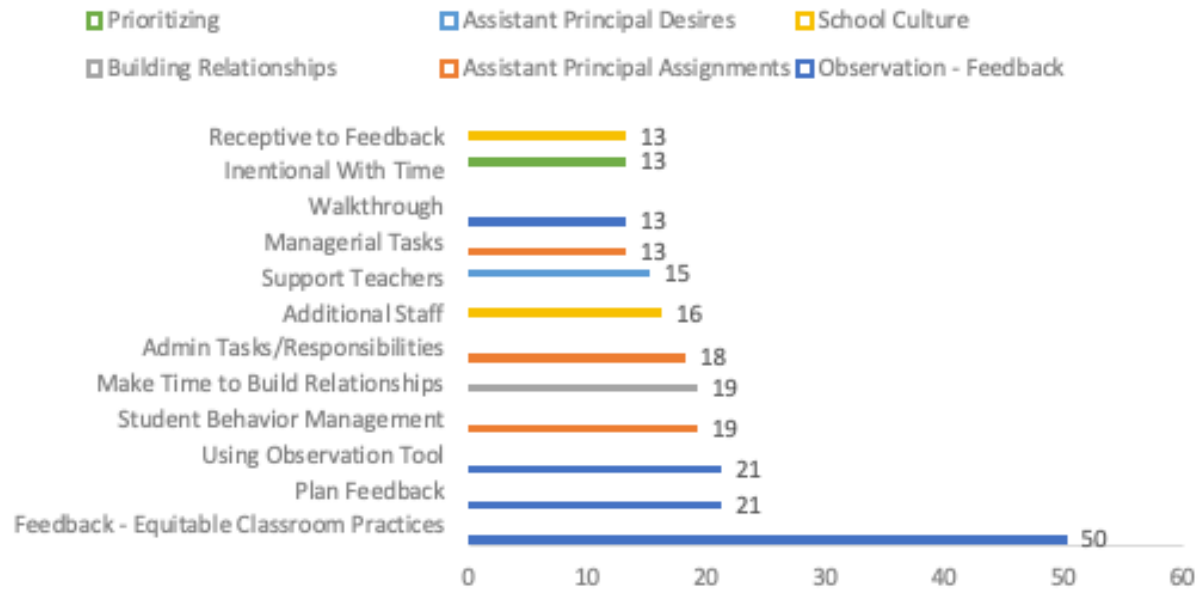
*Figure 11.* Frequency of codes with categories.

between the findings. Figure 12 illustrates the three findings and their relationship supported by the data.

## Findings

After conducting three cycles of inquiry that focused on answering the primary research question: How does a middle school principal develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders, the data supports three findings. First, the principal must create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership. Second, the principal must make assistant principal development a priority. Finally, the principal must juggle tasks side-by-side with assistant principals. While each of the three findings stands on its own, there is significant overlap between the three findings, and the power of each is amplified when exercised in conjunction with the others. To achieve the most significant impact, principals must implement all three findings. The white space in the center of Figure 12 illustrates the preferred area of practice.

The data from the three PAR Cycles support the findings. The PAR Pre-Cycle focused on understanding the context and relationships. PAR Cycle One started with the development of Assistant Principal–Network Improvement Communities (AP-NIC) and the implementation of equity-centered leadership practices. The focus shifted early in PAR Cycle One when I identified a knowledge and skill gap which prevented CPR group members from effectively engaging in the tasks. PAR Cycle Two focused on applying and implementing the knowledge and skills developed during the first two PAR Cycles. I collected significantly more data during PAR Cycle Two because CPR group members moved to different schools. Instead of collecting data from one school, I was now collecting and comparing data from multiple schools. In addition, due to starting at new schools, CPR group members implemented many of the tasks previously

*Figure 12*. Relationship of findings.

implemented during the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One at their new school in addition to the tasks from PAR Cycle Two. Figure 13 shows the frequency distribution of codes for each finding throughout the three PAR Cycles.

**Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership**

The data from the three cycles of inquiry demonstrates that equity-centered instructional leadership does not just happen because we want it to, nor do assistant principals engage in equity-centered instructional leadership practices on their own. For an assistant principal to develop the knowledge and skills to become an equity-centered instructional leader, the principal should intentionally create the conditions and spaces that allow learning about equity-centered instructional leadership. The data from CPR group meetings and principal and assistant principal reflective memos indicate (see Figure 14) that two primary ways principals can create the conditions and spaces necessary for equity-centered instructional leadership: School Culture (42%) and Building Relationships (30%). While it did not appear as frequently in the data, CPR group members were adamant that Administrative Team Expectations (13%) created the foundation for the conditions and spaces to exist and are as important as Building Relationships and School Culture. The open conversations and reflective process of the memos provided the opportunity for CPR group members to speak freely about the elements necessary to create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership. Next, I expand on each of these elements.

*School Culture*

The data indicates that creating the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership starts with school culture. As AP Smith stated during a CPR group meeting, "It is the culture of the school and the expectations of the principal." Figure 15 shows
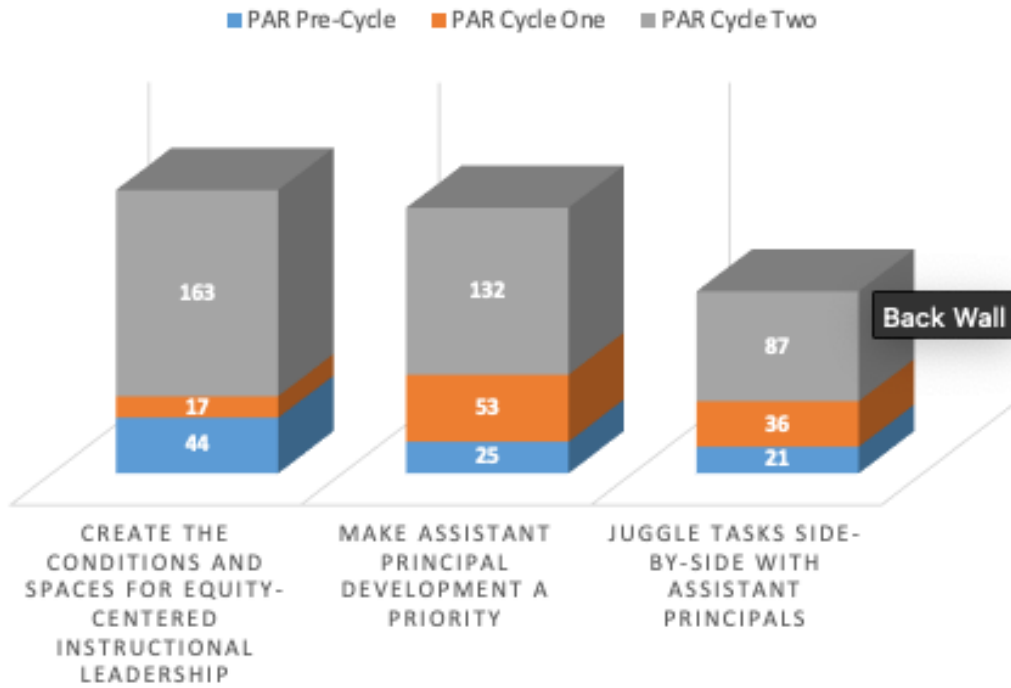
*Figure 13.* Frequency of codes by finding.

## CONDITIONS AND SPACES FOR EQUITY-CENTERED INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

■ Administrative Team Expectations  ■ Assistant Principal Desires
■ Building Relationships  ■ School Culture

13%
15%
42%
30%
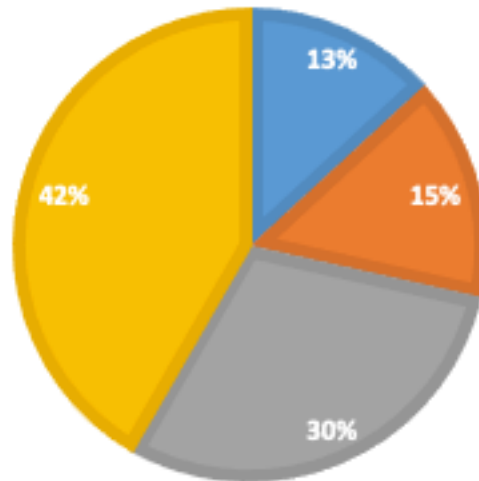
*Figure 14.* Conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership.

*Figure 15*. School culture sub-categories and codes.

the sub-categories of school culture and the corresponding codes. The CPR group members indicated that Administrator Beliefs (21%) and Schoolwide Support (45%) were the most important contributors to school culture. These two sub-categories work together to create the school culture. The administrator's beliefs provide the foundation for school culture and influence the schoolwide supports ultimately put in place.

**Administrator Beliefs.** Administrator beliefs were the least identified factor contributing to school culture; however, their beliefs provide the foundation for all other work to follow. CPR group members identified beliefs about a desire to include all students ($n$=7), increase student engagement ($n$=7), and provide the opportunity to learn ($n$=7). These beliefs drove administrators' work and influenced the development of schoolwide supports. As AP Jones said,"[The principal] put the mindset of equity in me. I'm aware of [equity] more now…that's the stuff I'm working to develop here." For administrator beliefs to create the foundation of school culture, administrators must communicate their beliefs to the staff.

**Schoolwide Supports.** Schoolwide supports were by far the most significant contributor to school culture. The significance of schoolwide supports to school culture became evident during PAR Cycle Two when multiple CPR group members moved to different schools. The foundation of schoolwide supports is the school's structures, expectations, and processes. These three things are essential because they create the foundation for assistant principals to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership. The importance of schoolwide supports became most evident when I moved schools during PAR Cycle One. When I started at Blue Circle Middle School, there was no established expectation for student transitions, there was no consistent process for student referrals, managing student behavior, or parent contact, and there was no established structure for teacher planning and meetings; as a result, the assistant principal and I

spent all of our time managing student behavior, conducting investigations, dealing with parents, completing, organizing, and submitting required documentation and paperwork. As I indicated in my reflective memo, "I am not able to start [working on equity-centered instructional leadership tasks] because [schoolwide structures, expectations, and processes] are not in place."

Once the foundation is created, administrators can focus on other aspects of schoolwide supports. Additional staff was the most frequent code within the sub-category, as AP Jones said after moving to a new school for PAR Cycle Two, "I mean that is [having an instructional coach] huge, like you need somebody." While not every school can hire additional staff, administrator visibility, the second most frequent code, is under the principal's control. The more visible the principal and assistant principals are within the school building, specifically the classrooms, the more positive the school's culture. "It's because we've been more visible" is the reason AP Jones attributed to teachers being more comfortable coming to administration for assistance and being more receptive to feedback.

### Building Relationships

The data indicates that building relationships is key to creating the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership. When looking at the frequency of the codes within this category, Figure 16 shows a wide spread in how CPR group members built relationships. The wide distribution of the data supports the notion that relationship building is complex and there is no one correct way to do it. The distribution highlights how CPR group members varied their strategy when building relationships based on the context and situation. Despite the wide distribution, CPR group members indicated that making time to build relationships stands out as the most important aspect at 28%. Making time to build relationships implies intentionality on the part of the CPR group members (assistant principals). The data about building relationships

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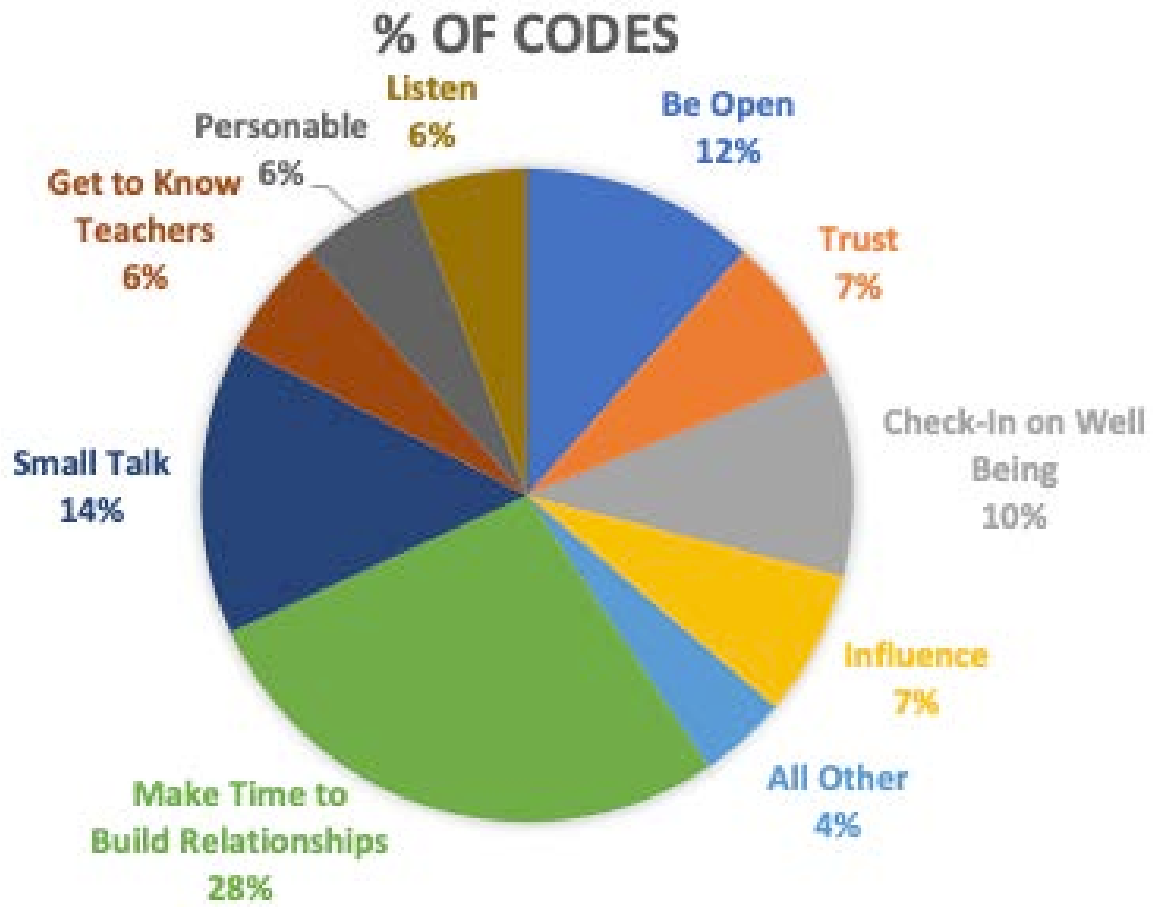
*Figure 16*. Distribution of codes within building relationships.

further confirms that the principal must intentionally create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered leadership to occur because it does not just happen on its own. As AP Smith indicated, "Building relationships is key; that's what I have learned." Being intentional about relationship building was important to CPR group members as they went to different schools between PAR Cycle One and PAR Cycle Two and provided the foundation for them to continue focusing on equity-centered instructional leadership with success despite working with a new group of teachers. The CPR group members found personal narrative and journey line protocols helpful in developing trust with teachers. During a CPR group meeting, AP Smith discussed some of the strategies they used to build relationships with teachers at the new school (listening, being open, talking to teachers in the hallway, being personable, and getting into their classrooms) and concluded that "you've got to make the effort because the more comfortable [teachers] get with you, the more you can accomplish." A final strategy I used during my transition to intentionally build relationships was to schedule a meeting with each staff member individually to ask them questions about themselves and their opinions and ideas for the school.

