ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	AN EXAMINATION OF PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP PRACTICES: PERSPECTIVES OF THOSE WHO TEACH THE ACADEMICALLY GIFTED AND THE ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGED IN INCLUSION CLASSROOMS
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Today, President Obama's "Blueprint for Education Reform" places the principal as the key player in raising academic standards and improving learning for all students. Research has been done on the role of the school principal in school effectiveness and school improvement at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. However, very little research has focused on the judgments of teachers who teach students from opposite ends of the academic spectrum in inclusive classrooms. The focus of this study was to learn about the teachers' judgments of the principal's role in school leadership and the impact that the principals' leadership practices have on the academic program for gifted and challenged students.

Literature regarding leadership practices from the perspectives of teachers who teach the academically gifted or the academically challenged is limited; however, over the past decade it has been reported that the practices of principals exert a powerful influence on teacher quality and student learning (Cotton, 2003; Quinn, 2002). For this study, the data were collected using a mixed-method approach that included both

quantitative and qualitative methods. The data were gathered through the use of a survey and focus groups.

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the belief that principals make a difference in school effectiveness, student achievement and school improvement. This theoretical perspective was developed by Powell (2004) who concluded that principals make a significant and measurable contribution to the learning process as well as the school's direction, vision, mission, curriculum and classroom instruction. Powell argued that leadership behaviors and practices fall within five domains: Vision, Mission, and Culture; Curriculum and Classroom Instruction; Collaboration and Shared Leadership; Family and Community Involvement; and Effective Management.

The findings were as follows. In Domains 1, 3, 4, and 5, there were statistically significant differences in teachers' views of the principal's leadership. The teachers of the gifted students believed the principal was more helpful than did the teachers of the academically challenged. In Domain 2, there was no statistically significant difference in their judgments. Qualitative findings from the focus groups supported the conclusions of the quantitative part of the study.

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by

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
2013

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother *Elaine King Bowman* who inspired me beyond words to pursue my Doctorate Degree in Education. Throughout every step of the process she gave me encouragement, support and most of love and for that I am so thankful. Even though her physical presence is not here to see the completion of my work her guidance and unconditional love will be with me forever. She helped to understand that God will give you the strength to accomplish things that you never thought were possible. Mom, I am because you are. THANK YOU.

In loving memory of: Mr. and Mrs. Earl E. King, Sr. - My loving grandparents

Mrs. Wanda Celesha Williams - My devoted sister

My family:

Mr. Theodore Cassell, Sr. - Who supported me every step of the way

Mr. Bertie H. Bowman - Who encouraged and supported me beyond words

Mr. and Mrs. Warren Williams Sr.- For your endless love and support

Mr. Warren Williams Jr. - For your continuous encouragement

Raiden Williams and Charlie Williams - For brightening up my life with your love and your smiles

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful for the support and encouragement given to me from many people throughout the course of this research journey.

To Dr. Carol Parham, my advisor and committee chair, who taught me to work hard until the end. Your insights were invaluable to me.

To Dr. Marx, Dr. Richardson, and Dr. McGinnis, who graciously agreed to serve on my dissertation committee. Thank you for your feedback and your guidance.

To Dr. Gilbert Austin, who encouraged me and guided me throughout the study. I will be forever grateful for your support.

To Dr. Meredith Honig, who was the inspiration at the beginning of my educational journey. Thank you for your encouragement.

To all of my friends and family members who encouraged me throughout the study. Your words of support enabled me to make a dream a reality.

To the teachers who participated in this study. Thank you for your time, dedication and commitment.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Schools, now more than ever, are being challenged to make improvements directed toward ensuring the success of all students (Maryland State Department of Education, 2000; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). The research clearly delineates the importance of the role of the principal as an instructional leader, change agent and visionary. These factors clearly play a significant role as they relate to special education. Today, with President Obama's call for major changes in the No Child Left Behind Act, his "Blueprint for Education Reform" places the principal as the key player in raising academic standards, improving learning for all students and providing America's students with a good education which they strongly deserve (Dillion, 2010).