The change of school and administrative teams for CPR group members highlighted other areas of building relationships. The CPR group members indicated that trust between them and teachers was the most critical aspect of their relationship, allowing them to effectively engage in equity-centered instructional conversations with teachers. "If you say something to [a teacher], then you should go through with that" that is one way you "get people to trust you." Creating trust with teachers does not just happen. Administrators build relationships through intentional decisions to be open, get to know teachers, engage in small talk, and check in on teachers' well-being. As AP Smith indicated, "I am making more time to get to know the teachers and be more personable with them. Checking in on teachers more often has become a thing for me."

### *Administrative Team Expectations*

Administrative team expectations were the least identified category; however, CPR group members were adamant that the administrative team expectations were as important as any other category because the administrative expectations created the spaces and conditions for CPR group members to engage in all their other work. Figure 17 highlights the specific components of administrative team expectations identified by CPR group members. Protecting assistant principals' time (23%) from other responsibilities emerged as an important way for principals to create the space for assistant principals to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership. Assistant principals juggle so many balls every day that despite their best efforts, they lack the knowledge and skills required to protect their time from interruptions. Assistant Principal Smith said, "It was like I was doing a lot of things, but I wasn't doing anything completely." Many assistant principals get stuck in their office unless the principal steps in to assist; as AP Jones said, "It was too much, so we tried to implement protected time." The principal has to communicate the expectation (22%) to assistant principals, teachers, and office staff that when assistant principals engage in equity-centered instructional leadership tasks, they are not to be disturbed. For example, "[the principal] said, AP Smith is going to get these observations done and doesn't need to handle discipline today or this or that." Communicating expectations and protecting time alone is not enough to ensure assistant principals engage in equity-centered instructional leadership. The principal has to hold assistant principals accountable (16%) by "putting the data in front of our faces." Assistant principals identified weekly administrative team meetings (13%) as a helpful way the principal communicated expectations, held assistant principals accountable, and scheduled protected time; "I liked that we met each week as a team.

*Figure 17.* Administrative team expectations codes.

I've suggested it because we don't do that here [at my new school] and I feel like I miss out on things."

This finding demonstrates that equity-centered instruction leadership does not just happen on its own. Principals must intentionally create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership. However, conditions and spaces alone are not enough; more is needed, but what leadership is needed, and how do we get it?

## Make Assistant Principal Development A Priority

Superintendents and principals have indicated that leadership training in schools of education are out of touch with the realities of today's districts (Farkas et al., 2001), meaning that assistant principals require on-the-job training. Therefore, in order for assistant principals to develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders, the principal must prioritize developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals. Two categories support this finding: Where Assistant Principals Learn and Observation–Feedback.

### *Where Assistant Principals Learn*

Most assistant principal positions require a Master's degree in school leadership. Yet, despite that preparation, assistant principals are ill-prepared for their new roles and primarily learn on the job. As AP Smith indicated, "I didn't learn it in school, but by just doing it." Figure 18 illustrates where assistant principals acquire their knowledge and skills.

Assistant principals acquire knowledge and skills primarily from their principal (33%) and through experience doing things (33%), typically by mimicking the way they observed assistant principals do things. As AP Jones said about their current situation, "I don't get much guidance; I just do what I'm assigned." The fact that one of the primary ways

*Figure 18.* Where assistant principals learn skills.

assistant principals learn how to do their job is essentially trial and error supports the need for principals must make assistant principal development a priority. Moreover, according to assistant principals, "I needed more guidance." Since principals are a primary source of learning for assistant principals, the stage is set for principals to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders by being intentional about the development of assistant principals. Principals cannot "be afraid to show [assistant principals] or give us feedback if you don't have confidence in the assistant principal yet."

### *Observation – Feedback*

For assistant principals to be equity-centered instructional leaders, the principal must prioritize developing their abilities to observe classrooms and engage with teachers in making changes to their instruction. At the start of the PAR Study, assistant principals were uncomfortable observing teachers and providing feedback. "I don't feel comfortable…I'm probably a five out of ten." However, after three cycles of inquiry focused on developing assistant principals' knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders, assistant principals became more comfortable and confident engaging in equity-centered instructional leadership. "Definitely more comfortable now" and "I'm more confident in myself" is what AP Jones said during the March 14, 2022, CPR meeting. Five sub-categories (Figure 19) support the Observation – Feedback category. The data indicate four primary areas of the Observation – Feedback process highlighted most frequently by assistant principals. Those areas are: Type of Feedback, Process, Improve, and Comfort.

**Type of Feedback.** Assistant principals provided a variety of feedback to teachers during observation–feedback cycles. Throughout the three PAR Cycles, the kind of feedback given by assistant principals evolved. Figure 20 shows the frequency of the feedback types over the three

## OBSERVATION - FEEDBACK SUB-CATEGORIES

Comfort
10%

Improve
17%

Professional
Learning
Community
5%

Process
34%
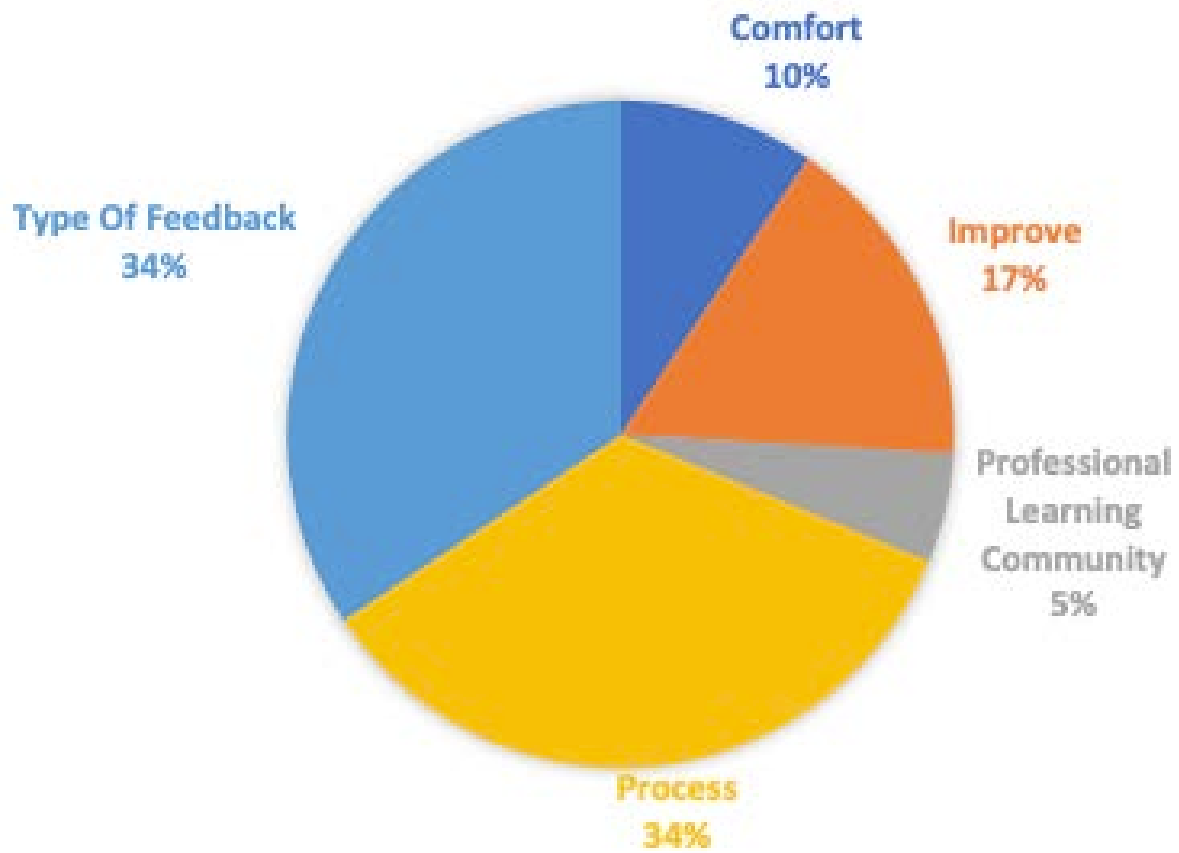
Type Of Feedback
34%

*Figure 19*. Observation - feedback sub-categories.

## Frequency of Codes Over Three PAR Cycles

Legend: PAR Pre-Cycle, PAR Cycle One, PAR Cycle Two

Categories: Classroom Management, Pedagogy, Technology, Time Management, Lesson Plans, Equitable Classroom Practices
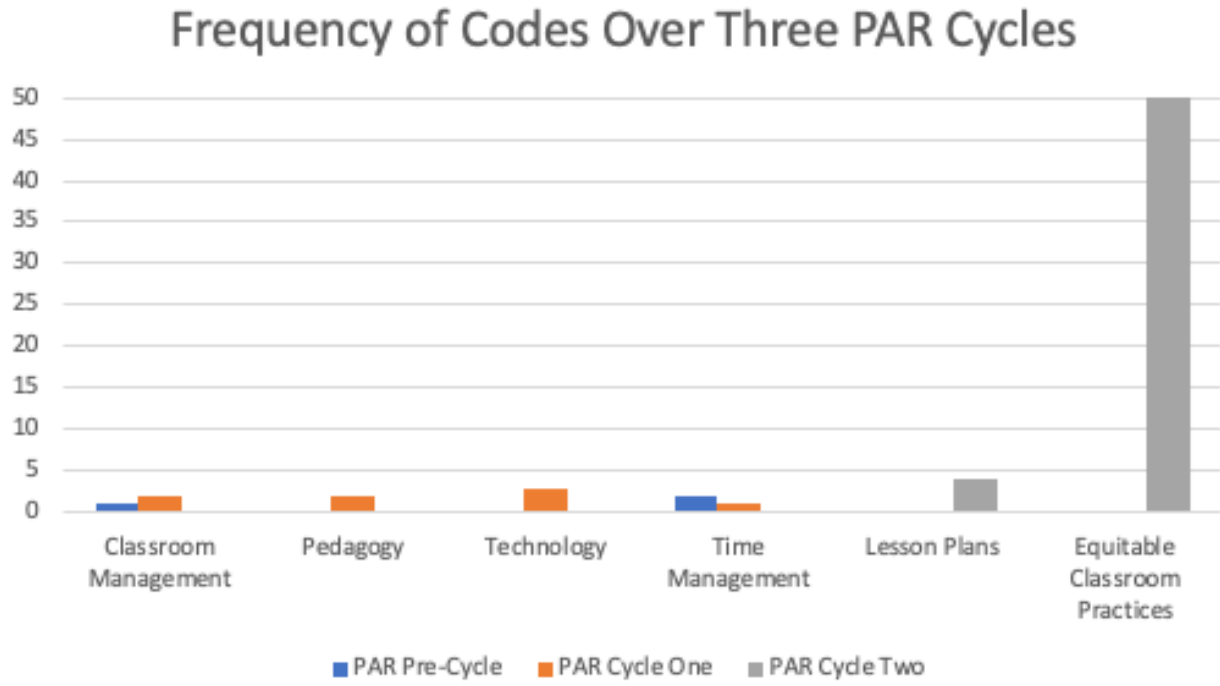
*Figure 20.* Type of feedback codes over three PAR cycles.

PAR Cycles. In the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One, assistant principals focused their feedback on items they were more comfortable with, including classroom management ($n=3$), technology ($n=3$), and management of time in the classroom ($n=3$). At no point during those cycles did assistant principals provide feedback on equitable classroom practices; however, by PAR Cycle Two, after assistant principals had gained some knowledge about equitable classroom practices, they were almost exclusively providing feedback to teachers on equitable classroom practices ($n=50$).

The data clearly show that assistant principals did not have the knowledge and skills to identify and provide feedback on equitable classroom practices. However, once they began to gain the knowledge and skills, assistant principals put them into action.