Speaking about leadership from a business perspective, Cashman (2008), in *Leadership from the inside out*, says, "What is fundamental to the most effective, results-producing leaders that supports their various competencies or styles?" Three patterns became clear:

1. Authenticity: Well-developed self-awareness that openly faces strengths, vulnerabilities, and developmental challenges.

2. Influence: Meaningful communication that connects with people by reminding self and others what is genuinely important.

3. Value creation: passion and aspiration to serve multiple constituencies—self, team, organization, world, family, community—to sustain performance and contribution over the long term. (p.24)

According to Northouse (2001), a transformational leader has the following qualities:

1. Empowers followers to do what is best for the organization;

2. Is a strong role model with high values;

3.   Listens to all viewpoints to develop a spirit of cooperation;

4.   Creates a vision, using people in the organization;

5.   Acts as a change agent within the organization by setting an example of how to initiate and implement change;

6.   Helps the organization by helping others contribute to the organization.

Hallinger and Murphy (1995) report that "an administrator trying to be an instructional leader has little direction in determining just what it means to do so" (p. 24). Murphy (2006) identified four common approaches that resonated among school principals: (a) focusing school activity on student learning aimed at high intellectual quality; (b) nurturing among staff a participatory, respectful collaborative work life; (c) reflecting and developing consistent with the school's mission; and (d) working to secure the social and structural support that teachers need to enhance instructional quality (p. 103).

Research on effective elementary schools also indicates the importance of quality leadership by consistently identifying strong instructional leadership as instrumental in creating a positive school climate. Further, in today's climate of heightened expectations, principals must be sensitive to the widening range of student needs. Principals who are effective create school cultures that support distributed and shared leadership between veteran and novice teachers and promote a collaborative learning community. As instructional leaders, principals observe teachers in their classrooms and conduct nonthreatening evaluations of their teaching. Teachers who feel supported describe their principals as coaches, mentors, and promoters of their work.

In an international study on making a difference in challenging, high-poverty schools, Ylimaki, Jacobson, and Drysdale (2007) found that successful principals used similar leadership practices and traits to make a difference and improve student performance in very challenging schools. These practices reflect a commitment to being a

transformational leader whose policies are inclusive of all parties in a school in order to make the school a success for the students who attend it. Effective schools research in the United States has identified strong, even directive instructional leadership as the role of the principal. Instructional leaders focus all efforts on the improvement of classroom practices through the creation of safe, orderly, and positive school environment, a clear and focused mission, high performance, and expectations, students' time on task, and positive home-school relations.

Harris (2004) studied effective head teachers in challenging UK schools and found leadership practices that aligned with U. S. effective schools research. Harris suggested that head teachers used more directive or authoritarian leadership styles in schools with serious problems; however, some head teachers also exhibited some development towards democratic leadership. Similar studies in Victoria (Australia) schools provided a view of principal leadership that was primarily democratic but also directive and purposeful during the early stages of school improvement.

Leithwood and Riehl (2005) found that even in the most challenging school context, effective leaders exhibit four core practices that are necessary, but insufficient, for success: (1) setting directions; (2) developing people; (3) redesigning the organization; and (4) managing the instructional program.

Over the past 35 years, much research has been done on the role of the school principal in school effectiveness and school improvement at all levels—elementary, middle, and high school. However, very little research has been done on the judgments of teachers, particularly those who teach students from opposite ends of the academic spectrum (i.e., the academically gifted or the academically challenged), about their school's leadership and the impact that the principal's leadership practices have on their academic program.

Many scholars acknowledge that today's elementary school principals must serve as leaders for student learning, particularly for students who have special needs and are in need of special services to reach their full potential (Cotton, 2003). Scholars further argue that principals must know and understand the content and pedagogical techniques of learning and must work with their staff to strengthen the teachers' instructional skills. Principals must also develop the leadership skills and knowledge necessary to become autonomous and pursue successful academic strategies. Some observers have stated that the principalship has become a uniquely challenging job with more and more demands placed on principals each year (Cotton, 2003). Thus the literature overwhelmingly emphasizes that the principal is a major contributor to the achievement of school improvement.