**Process.** At the start of the PAR Pre-Cycle, assistant principals only used the formal North Carolina Educator Evaluator System process (NCEES) to provide feedback to teachers. While assistant principals and teachers were comfortable with the NCEES process, assistant principals did not use it to effectively provide feedback to teachers that improved teachers' practice. Over the three PAR Cycles, assistant principals began using other classroom observation tools, like the Calling-On Observation Tool (see Appendix H), to collect data and collaborate with teachers on equitable classroom practices. Data collected after a classroom observation supported assistant principals in planning their teacher feedback conversations in advance. Describing their post-observation process, AP Jones says, "I shared the data and her walkthrough the day before, and I had to think the night before how I was going to do this." Because of the data and advanced planning, the collaboration between teachers and administrators on equitable classroom practices became more effective, which led to teachers seeking out administrators to engage in the observation–feedback cycle with them. As AP Jones

described, "[A teacher] stopped me in the hallway and said no one ever comes in, can you come by when you get a chance and help me." Figure 21 shows the codes for the three PAR Cycles and illustrates how assistant principals used other observation–feedback tools and processes once they learned about them.

**Improve.** Throughout the three PAR Cycles, the data shows that assistant principals knew there were areas of improvement they could make in the observation–feedback cycle. Figure 22 shows areas of improvement identified over the three PAR Cycles. Even though assistant principals identified areas of improvement within their practice, they lacked the knowledge and skills to make the necessary improvements. In a reflective memo, I wrote that "in theory [assistant principals] are understanding the concept…but in practice, they aren't able to fully carry it out with a high grade of confidence." Assistant principals indicated they needed more guidance to effectively improve their feedback to teachers. Assistant principals found it helpful when I modeled the observation-feedback process with them. We conducted teacher observations together, and the assistant principal was in the room when I provided feedback to the teacher. After the meetings and during CPR group meetings, we would discuss the conversation moves I used in the feedback meetings and how the assistant principals could use those strategies in their meetings with teachers. The modeling and coaching helped assistant principals turn their conceptual understanding into practice, as AP Jones said, "You coached me. We did observations and post-observations together. Now I'm able to see it."

**Comfort.** During PAR Cycle One, assistant principals expressed they were uncomfortable, "I'm probably a five out of ten," or unsure about what feedback to give teachers, "I didn't feel like I could offer much feedback on [the lesson]." As a result, the feedback assistant principals gave teachers focused on areas the assistant principal was comfortable with,

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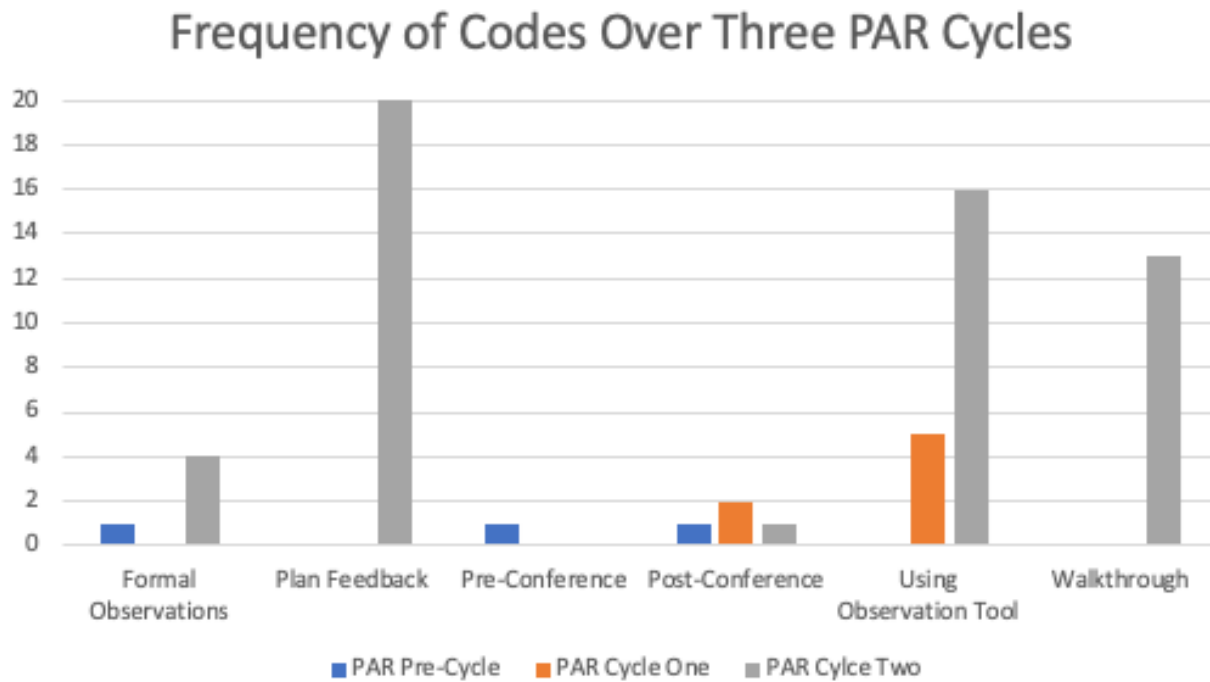
*Figure 21*. Observation - feedback process codes over three PAR cycles.
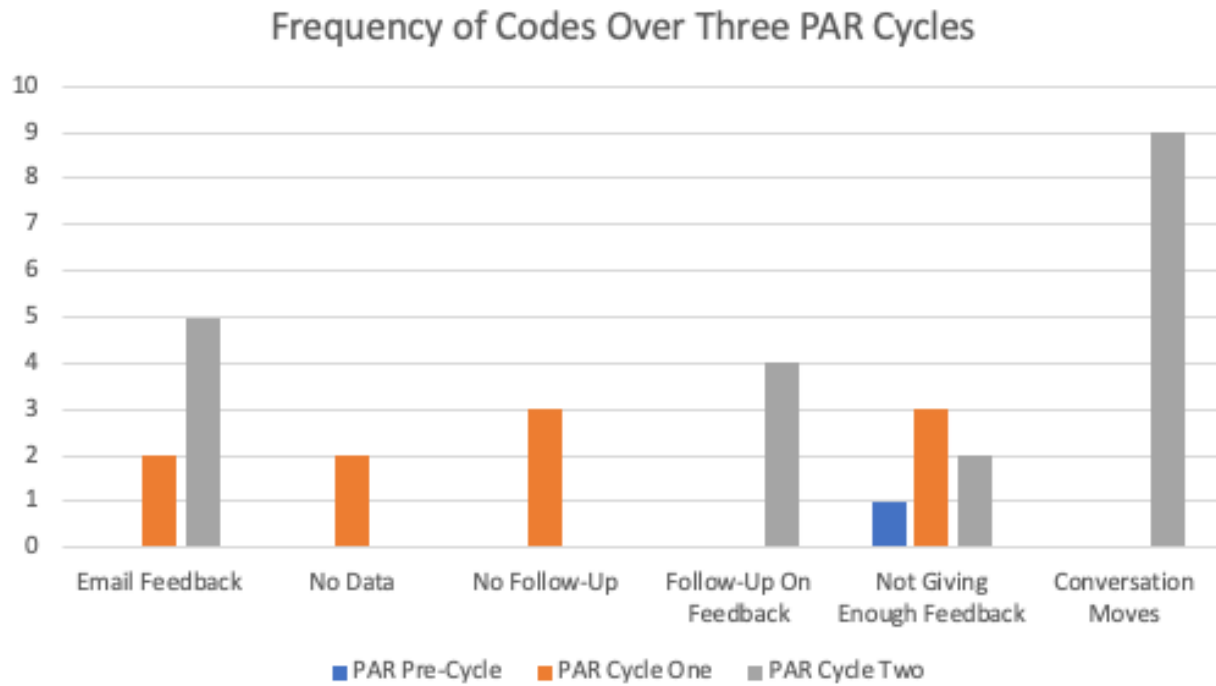
*Figure 22*. Frequency of improved codes over three PAR cycles.

like classroom management. As assistant principals began to use new observation tools that collected data, they became more comfortable giving feedback to teachers. In addition, the feedback they gave teachers became more focused on equitable classroom practices. Figure 23 illustrates how the comfort level of assistant principals evolved over the three PAR Cycles. During the PAR Pre-Cycle and PAR Cycle One, assistant principals only expressed they were uncomfortable or unsure about giving feedback to teachers; however, in PAR Cycle Two, after learning about observation tools and conversation moves, assistant principals began to express that they were more comfortable giving feedback. During PAR Cycle Two, assistant principals expressed negative feelings (uncomfortable or unsure) 11% of the time, while they expressed positive feelings (comfortable, more comfortable, confident) 89% of the time. As AP Jones emphatically stated, "I'm definitely more comfortable."

When combined, the first two findings provide principals with an outline for developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Furthermore, this is where nearly all of the current research stops, with an outline or a list of additional recommendations for principals and assistant principals. But how do principals and assistant principals find the time to do all of this? What is required on a daily basis?

**Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side with Assistant Principals**

Assistant principals are juggling too many balls, making it impossible for them to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership. The data show that for a principal to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders, the principal must work with assistant principals to prioritize tasks and jump into the fray to juggle with the assistant principals. Multiple people juggling together requires coordination, communication, and focus; therefore, principals cannot expect to be able to jump in and juggle
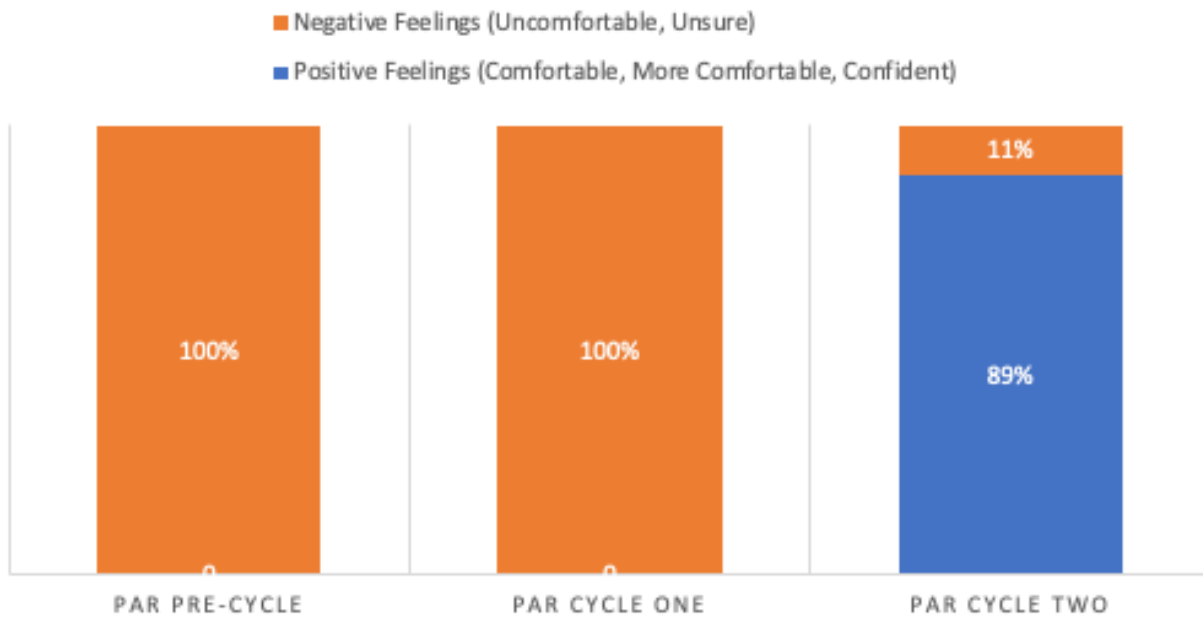
*Figure 23*. Comfort level of assistant principals over three cycles of inquiry.

with assistant principals without previously or simultaneously paying attention to the spaces and conditions for equity-centered instructional leadership and the development of assistant principals. Figure 24 shows the two specific areas principals must evaluate when juggling side-by-side with assistant principals.

**Assistant Principal Assignments**

The principal assigns responsibilities to the assistant principal, and the assignment of responsibilities typically does not prioritize assistant principal involvement in equity-centered instructional leadership. I realized this in my April 1, 2022, reflective memo stating, "I rotate responsibilities between my assistant principals every year, but I don't ever assign myself any of the responsibilities like discipline or busses that I hated." As Figure 25 illustrates, student behavior management ($n$=19), administrative tasks ($n$=18), managerial tasks ($n$=13), and testing ($n$=12) are the most common tasks assigned to assistant principals. Many of these tasks arise randomly during the school day, and assistant principals often feel required to address them immediately. The result is that whatever other task the assistant principal had planned, including engaging in equity-centered instructional leadership, gets set aside to handle the student behavior, administrative task, managerial task, or testing issue that suddenly came up, as AP Jones said, "I wanted to get in the rooms more, but we had so much discipline, constant interruptions, parents showing up, etc." To avoid the equity-centered instructional leadership tasks being set aside, the principal must be intentional in how tasks are assigned to assistant principals, specifically giving equity-centered instructional leadership tasks to assistant principals. In addition, the principal needs to occasionally jump in and help juggle these tasks side-by-side with the assistant principal so the student behavior management issue or administrative task gets completed but not at the expense of the equity-centered instructional task

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*Figure 24*. Distribution of categories.
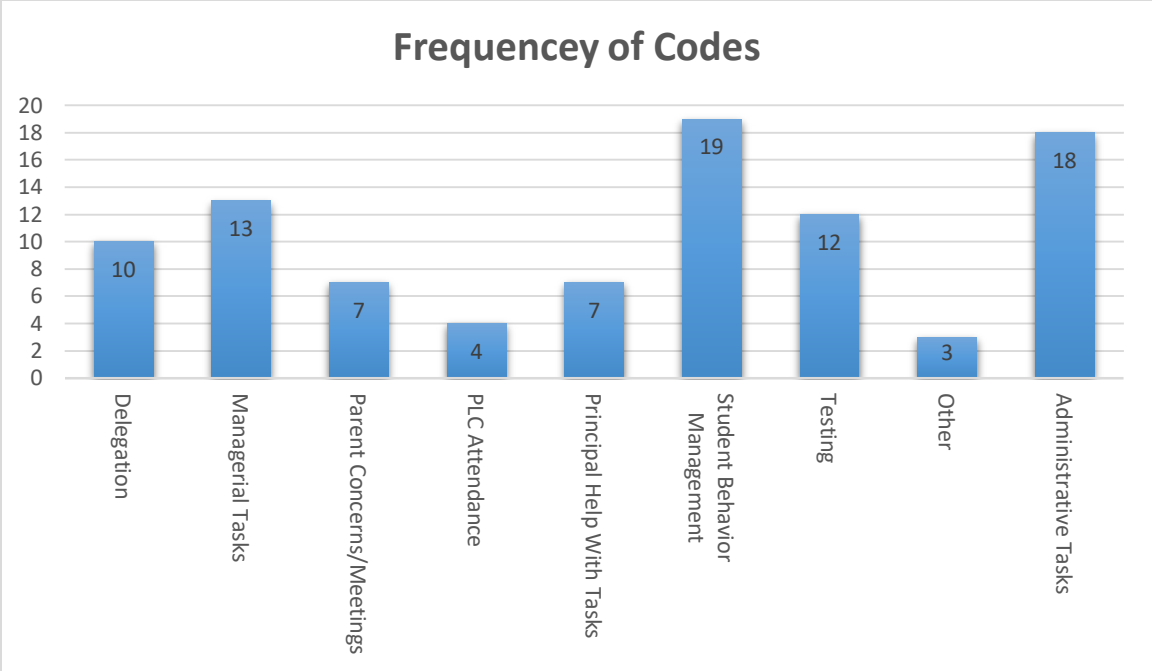
*Figure 25*. Frequency of assistant principal assignment codes.

the assistant principal planned. As AP Smith said when talking about the interim principal jumping in to help with student discipline and parents showing up, "It made a huge difference" by freeing up time for assistant principals to engage in classroom observations and feedback cycles with teachers.

**Prioritizing**

Due to the vast array of tasks, assistant principals must prioritize their time and energy. Principals cannot create more time in the day for assistant principals, but what principals can do is help develop assistant principals' skills to prioritize their time and tasks during the day. During PAR Cycle One, I communicated to assistant principals that our attendance at PLC meetings needed to be the priority because PLC meetings were not operating effectively. When attending PLC meetings, the administrator can provide real-time input and support teachers in the PLC meeting; AP Jones realized, "I didn't necessarily need more time, but to be there more consistently attending meetings to support the people in the PLC." During the three PAR Cycles, assistant principals learned to prioritize their time in several ways. (see Figure 26) Being intentional with their time was the number one-way assistant principals prioritized their time. For assistant principals to prioritize their time on the right tasks, the principal must communicate to assistant principals their expectations and what areas assistant principals should prioritize. One of the recommendations provided by assistant principals for how to help them was for the principal to "be clear on expectations." During this study, it meant creating a schedule of who was conducting classroom observations and when. I also made it an expectation for the assistant principals to be intentional with instructional conversations. In addition, the principal must help assistant principals manage their time effectively by identifying what tasks to complete during school hours when all staff is on campus and what tasks to complete outside of school hours.

**FREQUENCY OF CODES**

All Others 12%

Covind Changes 8%

Work Outside of School 18%

Intentional With Time 25%

Time Management 17%

Make An Impact 6%

No Time 14%
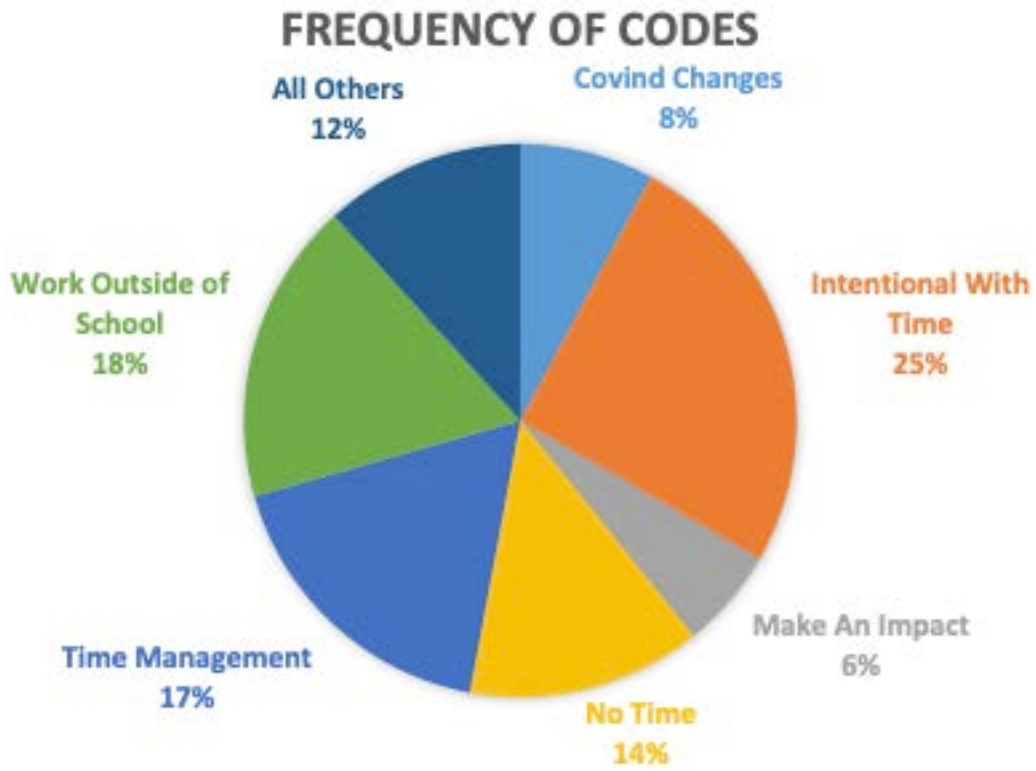
*Figure 26*. Frequency of prioritizing codes.

During PAR Cycle Two, AP Jones shared an area of focus for them, "I'm learning this year…I've really tried to focus on like I've gotten that mindset…to maximize our time with teachers while they're here because at 2:30 they're gone." Prioritizing equity-centered instructional tasks during the school day while teachers are in the building requires assistant principals to "hold off on some things because then I know after [school] I can get this, this, and this done."

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the activities conducted during PAR Cycle Two, the final inquiry cycle. I also discussed how I coded the new data from PAR Cycle Two and integrated the data from PAR Cycle Two with data from previous PAR Cycles. I provided the three findings of this PAR study:

1. the principal must create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership,
2. the principal must make assistant principal development a priority, and
3. the principal must juggle tasks side-by-side with assistant principals.

Finally, I explained how the data supported the three findings and answered the research questions for this PAR study, thus leading to the study's theory of action, *IF* principals develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders, *THEN* assistant principals can coach teachers to increase equitable classroom practices, resulting in more equitable outcomes for students and a principal succession pipeline of better-prepared assistant principals.

How do the findings of this study compare to current practices and empirical studies of leadership? What is the significance of studies like this to how school leadership is practiced or

how educational policies are developed? The final chapter of this participatory action research study compares the findings of this study to other research, provides a new framework for principal leadership practice, and discusses the significance and implications of this study.

# CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

We have a school leadership problem in this country. An overwhelming majority of superintendents and principals say that current school leadership preparation is out of touch with today's realities (Farkas et al., 2001). In addition, the current demands on school principals result in nearly a quarter of school principals leaving the role every year (Goldring & Taie, 2018). How can we expect schools to increase student performance and close achievement gaps if school leaders are ill-prepared and constantly leaving the role? Despite all of the challenges, there is hope, the assistant principal!

The participatory action research (PAR) study aimed at how a middle school principal can develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. In this study, we intended to relieve some pressure placed on a school principal to improve outcomes for all students by sharing the responsibility with other school administrators. The following theory of action: *IF* assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders, *THEN* assistant principals may coach teachers to implement equitable classroom practices resulting in more equitable outcomes for students and a principal succession pipeline of better-prepared assistant principals. I designed this study to understand and set the conditions to achieve this aim.

This PAR study consisted of three cycles of inquiry conducted over 18 months starting in the Fall of 2021. I based the activities in this PAR study on the Guajardo et al. (2016) assertion that those closest to the problem are best suited to find solutions. With that in mind, I invited two assistant principals to join me in a Co-Practitioner Researcher (CPR) group. The CPR group engaged in meetings using community learning exchange (CLE) protocols to strengthen our relationships and learn together. The CPR group members identified a group of teachers with

whom each member would work in an Assistant Principal - Network Improvement Community (AP-NIC). During AP-NIC meetings, CPR group members implemented and used the skills and tools shared and discussed during CPR group meetings. In addition to meetings, each member of the CPR group wrote reflective memos to document the work they completed, to discuss the impact of their work, and to reflect on their work.

This PAR study occurred in a traditional mid-size middle school in rural North Carolina with three members in the CPR group. As the principal of Green Square Middle School, I was the lead researcher and member of the CPR group. In addition, the two assistant principals who worked with me at Green Square Middle School participated in the CPR group. Assistant Principal Smith was a veteran assistant principal who worked with me at Green Square Middle School for several years. Assistant Principal Jones was a new assistant principal I hired at the start of the 2021 school year.

In the study, I determined three findings. First, principals must create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership to occur. Second, the principal must make assistant principal development a priority. Finally, the principal must juggle the tasks side-by-side with assistant principals.

In this chapter, I summarize the three findings and make connections to the existing literature. Then I discuss the framework I created for a principal to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals. I continue by answering the research questions and sharing the implications for policy, practice, and research. Finally, the chapter concludes with a reflection on my leadership development.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings from this PAR study support and confirm much of the previous research. At the same time, a new way of looking at the principal-assistant principal relationship emerged. The data generated three findings:

1. The principal must create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership.

2. The principal must make assistant principal development a priority.

3. The principal must juggle tasks side-by-side with assistant principals.

Using the literature examined and summarized in the literature review (see Chapter 2), I re-analyzed these findings. The literature served as a foil for analyses and provided new insights into this study.

**Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership**

Researchers, superintendents, and politicians have called for principals to focus more on instructional leadership (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Goldring et al., 2007; Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004). There is also a call for assistant principals to spend more time on instructional leadership (Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Searby et al., 2017; VanTuyle, 2018); however, there is no consensus on what exactly instructional leadership is (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). During this PAR study, the demands on the assistant principal often pulled them away from engaging in equity-centered instructional leadership. Similarly, in their study of assistant principals, Militello et al. (2015) found that what assistant principals were actually doing was not what they wanted. Moreover, what they wanted to do was more aligned with the professional standards that have a clear and present focus on the instructional side of leadership.

In order for assistant principals to actually engage in equity-centered instructional leadership, the principal has to create the spaces and conditions for it to occur. The findings of this PAR study suggest that some of the spaces and conditions necessary are a positive school culture, clear expectations for assistant principals, and structures and procedures that create consistency and protect time for assistant principals to fully engage in equity-centered instructional leadership tasks like classroom observations, coaching conversations with teachers, and attending PLC meetings.

A key condition for assistant principals as equity-centered instructional leaders is relationships. Making time to build relationships may be the most important factor and a key lever to create the spaces and conditions for equity-centered instructional leadership to occur. Relationship building is particularly important as the turnover rate for principals and assistant principals increases, and their tenure at one location is shortened. For example, during the 18-month duration of the study, there were three different principals at GSMS, three different assistant principals at GSMS, and two different principals at BCMS.

In addition, principals and assistant principals are expected to make immediate improvements in student performance and, therefore, must quickly build trust within the school. As AP Smith said, "Building relationships is key; that's what I have learned." Using the CLE pedagogies of gracious space, personal narratives, and journey lines in meetings created the spaces and conditions for authentic, trusting relationships between administrators and teachers. Assistant principals further developed these relationships through intentional actions, such as making time to build relationships with teachers, checking in on teachers, making small talk, and having an open-door policy. The more assistant principals built trust with teachers, the more

willing teachers were to engage with and act on the instructional feedback provided by assistant principals.

Many people (DuFour et al., 2008; Whitcomb et al., 2009) have discussed the importance of building relationships and trust within learning communities, but those discussions are less frequent when discussing assistant principal responsibilities. In addition, many studies of assistant principal responsibilities and tasks do not include building relationships as a primary responsibility (Brown & Rentschler, 1973; Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012), despite building relationships being listed by assistant principals as an important practice in an ideal world (Militello et al., 2015). In order to create the conditions and spaces necessary for equity-centered instructional leadership to occur, principals must make relationship building a priority. To do this, principals must clearly communicate the expectation that assistant principals make time for relationship building and list relationship building as one of their primary responsibilities. As assistant principals built relationships with teachers, assistant principals felt more comfortable going into the classrooms and providing feedback, and teachers were more receptive to the feedback, thus creating space for conversations about equitable classroom practices. As AP Jones said,

> the more you talk to teachers even out in the hallway or just little side conversations the more comfortable they get with you, the more comfortable you are. Getting to know them, talking with them at events, things like that…has made it easier to go in and do an observation.

**Make Assistant Principal Development A Priority**

The study findings support the work of others that found assistant principals are often not prepared for their current role, let alone the principalship (Brown & Rentschler, 1973; Farkas et

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al., 2001; Goldring et al., 2021; Grissom et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Searby et al., 2017). Specifically, the knowledge and skills assistant principals acquire in their school leadership programs through schools of education are not the knowledge and skills needed daily to perform the job (Farkas et al., 2001; Militello et al., 2015; Searby et al., 2017). As AP Smith said, "I didn't learn it in school, but by just doing it." As a result, assistant principals primarily learn by doing on the job or, in some cases, from their principal (Searby et al., 2017); however, it does not have to be this way. Principals are uniquely situated to mentor assistant principals and can fill in learning gaps for assistant principals created by poor preparation. While a mentor-learner relationship between principal and assistant principals is not common (Wong, 2009), the mentor-learner model (Wong, 2009) resulted in better-prepared assistant principals (Searby et al., 2017).