Effective leadership becomes paramount to schools as they answer the call for accountability for continuous improvement in the quality of students' educational experiences. Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), which rests on the principle that all children can learn and requires that no child is left out of the academic process, it is imperative that researchers gain an understanding of the extent to which principals' leadership practices affect the education programs that serve their students, particularly the academically gifted and the academically challenged.

Scholars argue that an in-depth analysis of the practices of school leaders is necessary to determine how leadership works and that one way to approach such an analysis is through teachers' eyes. Teachers can answer the questions about how and why leadership practices of principals are important and how these practices help them to carry out their jobs as instructional leaders. Therefore, it is vital to observe leadership not just from descriptions of the observed practice but also from the perspectives of teachers who are the primary leaders of instructional change.

Elementary schools are usually organized as beehives with teachers in their own rooms having little or no interaction with their colleagues (Barth, 2006). School leaders face increasingly high demands to reach higher standards and raise student achievement. The task of operating a school is very complex and one person can no longer accomplish this alone (Jackson & Davis, 2000). In brief, understanding leadership practices employed by principals and the effect these practices have on special education programs from the perspectives of teachers who teach on both sides of the special education arena—the academically gifted or the academically challenged—is the focus of this research study.

Fullan's (2001) *Leading in a culture of change* identifies five components for leading through complex change. The five components of leadership, according to Fullan, are interdependent of each other; however, together they mutually promote positive change. Fullan identifies moral purpose, understanding the change process, relationship building, knowledge creation, and sharing and coherence as the key components for effective leadership. These factors clearly play a significant role as they relate to special education. Fullan (2001) and other educational leaders concluded that the one-person leader in the school house is obsolete as the task of transforming a school is too complex for one person to accomplish.

School superintendents, principals, professors concerned with school administration, politicians, parents, and community members all agree that there is a critical need to have effective school administrators who will ensure the educational success of all students. As the nation's schools face tremendous educational reform, the keystone to success has been ensuring that every school is led by an effective instructional and administrative leader (Rice, 2001). Moreover, research substantiates that the school principal has the greatest effect on both exemplary teaching and student learning, particularly with gains in student achievement as indicated by both state and

federal assessments (Meyer, 2000). With increased national, state, and local standards as mandated by the federal legislation No Child Left Behind, the school principal's role has become the focus of educational reform. According to *The Baltimore Sun* (2006), "Having a good principal is essential to running a good school. Under a dynamic leader, teachers will stick around, even in the most challenging environments. Under weak leadership, they will leave" (p. B-2). A recent report by the National College for School Leadership (2007) states, "Scratch the surface on an excellent school and you are likely to find an excellent principal. Peer into a failing school and you will find weak leadership" (p. 11).

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

As the research literature has shown that the school principal is being held accountable and responsible for all students' progress, it is vital to understand principal leadership practices from the perspectives of the teachers who teach in the special education arena (Rallis & Goldring, 2000). Developing a deep understanding of principal leadership practices is a critical part of improving school performance. One of the most important challenges in education is to create and nurture inclusive environments that support learning for *all* students. In the last 30 years, much attention has been paid to educational leadership and its impact on student outcomes, particularly for those students who fall on the opposite ends of the special education spectrum: the gifted student and the low-achieving student (Witiziers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003).

As we examine the challenges of principal leadership in the 21st century, principals now have the responsibility for monitoring the administration as well as the delivery of special programs, including those for the academically gifted as well as those for the academically challenged. Some researchers believe that their role is so critical because in many cases the identification and placement of these students in particular programs rests on the leadership and recommendation of the principal.

Research has also shown that with the rise of site-based management, principals have more responsibility to lead their schools toward greater learning opportunities and a great deal depends on the principal's strength as an instructional leader and the individual's knowledge of the educational needs of *all* of their children, including those who are either academically gifted or academically challenged (Gallagher & Gallagher, 1994).