Like Huggins et al. (2017), the findings indicate that the principal must make assistant principal development a priority. Thousands of currently practicing assistant principals lack the knowledge and skills to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership, and we can no longer rely on assistant principals to figure out their roles on their own. Therefore, principals must make the development of assistant principals' knowledge and skills in instructional leadership a priority, specifically their knowledge and skills of the observation–feedback process.

Teacher observations and subsequent conversations about performance is the heart and soul of instructional leadership. However, while many assistant principals understand what the observation–feedback process should look like, they lack the knowledge and skills to implement it. In PAR Cycle One, I reflected, "In theory [assistant principals] are understanding the concept…but in practice, they aren't able to fully carry it out with a high grade of confidence." Therefore, I needed to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to engage in an

observation–feedback cycle with teachers effectively. Using the Plan, Do, Study, Act process, I conducted observation-feedback cycles with assistant principals where I modeled the use of the tools we discussed in our CPR group meetings (see Appendix D and Appendix H). Assistant principals then practiced using the tools I modeled, reflected on the experience in their reflective memos, and we discussed the experience during CPR group meetings. Then, based on the data, I introduced new learning, and we repeated the cycle. Assistant principals found conducting observation–feedback cycles with the principal, using different observation tools like the Calling–On Observation Tool, and using data in feedback conversations beneficial as they developed their knowledge and skills of the observation–feedback process. It became clear to me, even if not explicit in the literature, that if we expect assistant principals to engage more in instructional leadership, then improving their ability to engage in observation–feedback cycles with teachers is a must.

**Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side with Assistant Principals**

Many researchers and studies have highlighted how assistant principals are responsible for a variety of tasks, typically including butts, books, and buses (Brown & Rentschler, 1973; Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012). Additionally, many researchers and studies have highlighted the need and desire for assistant principals to take a more significant role in instructional leadership (Brown & Rentschler, 1973; Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012). However, how can assistant principals assume a more significant role in instructional leadership if they are currently overwhelmed with their current responsibilities? The findings of this PAR study indicate that the principal must step in and help assistant principals juggle everything on their plates.

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The principal assigns tasks and responsibilities to assistant principals. Moreover, principals typically assign assistant principals duties and responsibilities the principal does not want to do. For assistant principals to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership, the principal must share that responsibility with assistant principals and, in turn, take some responsibility off the plate of assistant principals. The principal helping juggle tasks with the assistant principal can free up time for the assistant principal to engage in observation–feedback cycles with teachers. As AP Smith said, "It made a huge difference" when the principal jumped in and helped with student discipline. The difficulty for principals is that there is no one correct way for the principal to help the assistant principal juggle tasks. The specific tasks the principal needs to help the assistant principal juggle depend on the specific context. As I stated in my reflective memo after I changed schools, "I'm in the same role I was in at GSMS, but I'm not able to do any of the things I was doing at GSMS because there is no foundation here."

Therefore, principals need to be thoughtful and intentional when sharing or acting with a distributed leadership lens (Harris et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane, 2005). Part of being thoughtful and intentional is using the experience and expertise of assistant principals when distributing leadership to maximize and increase capacity (Dimmock, 2012; Harris, 2004). The findings demonstrate that even with thoughtful and intentional distribution of leadership, the principal must occasionally jump in and help the assistant principals juggle their tasks. The principal juggling tasks side-by-side with assistant principals is the practical application of Spillane et al.'s theoretical distributive leadership perspective (2004).

**Summary**

The literature reflects the main findings of this PAR study, but there are not a lot of details provided about how to address the identified problems. There are possible opportunities

for improvement with principal preparation programs and assistant principal in-service programs, which I discuss later in the implications section. The primary, and more immediate, area of focus lies with the principal and how they mentor and coach assistant principals, which I discuss in the next section.

## New Implementation Framework

This study aimed to understand how a principal could develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Specifically, how can a principal build the capacity of assistant principals to identify and support teachers in using equitable classroom practices? Previous researchers (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Spillane et al., 2004) identified a void in the "how" of school leadership, and this study set out to begin determining how to fill that void, previously illustrated in Figure 4. The concept is simple, develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders, and you get a whole host of positive outcomes (see Figure 5). The reality, however, is more complicated. The role and expectations of the principal are complicated and conflicting (Catano & Stronge, 2007). The role of the assistant principal is even less clear (Goldring et al., 2021), and most assistant principals are not spending time on the tasks they desire (Militello et al., 2015; Searby et al., 2017). So, the question remains, how can principals sort through the challenges to build the capacity of assistant principals?

The findings of this study identified three things necessary for principals to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders

- Create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership

- Make assistant principal development a priority

- Juggle tasks side-by-side with assistant principals

These findings are consistent with the leadership behaviors and skills of successful school principals identified by Grissom et al. (2021). When combined together as three intertwined and overlapping circles (see Figure 27), the circles create a framework to guide principals in their daily work.

This framework combines much of what we already know about effective teaching, school leadership, and building capacity with the realities school leaders face. We already know much of what is required to create the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership. It requires a positive school culture (Grissom et al., 2021), equity beliefs and practices of teachers and administrators (Delpit, 2006; Eubanks et al., 1997; Gay, 2018; Gutierrez, 2013; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994), and positive relationships built on trust (Grissom et al., 2021; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Whitcomb et al., 2009) among others. The same is true for building the capacity of assistant principals. Assistant principal development is a process (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Huggins et al., 2017); it has to be intentional (Harris et al., 2007; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane, 2005), it is important for distributing leadership (Dimmock, 2012; Harris, 2004; Spillane et al., 2004), and it requires coaching from the principal (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Marshall & Davidson, 2016). If we already know so much, then why are all principals not developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders?

Many have called for more assistant principal involvement in instruction (Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Searby et al., 2017; VanTuyle, 2018), but there typically is not a how provided for principals to make it happen. In addition, it is well documented that assistant principals are busy with the many tasks assigned to them by the

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*Figure 27*. Equity-centered instructional leadership framework.

principal (Brown & Rentschler, 1973; Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Davidson, 2016; Oleszewski et al., 2012). As a result, assistant principals cannot juggle another task without dropping something or getting some help. The missing piece is the principal juggling tasks side-by-side with assistant principals. Without this missing piece, assistant principals are stuck in the red, orange, or yellow areas of Figure 27, hopelessly working as hard as they can, but never able to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership.  Therefore, the principal must step in, roll up their sleeves, and help assistant principals juggle their tasks. Otherwise, the void in Figure 12 continues, and principals never expose assistant principals to equity-centered instructional leadership. This might mean a significant change, like analyzing and redistributing responsibilities between the principal and assistant principals, which is probably needed regardless, in order to move assistant principals away from butts, books, and buses and into more instructional responsibilities.

While on the surface, a simple redistribution of responsibilities seems to solve the problem, in reality, the issue remains - other assistant principal responsibilities pull the assistant principal away from the instructional leadership task. For example, an assistant principal might have a coaching conversation scheduled with a teacher, but a fight breaks out, and the assistant principal must investigate, assign consequences, and contact parents; as a result, the assistant principal has to cancel or postpone the coaching conversation with the teacher. This is a simplified example, but AP Jones explained the reality of schools when they said, "I wanted to get in the [classrooms] more, but we had so much discipline, constant interruptions, and parents showing up." However, another option is for assistant principals to assume additional instructional responsibilities while maintaining their current responsibilities and for the principal to regularly assume the assistant principal's responsibilities when the assistant principal is

engaged in instructional leadership. In the scenario described above, the assistant principal collects statements and conducts the investigation but then passes off the rest of the process to the principal so that the assistant principal can still have the coaching conversation with the teacher.

It seems simple enough; the principal jumps in when needed to juggle tasks with the assistant principal so that the assistant principal can engage in more equity-centered instructional tasks. Then why does it not happen more regularly? One possibility is that principals are uncomfortable assuming the risk (Harris, 2004, 2012; Huggins et al., 2017) that comes with letting someone else lead a task or study the principal is ultimately responsible for. A second more daunting possibility is that principals do not want to assume, even briefly, the responsibilities and tasks they assign to the assistant principal. The primary reason principals assign butts, books, and buses to assistant principals is that those were their responsibilities when they were assistant principals, and they do not want to deal with them again. Regardless of the reason it is not current practice, this framework provides principals with a way to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders within the current realities facing school leaders.

The CPR group developed a professional learning community as a by-product of, or possibly a condition to, reach the center of Figure 27 and achieve praxis (Freire, 2000). Specifically a community of practice with a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). I cannot definitively state that a community of practice is a condition to reach the center of Figure 27 because we did not purposefully design a community of practice, but by *thinking together,* a community of practice came to life (Pyrko et al., 2017). Therefore, I can state definitively that a community of practice is at least a by-product

of the principal working to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. The CPR group entered into a joint enterprise where we discussed and negotiated what we would do, in this case, develop the knowledge and skills of the assistant principals. The CPR group became mutually engaged through regular meetings to develop new skills and refine old ones. Finally, the CPR group developed a shared repertoire of resources through our meetings and work together that included the Calling-On Observation Tool (see Appendix H) and the CLE axioms and pedagogies utilized during meetings (see Appendix D).

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**Review of Research Questions**

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In this section, I revisit the primary research question and the first two sub-questions. I return to the final sub-question in the Leadership Development section. To answer the research questions, I collected and analyzed data throughout the course of the three PAR cycles. Artifacts collected and analyzed included meeting minutes and transcriptions from CPR group meetings, reflective memos from two assistant principals, reflective memos from myself, CLE artifacts, and notes from AP-NIC meetings. Table 13 shows the number of artifacts collected and analyzed.

**Research Question 1**

The first research sub-question was: How does a principal develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders? The evidence in this study points to equity-centered instructional leadership, the center of Figure 27, as a key condition for developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals. While there are numerous ways principals can get to the desired area of practice, there are three particular practices that should be implemented. The three practices are using the CLE axioms and

Table 13

*Artifacts Collected and Analyzed*

| Header | CPR Group Meeting | Principal Reflective Memo | Assistant Principal Reflective Memo | Community Learning Exchange | Assistant Principal – Network Improvement Community |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-Cycle | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Cycle One | 4 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Cycle Two | 2 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 10 | 15 | 7 | 1 | 4 |

pedagogies, principal professional learning, and making decisions through the lens of assistant principal development.

The CLE axioms and pedagogies are a lifestyle (Guajardo et al., 2016). Participants centered the axioms and used the pedagogies of Gracious Space, Opening and Closing Circles, Personal Narratives, and Journey Lines during CPR group meetings, AP-NIC meetings, and formal and informal meetings with teachers, resulting in more meaningful conversations and deeper learning. Table 14 indicates the ways in which we used the CLE axioms during the study. Modeling the CLE axioms and pedagogies in CPR meetings created opportunities for assistant principals to develop and use their equity-centered instructional leadership skills in AP-NIC meetings when they replicated the use of the CLE axioms and pedagogies. As AP Jones said, "Thinking about the CLE axioms gives me a perspective on other things that helped me grow."

Secondly, the principal has to lead the development of the assistant principals and, therefore, must make developing their knowledge and skills a priority. Any new or veteran principal can help assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills necessary to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Principals do not have to become experts before developing assistant principals. A principal is able to lead the development of assistant principals while simultaneously developing their own knowledge by engaging in a community of practice. Specifically, a community of practice with a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The principal must create a joint enterprise with the assistant principal(s) where they discuss and negotiate how to develop the knowledge and skills of the assistant principal(s). Next, the principal and assistant principal become mutually engaged through regular meetings and discussions. In this study, the CPR group (principal and assistant principals) met regularly to discuss and share tools and resources that

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Table 14

*Community Learning Exchange Axioms in Use*

| Community Learning Exchange Axiom | Evidence from Participatory Action Research Project |
|---|---|
| 1. Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes. | Administrator community of practice Assistant Principal – Network Improvement Communities |
| 2. Conversations are a critical and central pedagogical process. | Administrators calibrating observations Observation – Feedback process between administrators and teachers |
| 3. The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns. | Inclusion of assistant principals in the co-practitioner research group |
| 4. Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process. | Providing in-service professional development to assistant principals due to lack of in-service and pre-service development. |
| 5. Hope and change are built on the assets and dreams of locals and their communities. | Relationship building between principal and assistant principals and between teachers and administrators. |

assistant principals used to develop their knowledge and skills. The assistant principals then used those tools and resources with teachers in their AP-NICs. To complete the cycle, the assistant principals brought learning back from the AP-NICs to share in the CPR group meeting resulting in everyone developing new skills and refining old ones. Finally, through regular meetings, the principal and assistant principal(s) developed a shared repertoire of resources like the Calling-On Observation Tool (see Appendix H) and the CLE axioms and pedagogies utilized in this study (see Appendix D).

Finally, the principal must center assistant principal development in decision-making. The decisions that had the greatest impact were the decisions that focused on assistant principal development. The administrative team shifted responsibilities during the study specifically to create more time for assistant principals to work with teachers. As AP Smith said, after some responsibilities shifted, "It made a huge difference." Assistant principals found it beneficial when the principal prioritized conducting observations and post-conferences together with assistant principals to model and provide feedback versus assistant principals conducting observations independently. As AP Jones said, "We did observations and post-observations together. Now I'm able to see it."

**Research Question 2**

The second research sub-question was: How do assistant principals develop the knowledge and skills to help teachers identify equitable classroom practices? The findings of this question indicate that the principal must model what is expected. There were two ways assistant principals developed the knowledge and skills to help teachers identify equitable classroom practices. The first is through coaching and collaborating with the principal, including regularly

scheduled meetings and conducting observations together. The second way was by using observation tools.

Both assistant principals attributed much of their learning to coaching and feedback from the principal. The coaching and feedback primarily occurred in two settings. The first was during regularly scheduled administrative team meetings. During these meetings, we discussed equitable classroom practices, shared data and information from classroom observations, and provided feedback to each other on our practices. As AP Smith said, "you weren't afraid to show us, or give us feedback during our weekly meetings."

The place where assistant principal coaching and feedback occurred was during the use of the Calling-On Observation Tool. The use of observation tools may have been the single most significant factor in assisting assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders by improving their knowledge and skills to help teachers identify equitable classroom practices. Before participating in this study, neither assistant principal had ever systematically collected data during a classroom observation. As AP Jones said, "I write down the times stuff happens, but I haven't used any other data [during observations]." The Calling-On Observation Tool (see Appendix H) provided assistant principals with an easy way to collect data about equitable classroom practice during an observation. As AP Jones said after using the Calling-On Observation Tool, "I like having concrete data to share with the teacher." Through the Calling-On Observation Tool, teachers became much more comfortable identifying equitable classroom practices, and the data from the tool made them more comfortable helping teachers identify equitable classroom practices.

**Research Question 3**

The third research sub-question was: How do assistant principals collaborate with teachers to implement equitable classroom practices? The findings of this question identified two keys to assistant principal collaboration with teachers while also leaving some unanswered questions. The two keys to assistant principal collaboration are assistant principals prioritizing time for teacher collaboration and building relationships with teachers. While the data showed that collaboration between assistant principals and teachers increased, the impact on the implementation of equitable classroom practices was less clear.

Assistant principals learned they needed to prioritize collaboration with teachers about equitable classroom practices during the school day when teachers were in the building. Prioritizing time during the school day included protecting time to attend PLC meetings. As AP Jones realized, "I didn't necessarily need more time, but to be there more consistently attending meetings to support the people in the PLC." Additionally, assistant principals had more success collaborating with teachers after observations when they scheduled time during the school day. As AP Jones said, "I've learned that you have to provide that support to teachers when they are here because at 2:30 they're gone."

Both assistant principals highlighted the importance of building relationships with teachers, but the data shows that relationship building is a complex and a time consuming process. Assistant principals were clear that stronger relationships with teachers resulted in more collaboration. As AP Smith said, "building these relationships provides opportunities for teachers to feel comfortable to approach you when needing some guidance."

Finally, due to CPR group members moving to different schools during the study, the data showing how the collaboration between assistant principals and teachers affected the

implementation of equitable classroom practices is limited. Moving to different schools required CPR group members to build relationships with new teachers in the middle of the study. As a result, assistant principals had to spend more time on relationship building than initially planned. In addition, in PAR Cycle Two, we had to eliminate the Assistant Principal – Network Improvement Communities established in PAR Cycle One, therefore, limiting the data collection on the implementation of equitable classroom practices. The AP-NIC structure (see Figure 6) required assistant principals to use learning from the CPR group meetings to collaborate with teachers to implement equitable classroom practices; however, this was limited due to only using AP-NICs during PAR Cycle One. Even though participants did not use AP-NICs after they changed schools, participants took the knowledge and skills they learned in the AP-NICs and found ways to implement their learning in their new schools under new leadership. As AP Jones said, "Using some of those strategies has been my go to here because I saw the importance of it at GSMS."

**Summary**

Reflecting on the research questions provided hope that developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders is possible. While significant systematic changes are needed, the data indicate that small changes to practice around relationships, collaboration, and the use of the CLE axioms and pedagogies helped understand the overarching research question. I next turn to the implications of this PAR study for policy, practice, and research.

<div align="center">

**Implications**

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Current research shows that the number of assistant principals has exploded over the last 30 years; however, the research on assistant principals remains limited (Goldring et al., 2021).

This PAR study studied how a principal can develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Due to the dearth of research on assistant principals and the focus of this study, the implications of this study extend to policy, practice, and research.

**Policy**

This study has several implications for policy changes at the local and state level. First, at the local level, there are implications for current assistant principal development programs. In our district, the assistant principal development program changes based on the desires of the current superintendent. This PAR study suggests that assistant principals learn the most about their role from their current principal; as a result, there are implications for the future direction of assistant principal development programs and the role of current principals in those programs. Additionally, assistant principals found the use of the Calling-On Observation Tool useful. It is possible that districts could incorporate the Calling-On Observation Tool into existing and future walkthrough tools to provide more objective data and instructional feedback.

At the state level, policy implications exist for the specific observation tools currently used to evaluate teachers and administrators. For example, members of the CPR group used a Calling-On Observation Tool when observing teachers to collect data and then provide feedback. This tool is significantly different from the tool currently required by the state for formal teacher observations. However, the improvement and changes in teacher practice suggest that teachers are more receptive to the Calling-On Observation Tool than the current North Carolina Educator Evaluation System. Further study might show an increase in equity within classrooms if the state moved to a different observation tool.

At the district level, there are potential policy implications for in-service professional development for assistant principals. Principals are not currently involved in the planning or implementation of the assistant principal academy or other district assistant principal meetings. The findings of this study suggest that the district could improve assistant principal development by including principals in the planning and implementation of assistant principal in-service training.

On a larger scale, there are implications for the educational system. In this study, we engaged in innovative observation-feedback cycles and processes to develop assistant principals' knowledge and skills. Further study is needed into how systems change, specifically in tandem with individuals changing knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Do systems change, or how do practitioners change systems so that the system does not squash innovative practices?

**Practice**

This PAR study pushed against the current practice of assistant principals' focus on "butts, books, and buses" and shifted the focus of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. However, where should a principal initially focus their attention during this shift? On instruction? On equity? I chose to engage in both simultaneously; however, other approaches to developing assistant principals as equity-centered instructional leaders should be studied. The findings of this study also highlight the eclectic nature of current assistant principal responsibilities and suggest that principals should re-evaluate how they distribute those responsibilities. In addition, the findings show that assistant principals are ill-prepared to engage in effective observation-feedback coaching cycles with teachers. As a result, there are implications for current practice regarding how schools of education and districts prepare assistant principals for the role.

Finally, what should principals be doing with their assistant principals? The findings of this study indicate that principals should adjust their current practice in a number of ways. First, principals should develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to conduct classroom observations and engage teachers in post-observation coaching conversations. Secondly, principals should learn the strengths of their assistant principals and intentionally distribute leadership to maximize those strengths. Finally, the findings suggest that principals should roll up their sleeves and engage in tasks traditionally reserved for assistant principals while simultaneously creating a process to protect time for assistant principals to engage in equity-centered instructional practices.

**Research**

Current literature emphasizes the importance of instructional leadership. This study attempted to uncover how a principal can develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. The findings of this study indicate that assistant principals primarily gain their knowledge and skills from the principals they work for. Therefore, future research should focus more on the role of the principal in assistant principal development. For example, do assistant principals that receive coaching from their principal become more effective principals? Does a principal focusing on developing assistant principals impact student achievement?

In addition, there are numerous assistant principal preparation programs across the country, yet assistant principals are often still ill-prepared for the role. Future research should analyze the effectiveness of assistant principal preparation programs and investigate the role current principals could have in those programs. A deep case study involving current principals who are successfully coaching assistant principals could provide other principals specific ways

they could begin coaching assistant principals and provide useful insight to assistant principal preparation programs.

Recent research shows that strong instructional leaders in the principal role improve student performance (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004), but is the same true for strong instructional leaders in the assistant principal role? Is there a positive impact on student performance when the principal focuses on developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders? Additional research is needed to determine if developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals is worthwhile.

Assistant principals evolved over the course of this study, expanding their knowledge and skills, which in turn grew their dispositions to engage in equity-centered instructional leadership. However, further research is needed in the area of assistant principals. Specifically, how they learn to become school leaders? A value contribution to the research would be a developmental study that follows assistant principals as they evolve into principals.

**Limitations**

This was a small PAR study involving one principal and two assistant principals who worked together at a middle school in rural North Carolina. The findings of this study are not generalizable due to the limited number of participants. In addition, two of the three participants changed schools in the middle of the study, impacting the course of the study. Specifically, the movement of participants limits the findings because the AP-NICs were terminated after PAR Cycle One; therefore, we were unable to completely study the impact of the NIC structure. Additionally, all schools are different and are affected by their unique context. Therefore, since this study occurred primarily in a rural middle school, the findings are not applicable to the elementary or high school level. In addition, the rural setting of the school provides unique

circumstances that are different from those in suburban or urban settings; as a result, the findings of this study are not applicable to those settings. Finally, this study began in the 2021-22 school year; the first year schools resumed full-time and in-person instruction after the COVID pandemic and school closures. Therefore, the impact of the COVID pandemic was universal yet unprecedented, and this study's results must be interpreted in that context.

<div align="center">**Leadership Development**</div>

I chose Participatory Action Research as the framework for this study because, as a current school principal, I wanted to continue to build my capacity as I studied how to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals. Therefore, one of the research sub-questions was: *How does the process of supporting assistant principals build my capacity as an instructional leader?* Leading this study as a researcher-practitioner required me to reflect on my current leadership practice, add tools to my leadership arsenal, and often push myself out of my comfort zone.

**Reflection on Current Practice**

In this study, I studied how a principal developed the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. More specifically, I studied how I developed the knowledge and skills of my assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Studying my practice and discussing it during CPR group meetings required me to reflect and change to move the study forward.

I reflected on how I distributed the assignment of responsibilities and tasks amongst the administrative team. I was not distributing responsibilities and tasks in a way that supported the equity-centered leadership development of the assistant principals. I primarily assigned them the same responsibilities and tasks I had as an assistant principal. The same responsibilities and tasks

research says assistant principals spend all of their time doing. I assigned them things like butts, books, and buses. I am now more cognizant of how I assign responsibilities and tasks to the administrative team. I try to ensure that I also take on some responsibilities and tasks that interfere with instructional leadership, like butts, books, and buses. As I wrote at the start of the 2022-23 school year, "Since I only have one assistant principal, I had to make sure [the assistant principal] isn't stuck with everything." As a result, for the first time in my six years as a principal, I assumed some responsibilities I always assigned to my assistant principals, like testing, facility management, and the emergency operations plan.

Additionally, as I reflected on how I distributed tasks and assignments to assistant principals, I also reflected on how I communicated (or did not communicate) my expectations for those tasks. During PAR Cycle One, AP Jones wished I was clearer on my expectations, and AP Smith added, "don't be afraid to tell us or show us exactly what you want." As I reflected on the feedback from assistant principals, I realized that every time I could remember being clear on my expectations was in interactions with students or teachers, not assistant principals. I thought I gave assistant principals autonomy, but in reality, my expectations were just unclear.

**New Leadership Tools**

I added several new leadership tools to my arsenal as a result of this study. First, I started using the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) pedagogies and axioms in my everyday work. The CLE pedagogies and axioms have specifically influenced the way I think, lead, and facilitate meetings with teachers and students. I used to plan meetings focused on disseminating information. All my meetings were very directive, and I presented information to those in attendance. Now, I start meetings with a personal narrative and utilize protocols that promote conversation between participants and myself. I am still learning how best to use the CLE

pedagogies and axioms, but I have already seen a difference in meetings. As I wrote in my reflective memo, "This was the best leadership team meeting I've ever been a part of. I didn't even do that much once the meeting started. The teachers ran with it and created a great plan for the year."

The benefit of the CLE pedagogies and axioms is not limited to meetings. Guajardo et al. (2016) suggest that CLE axioms are a lifestyle, and I have tried to embody the axioms in my daily practice. This is most evident in my interactions with staff, students, and parents. I have intentionally crossed boundaries to engage in conversations with staff, students, and parents. I believe this has led to a more positive school culture and better relationships within the school. The effort I made to engage more with staff and students was noticeable; AP Smith said, "I see you talking and interacting more with the staff. You are more personable with them now."

**Pushed Out of Comfort Zone**

This PAR study helped develop my leadership by pushing me out of my comfort zone in two primary areas. First, the focus on equity-centered instructional leadership required me to analyze my commitment to equity in my practice. I have always believed in equity, but as I engaged in this study within my local context, I realized I had not been as vocal about equity-centered practices as I needed to be. As I centered equity in the PAR study, I began to center equity in my practice. This resulted in changing how we scheduled students into homerooms to make it more equitable and ensure all students had access to our most effective teachers.

Additionally, as I began to center equity in my daily work, I became more aware of equity issues within the district. When a principal position became open within the district that allowed me to put my equity words into action, I took it. Before this PAR study, I did not have the tools or courage to stand up for equitable practices and policies like I do now.

The second area where I was pushed out of my comfort zone was releasing control of some things. Developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals required me to trust them with responsibilities that I wanted to hold on to. Over the 18 months I engaged in this PAR study, I slowly became more comfortable letting go of some responsibility to the assistant principals. Letting go of responsibilities to the assistant principals did not impact the quality of work or the outcomes; however, it did give the assistant principals confidence and developed their skills. As AP Smith said, "you trusted me to go ahead and do it, and you didn't micromanage me," and AP Jones said, "[giving me those responsibilities] gave me a perspective or grasp on other things that helped me grow."