In the midst of the calls for good instructional leadership in schools, the literature is limited on the role of principals as it relates to the academically gifted; however, the body of research on leadership relating to the academically challenged is enormous. In *A Tale of Two Principals*, Weber, Colarulli-Daniels, and Leinhauser (2003) investigated the role of the principal in relation to academically gifted children and found neither extensive nor current research on the role of the principal in elementary schools with gifted learners. Many researchers feel that this is true because of the fallacy that gifted students can progress on their own (Clark, 2002).

On the contrary, extensive literature relating to the academically challenged suggests that the principal's role is pivotal in meeting the needs of these students. Researchers from this perspective argue that principals who focus on instructional issues, demonstrate support for the academically challenged, and provide high-quality professional development for teachers produce enhanced outcomes for students, especially those at risk for school failure (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Klingner et al., 2001).

Providing appropriate educational opportunities for all students is an ambitious goal for all principals. To ensure that no child is left behind in school reform, capable and caring leaders are needed in every school in America (Fenwick, 2000). In today's society, given principals' roles and responsibilities, they are uniquely positioned to mobilize human and material resources that will provide supportive and challenging learning

environments for *all* students. This body of research shows that without capable instructional leaders, dedicated advocates for students and teachers, and skillful community builders, reform efforts will fail. To achieve the goals of school reform, effective leadership is critical.

This study sought the perceptions of elementary school special education teachers as they reflected on their principals' leadership practices and the complexities of promoting change in the education of academically gifted and academically challenged students. The educational leadership of the principal and its impact on teachers' perceptions of best practices to educate special education students is important for the following reasons: (1) staff development, (2) insight into best practices, (3) training of future teachers, and (4) fostering greater parent involvement (Fullan, 2001).

Special Education - Academically Gifted and

Academically Challenged Students

The term "special education" is broad and complex with multiple meanings and interpretations. The federal government's definition of special education refers to a range of educational and social services provided by the public school system and other educational institutions to all exceptional children who are between the ages of 3 and 21 years. Special education is intended to ensure that students with abilities and disabilities are provided with an environment that allows them to be educated effectively. The role of the elementary school principal helping to meet the needs of these children is extremely important.

"Although several pieces of disability-related legislation were passed in the 1960s and early 1970s, the most significant in this time period was the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1973 (PL 93-112). Dating to 1918, ... when the Rehabilitation Act was reauthorized in 1973, it included the first civil rights protections for individuals with

disabilities, including the right to education" (Wood, 2006, p. 7). In 1975, the federal bill known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was signed into law. Reauthorized in 1997 (PL 105-17), the law is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The law has been reauthorized every year through the 30th annual report to Congress in 2008. This law requires that *all* exceptional children be given a free and appropriate public education suited to their own needs. Shaunessy (2003) argues, and some states concur, that the education of the academically "gifted" is a part of special education and should be included in their state's special education laws. Like many other scholars they view a gifted child's unique educational needs as "special" and therefore not met in the regular classroom. Shaunessy (2003) further argues that if all human beings are equal and have the right to develop their potential to its maximum and fair and systematic attention is not found in the treatment of the whole class of individuals endowed with special needs, including the gifted ones and the challenged ones, then some who need special services have been neglected by our society.

The researcher placed a call to the Special Education Division of the U. S. Department of Education to clarify whether gifted and talented education is included under IDEA. The answer is that it is up to the individual state, but most states allow it. All states must provide it if the child has another disability (Personal communication, Dr. Medina, 2011). The mid-Atlantic state where this study was done does provide for it.

Today, education is serving all exceptional children who need "special" and related services to reach their full potential. The term "special" is used as a general description for education services appropriate for exceptional students (Turnbull, 2006). Using this definition as the framework, special education means that teachers work with some students who have learning deficiencies or disabilities and others who have advanced cognitive abilities.

For the purpose of this research, "special education" refers to only two aspects of the special education arena: the academically challenged, meaning students who are about two grade levels below other children of the same chronological age and have an individualized education plan (IEP), and the academically gifted, meaning students who have demonstrated high intellectual performance and are two grade levels above other children of the same chronological age. Both types of special education programming involve screening and identification procedures, placement options, teachers with specialized training, and strong leadership practices by principals.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the belief that principals make a difference in school effectiveness, student achievement and school improvement. This theoretical perspective was developed by Powell (2004) who through her review of the literature and findings from her case study concluded that principals make a significant and measurable contribution to the learning process as well as the school's direction, vision, mission, curriculum and classroom instruction.

One of the fundamental tenets of Powell's theoretical perspective is that schools that make a difference in students' learning are led by principals who have high expectations for the learning of their students. Powell (2004) argued that leadership behaviors and practices fall within five domains: Vision, Mission and Culture; Curriculum and Classroom Instruction; Collaboration and Shared Leadership; Family and Community Involvement; and Effective Management. Powell cited the principal's vision as the key element guiding the school toward success and as one of the most important of the domains. Powell's idea of examining principals' behaviors and practices through these domains and understanding how these practices and behaviors influence the learning community and successful schools was the core element of her theory.

Of course this is not the only theoretical perspective from which leadership practices can be studied. However, Powell's framework offers a useful means for conceptualizing and organizing the comprehensive perspectives of the behaviors and practices of an effective leadership. Figure 1 outlines the conceptual framework of Powell's model that was used in this study. Felder (2006) and McLeod (2008) further noted that these five domains also influence principal behaviors and practices which are modeled in Table 1.

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│   Behaviors and Practices of│
│        School Principals    │
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│   Domains of the Principal – │
│   Principal's Personal Vision│
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| Vision, Mission & Culture | Family and Community Involvement | Curriculum and Classroom Instruction |

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│  Collaboration and Shared   │
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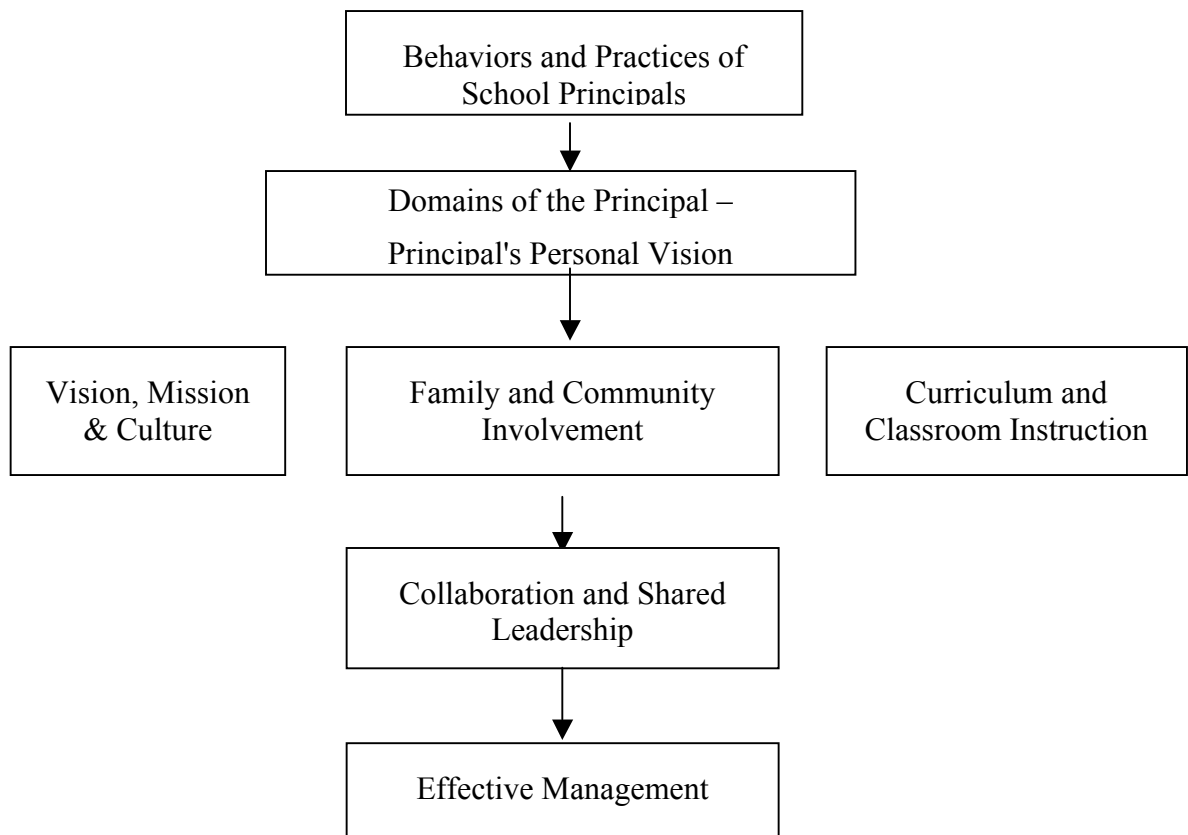
Figure 1. Powell's (2004) conceptual framework