## Conclusion

Leadership matters. It follows then that leadership development matters. Unfortunately, in education, we are failing in leadership development and have been for over 20 years (Farkas et al., 2001). Since nearly 80% of principals are promoted from the ranks of assistant principals (Farkas et al., 2001), it is imperative to build the capacity of school leaders, specifically assistant principals, to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Despite our current failure to adequately develop school leaders, there is hope. There are burgeoning teacher leaders and assistant principals across the country who aspire to become principals, and this study provides a framework for us to develop them into the leaders our schools and students need. Developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders may be the key lever to improve equitable outcomes for students immediately and in the future. In the short term, we expand the number of administrators effectively coaching teachers to implement equitable classroom practices, and in the long term, we created assistant principals ready to be

the "new generation of leaders who can transform schools and provide instructional leadership unlike previous generations" (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 264).

This study found that the principal is instrumental in developing the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders. Additionally, the process allowed assistant principals to gain new knowledge, practice new skills, and built dispositions that increased their equity-centered instructional leadership. Interestingly, when assistant principals left school positions, they indicated that they were implementing the equity-centered knowledge, skills, and dispositions as they engaged in educational practices and conversations at their new schools, even though equity-centered instructional leadership was not a stated priority at those schools. The evidence suggests that development in one of the three: knowledge, skills, or dispositions, has a positive effect on the other areas. While developing instructionally focused assistant principals is not a new idea (Goldring et al., 2021; Hausman et al., 2002; Hilliard & Newsome, 2013; Searby et al., 2017; VanTuyle, 2018), figuring out how to do it remains problematic. Creating the conditions and spaces for equity-centered instructional leadership, making assistant principal development a priority, and the principal juggling tasks side-by-side with assistant principals, allows assistant principals to still be responsible for butts, books, and buses but also responsible for better instruction and actualize their role as an equity-centered instructional leader, the reason they became a school leader in the first place.

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# APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board**
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

## Notification of Exempt Certification

| | |
|---|---|
| From: | Social/Behavioral IRB |
| To: | Timothy Mudd |
| CC: | Matthew Militello |
| Date: | 9/20/2021 |
| Re: | UMCIRB 21-001660 |
| | Butts, Books, & Buses |

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 9/20/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1 & 2a.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

| Document | Description |
|---|---|
| CALL Survey(0.01) | Surveys and Questionnaires |
| CLE Minutes Form(0.01) | Data Collection Sheet |
| CLE Protocol(0.01) | Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions |
| Dissertation Proposal(0.01) | Study Protocol or Grant Application |
| Group Interview Protocol(0.01) | Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions |
| Informed Consent(0.03) | Consent Forms |
| Script(0.01) | Recruitment Documents/Scripts |

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

# APPENDIX B: CITI TRAINING CERTIFICATE



**CITI PROGRAM**

Completion Date 29-Dec-2020
Expiration Date 29-Dec-2023
Record ID 40081958

This is to certify that:

**Timothy Mudd**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

**Human Research**
(Curriculum Group)
**Group 2.Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel**
(Course Learner Group)
**1 - Basic Course**
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**East Carolina University**

**CITI**
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wb13a3d51-671d-4ec8-92af-8b79aa0bea38-40081958

# Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: *Butts, Books, and Buses: Redesigning the Role of Assistant Principals to Focus on Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership*

Principal Investigator: Timothy Mudd
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership
Address: 1216 West Haven Blvd., Rocky Mount, NC 27803
Telephone #: 252-204-9877
Study Coordinator: Dr. Matthew Militello
Telephone #: 252-328-6131

Participant Full Name: _____

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems, and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

**Why am I being invited to take part in this research?**

The purpose of the participatory action research (PAR) study is to support assistant principals in the development of the knowledge and skills to become equity-centered instructional leaders. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are an assistant principal or teacher interested in becoming an equity-centered instructional leader. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn to how to develop the knowledge and skills of assistant principals to become equity-centered instructional leaders.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about five to ten people to do so.

**Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?**

You should not participate in this study if you are under 18 years of age.

**What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?**

You can choose not to participate

**Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?**

The research will be conducted at Red Oak Middle School, Battleboro, NC. You will need to meet at ROMS, in the PLC room, approximately ten times during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately fifteen-hours over the next eighteen months.

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in meetings, community learning exchanges, reflections, and conversations about identifying and implementing equitable classroom practices.

**What might I experience if I take part in the research?**

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study

**Will it cost me to take part in this research?**

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

**Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?**

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

The sponsors of this study.

Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.

The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

**How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?**

The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

**What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?**

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at phone number 252-204-9877 (weekdays, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm) or email [muddt06@students.ecu.edu](mailto:muddt06@students.ecu.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2941 (days, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the ORIC at 252-744-1971.

**I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?**

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.

I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.

By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.

I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)　　　Signature　　　　　　　Date

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

**Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)　　Signature　　　　　Date**

# Co-Practitioner Research Group Meeting
# November 15, 2021

*Oh, the comfort-*
*the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person-*
*having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words,*
*but poring them all right out,*
*just as they are,*
*chaff and grain together;*
*certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them,*
*keep what is worth keeping,*
*and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.*

--Dinah M. Craik, from her short story, "A Life for a Life"

| Learning Outcomes | Agreements | |
|---|---|---|
| • **Build and strengthen professional relationships**<br>• **Co-analyze the CLE axioms and how they apply to this study** | • Develop and record agreements at the start of the meeting | |

| Time<br>(120 min) | Activity | Facilitator |
|---|---|---|
| 5 min | **Overview of PAR Study** | Mudd |
| 5 min | **Develop and Record Agreements** | Mudd |
| 15 min | **Gracious Space**<br>- Think of a time when you have experienced Gracious Space, whatever this means to you. What was the setting? What did you experience?<br>- Share with the group.<br>- Discuss elements of Gracious Space – see handout | Mudd |
| 20 min | **Personal Narrative**<br>- What is the best professional learning experience you have ever had (education or other source)? | Mudd |
| 5 min | **Break** | |
| 20 min | **Journey Line**<br>- Create a journey line of significant moments throughout your career in education as a student and educator. | Mudd |
| 45 min | **CLE Axioms**<br>1. Learning and leading are dynamic social processes.<br>2. Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes.<br>3. The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns. | Mudd |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 4. Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational processes.<br>5. Hope and change are built on the assets and dreams of locals and their communities.<br>- Appreciative Listening Protocol – see handout<br>  - 2 minutes for each person per axiom<br>  - 2 minutes of cross sharing after each axiom | |
| **5 min** | **Next Steps**<br>- Reflect on the CLE axioms and choose one you think is most important as we engage in this PAR study | Mudd |

Elements of Gracious Space

### Spirit

"What do you do to prepare for a difficult conversation or an uncomfortable new situation?" Share an example. "When I know I will be entering a discussion with a difficult person, a conversation starts in my head. Why do I have to keep dealing with this person? Why do they have to make things so hard? An alternate way of preparing for this meeting is to bring a positive intention into the conversation. In my head I tell myself "the other person means well." I tell myself to "look for their gifts" that might help the situation. The spirit you bring into any situation can have a big impact. Spirit is also about the energy we create together as a group. Do we want to have our solution be adopted or do we want to understand each other? Gracious Space seeks to create a spirit where people develop their ideas together."

### Setting

"The external setting matters. Look around the room we are gathered in. What about this setting supports the kind of interaction we want?" Listen to four or five responses. "When working on the setting it is important to ask the question, how can the setting support the type of interaction we want to have? This requires us to look three elements: • Physical space. Do we want to be in a retreat setting away from distractions? How important is natural lighting and air? • Time. How much time will we allocate? Is the time sufficient to have the depth of conversation we intend? • Format. Do we want to sit in a large circle to be able to face each other and share stories? Do we want to be at round tables to support small group discussion?"

### Welcome the stranger

"We want to welcome difference – background, experience, perspective, etc. We need to ask who else in our community needs to be included in this work."

### Learn in public

"How will you open up to learning? What do you need to let go of – certainty, expertise, solutions, etc.—to open up? How will you create space for the ideas, wisdom, and expertise of others to show up?"

Reference: Hughes, Patricia. Gracious Space: a Practical Guide for Working Better Together , Center for Ethical Leadership, Seattle. 2004.

# LEARNING EXCHANGE PROTOCOL
## Appreciative or Constructivist Listening Protocol

The original constructivist listening protocol was designed by Julian Weissglass, Professor Emeritus, UC Santa Barbara. Please transfer this citation to any documents you use for the appreciative/constructivist listening protocol. Weissglass, J. (1990). *Constructivist Listening for Empowerment and Change, The Educational Forum 50*(4), 1990. 351- 370.

*The purpose of the protocol is to share with a partner a story that connects you personally to the learning. Sometimes listening or silence is difficult with some persons new to the protocol. At times, the listener wants to ask questions, but the listener needs to refrain from this as this protocol helps the speaker reflect and construct his or her thinking. Even if there is silent time, it is useful for the thinking. There are other occasions in our work for questions, feedback and co-constructed conversation.*

**Facilitator Role**
o A facilitator reviews directions and keeps time. A timer that beeps is good.
o Prepare and have participants respond to a designated prompt.
o State norms of engagement. Ask if there are questions.
o Let everyone get settled with partner. If they do not know each other (or know each other well), give time for interchange to meet and greet before starting. Have dyad decide who goes first. Be a "warm demander" on the protocols for the dyad, as it is uncomfortable for some at first – but necessary.

The first person shares for 2 minutes (or selected time) without interruption, even if he or she is silent. The listener may give nonverbal feedback or subvocalization like "ummm..." but does not include verbal feedback, questions, other stories, etc.
- Facilitator joins the single person if there is an uneven number.
- Do clear "bordering" of this activity by setting time and saying "go" and "stop" after two minutes.
- Make sure the dyads change partners.
- Debrief activity at end, accepting all responses, but not defending the process. It takes some people longer to get used to this than others.
- Two minutes for cross-sharing may be added to the end of the protocol.
- Remind persons of double confidentiality at end of process.

**Adaptations**
o You may decide to do this in trios.

# APPENDIX E: REFLECTIVE MEMOS

The format below will be input to a Google Form that CPR group members will use to complete reflective memos.

Reflective Memo (Kolb, 1984)

Name:

Position:

1. **Engage in Experience** - Fully participate and document the experience.

2. **Reflect on Experience –** What happened?

3. **Contextualize the Experience –** How did this experience relate to other experiences you've had and/or what you thought would happen?

4. **Plan for the Future –** Based on the experience, what will you do differently in the future? What additional knowledge, skills, and support do you need?

# APPENDIX F: DISTRICT PERMISSION

**Nash County Public Schools**

Steven J. Ellis, Ed.D.
*Superintendent*

June 29, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

Nash County Public Schools recognizes the benefits of participating in relevant, well-designed research studies proposed by qualified individuals. Approval for conducting such studies is based primarily on the extent to which substantial benefits can be shown for Nash County Public Schools and its mission of educating students. The purpose of this letter is to notify you of the **approval** to conduct your dissertation study titled, "How do assistant principals develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become equity-centered instructional leaders?" with participants in our schools. We also give permission to utilize the following spaces at Red Oak Middle School to collect data and conduct interviews for your dissertation project: district principal and assistant principal meetings, PLC meetings, and site and classroom visits.

The project meets all of our school/district guidelines, procedures, and safeguards for conducting research on our campus. Moreover, there is ample space for Timothy Mudd to conduct his study and his project will not interfere with any functions of Red Oak Middle School. Finally, the following conditions must be met, as agreed upon by the researchers and Nash County Public Schools:

➢ Participant data only includes information captured from the state data collection strategies.
➢ Participation is voluntary.
➢ Participants can choose to leave the study without penalty at any time.
➢ Any issues with participation in the study are reported to the school administration in a timely manner.
➢ An executive summary of your findings is shared with the school administration once the study is complete.

In addition to these conditions, the study must follow all of the East Carolina University IRB guidelines.

We are excited to support this important work.

Respectfully,

Dr. Steven Ellis
Superintendent, Nash County Public Schools

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# APPENDIX G: CODEBOOK

| | THEME | CATEGORY | SUB CATEGORY | CODE | DEFINITION | MEMOS | CPR MEETING | CLE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | THEME | CATEGORY | SUB CATEGORY | CODE | DEFINITION | MEMOS | CPR MEETING | CLE | TOTAL |
| 2 | | | | access | education | 1 | | | 1 |
| 3 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Schoolwide Supports | additional staff | Hiring or creating new staff roles to distribute the work load of administrators | 6 | 10 | | 16 |
| 4 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Administrative Team Expectations | | admin meetings | Formal admin team meetings | 2 | 2 | | 4 |
| 5 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | admin tasks/responsibilities | Administrative tasks assigned to APs | 15 | 3 | | 18 |
| 6 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Schoolwide Supports | administrator visibility | Visibility of administrators in the school building | 5 | 5 | | 10 |
| 7 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | be open | APs being open to helping teachers/open door policy | 3 | 5 | | 8 |
| 8 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Comfort | become more comfortable | APs becoming more comfortable with observation-feedback cycles | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| 9 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | build relationships - trust | Actions to build trust between staff | 4 | 1 | | 5 |
| 10 | | | | celebrates all | Teachers celebrating the accomplishments of all students | 1 | | | 1 |
| 11 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | check-in on well-being | APs checking-in on teachers well-being | 5 | 2 | | 7 |
| 12 | | | | comfort | Comfort level of teachers | 1 | | | 1 |
| 13 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Comfort | comfortable giving feedback | feedback to teachers during observation-feedback cycle | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| 14 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | committees | feedback during committee meetings | 2 | | | 2 |
| 15 | | | | community | APs attempting to build community within the school | | 1 | | 1 |
| 16 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Comfort | confident w/ feedback | feedback to teachers during observation-feedback cycle | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| 17 | | | | constructive criticsm | criticsm to teachers | 1 | | | 1 |
| 18 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Improve | conversation moves | conversation moves during feedback meetings with teachers | 6 | 3 | | 9 |
| 19 | | | | co-teach | APs co-teaching with a teachers | | | 1 | 1 |
| 20 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | covid changes/different | Specific changes APs noticed after the COVID pandemic began | 4 | | | 4 |
| 21 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | delegation | been delegated from principal to AP or AP to teacher | 7 | 3 | | 10 |
| 22 | | | | educators | Wanting to be an educator | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 23 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Improve | email feedback | during the observation-feedback cycle via email | 6 | 1 | | 7 |
| 24 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | empathy | Administrators having empathy for teachers | 1 | | | 1 |
| 25 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Schoolwide Supports | establish expectations | Admin process for establishing school expectations | 6 | 2 | | 8 |
| 26 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Schoolwide Supports | establish process | Admin process for establishing school processes and procedures | 5 | 2 | | 7 |
| 27 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Administrative Team Expectations | | establish responsibilities | Defined roles of the admin team | 2 | 2 | | 4 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 27 | Leadership | Expectations | | responsibilities | Defined roles of the admin team | 2 | 2 | | 4 |
| 28 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Schoolwide Supports | establish structures | Schoolwide structures put in place by administration | 3 | | | 3 |
| 29 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Type of Feedback | feedback - classroom management | APs giving feedback on classroom management strategies | 2 | 1 | | 3 |
| 30 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Type of Feedback | Feedback - Equitable Classroom Practices | during the observation-feedback cycle on equitable classroom practices | 23 | 27 | | 50 |
| 31 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Improve | feedback - no data | data when giving feedback to teachers | | 2 | | 2 |
| 32 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Type of Feedback | feedback - pedagogy | APs giving feedback on pedagogical strategies | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| 33 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Type of Feedback | feedback - tech | APs giving feedback on technology or technology use in the classroom | | 3 | | 3 |
| 34 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Type of Feedback | feedback - time management | APs giving feedback on the use of time within the classroom | 3 | | | 3 |
| 35 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Comfort | feedback - unsure | feedback to teachers or unsure of what to give feedback on | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| 36 | | | | help teacher | help teachers | 1 | | | 1 |
| 37 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Improve | Follow Up On Feedback | implementation after providing feedback | 1 | 3 | | 4 |
| 38 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Process | formal observations | APs conducing formal observations using the NCEES | 1 | 4 | | 5 |
| 39 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | get to know teachers | APs taking the time to get to know teachers | 2 | 2 | | 4 |
| 40 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Assistant Principal Desires | | give feedback | APs wanting/being able to give feedback to teachers | 3 | 1 | 2 | 6 |
| 41 | | | | goal discussion | APs discussing goals with teachers | 1 | | | 1 |
| 42 | | | | growth discussion | APs talking with teachers about how to grow/improve instruction | 1 | | | 1 |
| 43 | | | | help people | AP desires to help people | | 1 | | 1 |
| 44 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Administrative Team Expectations | | hold accountable | Principal holding APs accountable | 3 | 2 | | 5 |
| 45 | | | | learning | learning | | 1 | | 1 |
| 46 | | | | practices | practices | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| 47 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Administrator Beliefs | includes all students | School staff believing that all students should be included in decisions and/or learning | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| 48 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Administrator Beliefs | increase student engagement | Conversations about increasing student engagement | 5 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| 49 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | Influence | APs using relationships to get teachers to do what is asked | 3 | 2 | | 5 |
| 50 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Administrative Team Expectations | | intentional - equity | APs being intentional about talking with teachers about equity | | 4 | | 4 |
| 51 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | intentional with time | APs being intentional in scheduling time | 8 | 5 | | 13 |
| 52 | | | | investment | APs investing in teachers | | 1 | | 1 |
| 53 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | Its hard | APs aknowledging their job is hard | | | 1 | 1 |
| 54 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Where Assistant Principals Learn | | learn by other roles | APs learning job skills from being in other roles | 1 | | | 1 |

| | THEME | CATEGORY | SUB CATEGORY | CODE | DEFINITION | MEMOS | CPR MEETING | CLE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 54 | Development a Priority | Principals Learn | | learn by other roles | in other roles | 1 | | | 1 |
| 55 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Where Assistant Principals Learn | | learn from AP | APs learning job skills from other APs | | 4 | | 4 |
| 56 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Where Assistant Principals Learn | | learned by doing | APs learning job skills by doing them | 5 | 2 | | 7 |
| 57 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Where Assistant Principals Learn | | learned from principal | APs learning job skills from the principal | 2 | 5 | | 7 |
| 58 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Where Assistant Principals Learn | | learned with PD | APs learning job skills through Professional Development | 1 | | | 1 |
| 59 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Type of Feedback | lesson plan - feedback | APs monitoring lesson plans | 1 | 3 | | 4 |
| 60 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | make an impact | APs desire to make an impact on student learning | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| 61 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | make time to build relationships | APs building relationships with teachers | 9 | 10 | 1 | 20 |
| 62 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | managerial tasks | APs having to manage staff and deal with staff issues | 6 | 7 | | 13 |
| 63 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | need to be more instructional | feedback needs to be more instructionally focused | 1 | | | 1 |
| 64 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Improve | no follow up on feedback | APs not following up on feedback given to teachers | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| 65 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | No time | APs identifying they don't' have time to complete tasks | 3 | 4 | | 7 |
| 66 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Improve | not giving enough feedback | they are giving enough feedback to teachers | 4 | 2 | | 6 |
| 67 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | not involved enough in PLC | APs indicating they are not involved/attending PLCs enough | 2 | | | 2 |
| 68 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Where Assistant Principals Learn | | not learned in school | APs not learning what is needed/required in MSA program | | 1 | | 1 |
| 69 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Administrator Beliefs | opportunity to learn | Belief that students should have the opportunity to learn | 5 | 2 | | 7 |
| 70 | | | | ownership | practice | | 1 | | 1 |
| 71 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | parent concerns/meetings | APs having to meet with parents | 6 | 1 | | 7 |
| 72 | | | | passion to lead | APs having a passion to lead | | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 73 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | personable | APs being friendly and personable with teachers | 3 | 1 | | 4 |
| 74 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | personal issues | When personal issues impact APs job | | 1 | | 1 |
| 75 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Process | Plan Feedback | a meeting with a teacher during the observation-feedback cycle | 8 | 13 | | 21 |
| 76 | | | | play school | Playing school when younger | | 2 | | 2 |
| 77 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | PLC - attendance | APs and teachers attending PLC meetings | 2 | 2 | | 4 |
| 78 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | PLC | PLC - equity feedback | during a PLC meeting about issues of equity | | 4 | | 4 |
| 79 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | PLC | PLC - planning | APs collaborating with teachers in PLC meetings on lesson plans | 4 | 2 | | 6 |
| 80 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | positive work environment | Creating a positive work environement for teachers | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| 81 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Process | pre-conf | feedback to the teacher during a pre-conference | 1 | | | 1 |
| | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional | Administrative Team | | | The expectations for APs of the | | | | |

| | THEME | CATEGORY | SUB CATEGORY | CODE | DEFINITION | MEMOS | CPR MEETING | CLE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 82 | Leadership | Expectations | | principal expectations | principal | 4 | 3 | | 7 |
| 83 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | principal help w/ tasks | The principal helping APs with their assigned tasks/responsibilies | 2 | 5 | | 7 |
| 84 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Administrative Team Expectations | | protected time | Acts by the principal to protect the time of APs for equity-centered instructional leadership | 2 | 5 | | 7 |
| 85 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Assistant Principal Desires | | provide PD | APs delivering PD to teachers | 2 | 5 | | 7 |
| 86 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Teacher Attitudes | receptive to feedback | Teachers being receptive to feedback from APs | 9 | 2 | 2 | 13 |
| 87 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | relationships - listen | APs building relationships with teachers by listening | 1 | 3 | | 4 |
| 88 | | | | rewarding expereince | from their job | | | 1 | 1 |
| 89 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | schedule time | APs scheduling time for activities | | 1 | | 1 |
| 90 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | | school culture | The culture of the school | 3 | 2 | | 5 |
| 91 | | | | seek help | administration | 2 | | | 2 |
| 92 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | small talk | APs and teachers engaging in informal small talk | 7 | 3 | | 10 |
| 93 | | | | student achievement | standardized assessments | 2 | | | 2 |
| 94 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | student behavior management | APs having to manage student behavior | 12 | 6 | | 19 |
| 95 | | | | learn | students | 1 | | | 1 |
| 96 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Building Relationships | | support from admin | Teachers feeling supported by admin | | | 1 | 1 |
| 97 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Assistant Principal Desires | | support teachers | APs wanting/being able to support teachers to improve teaching | 8 | 2 | 2 | 15 |
| 98 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Teacher Attitudes | teacher efficacy | Teacher efficacy | 1 | | | 1 |
| 99 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Process | opportunity - Post conference | APs providing feedback during formal observations using NCEES | 3 | | | 4 |
| 100 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Teacher Attitudes | teacher personality | Differing personality traits of teachers | 1 | 2 | | 3 |
| 101 | | | | teacher quality | APs perceived quality of teachers | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| 102 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Teacher Attitudes | teacher reflection | Teachers reflecting on feedback from APs | 4 | 4 | | 8 |
| 103 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Teacher Attitudes | teacher resistence | Teachers resisting feedback from APs | 3 | | | 3 |
| 104 | | | | teachers | Wanting to be a teacher | | 3 | | 3 |
| 105 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | testing | Tasks/Responsibilities of the testing coordinator | 2 | 10 | | 12 |
| 106 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | time management | APs identifying the need for better time management | 4 | 5 | | 9 |
| 107 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | Unclear expectations | Principal being unclear with expectations | 1 | | | 1 |
| | Make Assistant Principal | Observation - | | uncomfortable giving | uncomfortable giving feedback to | | | | |

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| | THEME | CATEGORY | SUB CATEGORY | CODE | DEFINITION | MEMOS | CPR MEETING | CLE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 103 | for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | School Culture | Teacher Attitudes | teacher resistence | Teachers resisting feedback from APs | 3 | | | 3 |
| 104 | | | | teachers | Wanting to be a teacher | | 3 | | 3 |
| 105 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | testing | Tasks/Responsibilities of the testing coordinator | 2 | 10 | | 12 |
| 106 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | time management | APs identifying the need for better time management | 4 | 5 | | 9 |
| 107 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Principal Assignments | | Unclear expectations | Principal being unclear with expectations | 1 | | | 1 |
| 108 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Comfort | uncomfortable giving feedback | uncomfortable giving feedback to teachers | 4 | 3 | | 7 |
| 109 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Process | using observation tool | feedback to the teacher through the use of an observational tool | 11 | 10 | | 21 |
| 110 | Make Assistant Principal Development a Priority | Observation - Feedback | Process | walkthrough | APs conducing short <20 min observations of teachers | 1 | 12 | | 13 |
| 111 | Create the Conditions and Spaces for Equity-Centered Instructional Leadership | Assistant Principal Desires | | want involvement in instruction | APs desire to be involved in instructional conversations with teachers | 5 | 3 | | 8 |
| 112 | Juggle Tasks Side-by-Side With Assistant Principals | Prioritizing | | work outside of school | APs having to complete tasks outside of regular school hours | 2 | 7 | | 9 |
| 113 | | | | | | | | | |
| 114 | | | | | | | | | |

# APPENDIX H: CALLING-ON OBSERVATION TOOL

**Type One of Calling On: Make a seating chart.**
Using a seating chart to determine equitable calling on is critical. Too often, some students are totally overlooked – they may not raise their hands, or, if they do, teachers ignore them. If possible, write student names if you know them. Either use STUDENT NAME or identity (F/M or race/ethnicity): AA= African American; L= Latinx; W=White; AsA= Asian American. This classroom map is of one table of 6 persons.

| St 1 (F/AA) /R/CC | St 2 (M/L) /B-I/TR |
|---|---|
| St 3 (F/W) /R/R/R/R/R | St 4 (M/AsA) /R/TR |
| St 5 (M/L) | St 6 (F/L) |

Try to indicate with short abbreviation of the type of calling on or teacher response that was used (after the slash mark). It will take a bit of practice to get used to the names of calling on (chart below), but this offers precise data with which to have the conversation with the teacher

| R | Raised hand |
|---|---|
| CC | Cold Call |
| CCD | Cold Call for Discipline |
| B-A | Blurt out-Accepts |
| B-I | Blurt out-Ignores |
| C&R | Call and Response: Teacher asks for group response or indicates students should "popcorn" |
| ES | Uses equity strategy (equity stick or card to call on student) |
| TR | Teacher repeats student response to class verbatim |
| TRV | Teacher revoices student response |
| TPS | Think and Pair and then Share |
| Other | Any other strategy you note |

**Teacher**          **Observer**          **Date**
**Duration of Observation** _____ **to** _____

| Student Name OR number | Raised hand **CO: R** | Cold Call **CO: CC** | Cold Call Discipline **CO:CCD** | Calling out **CO: C&R** **CO: B-A** **CO: B-I** | Equitable method **CO: ES** | Simple Repetition **TR** | Teacher Revoicing **TRV** | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | | | | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | | | | |
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| 19. | | | | | | | | |
| 20. | | | | | | | | |

**After the observation, tabulate the number of instances of each type of calling on.**

**Teacher**             **Observer**        **Date**
**Duration of Observation _____ to _____**

| | | Total Number |
|---|---|---|
| R* | Raised hand | |
| CC** | Cold Call | |
| CCD | Cold Call for Discipline | |
| B-A | Blurt out-Accepts | |
| B-I | Blurt out-Ignores | |
| C&R | Call and Response: Teacher asks for group response or indicates students should "popcorn" | |
| ES | Uses equity strategy (equity stick or card to call on student) | |
| TR*** | Teacher repeats student response to class verbatim | |
| TRV*** | Teacher revoices student response | |
| TPS | Think and Pair and then Share | |
| Other | Any other strategy you note | |