Table 1

Domains and Examples of Principal Leadership Behaviors and Practices

Domains	Examples of Principals' Leadership Behaviors and Practices
Vision, Mission, Culture	- Provides a vision that's embraced by others - Makes student achievement a high priority/mission of the school - Treats staff as professionals - Treats all stakeholders with respect - Leads ethically - Highly visible throughout the school - Knows and calls students by name - Celebrates successes frequently and openly - Visits classrooms regularly - Provides a nurturing environment for students and teachers
Curriculum and Classroom Instruction	- Teaches lessons in classrooms - Makes student learning a high priority - Knows curriculum and recognizes good teaching - Encourages and provides opportunities for staff development - Ensures special programs and resources are in place to meet the needs of all learners - Makes academic decisions on his/her own at times
Collaboration and Shared Leadership	- Elicits teacher input regarding academic decisions and the purchase of instructional resources - Involves staff in analyzing school data and developing the school's improvement plan - Ensures teacher participation in the hiring process of new teachers - Encourages and supports teacher leadership - Encourages teacher participation in the decision-making process
Family and Community Involvement	- Hires staff to reflect school's diversity - Makes all feel welcome, comfortable and appreciated (i.e., personally greets students and parents as they enter the school or assigns a staff member to do so) - Keeps parents informed about student expectations - Creates open lines of communication between home and school (i.e., sends home weekly newsletters, meets frequently with parents, provides translators as needed, etc.) - Encourages parental and community involvement (i.e., fosters partnerships with local businesses, encourages voluntarism, etc.) - Removes barriers to communication (i.e., newsletters in more than one language)

Table 1 (continued)

Domains and Examples of Principal Leadership Practices

Domains	Examples of Principals' Leadership Behaviors and Practices
Effective Management	▪ Effectively manages school budget ▪ Is resourceful (i.e., acquires funds via grants, businesses, central office, etc.) ▪ Remains focused on instruction (i.e., delegates behavioral and social issues) ▪ Implements an effective discipline plan ▪ Ensures minimal classroom interruptions

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to use quantitative and qualitative methodology to identify, compare and contrast the leadership behaviors and practices of principals from the perspective of elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach either academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms. The researcher used Powell's (2004) five domains of effective principal leadership behaviors and practices as lenses through which to view the principals' leadership.

For the quantitative portion of the study, the Powell School Leadership survey was administered to teachers of academically gifted and academically challenged students. The instrument was designed to solicit judgments about school leadership behaviors. Of the 60 questions on the survey, 13 are questions for the school vision, mission and culture domain, 13 are questions for the curriculum and classroom instruction domain, 13 are questions for the family and community involvement domain, 9 are questions for collaboration and shared leadership, and 12 are questions for effective management.

The qualitative portion of this study used focus group interviews of special education teachers as a nondirective method to obtain information about principals' leadership behavior and practices that may not be available through general quantitative

research methods. The researcher prepared a series of probes to guide the focus group discussion.

Statement of the Problem

Since the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act there has been a growing emphasis on the need to improve instruction for students with special needs. Now, school principals find themselves in an era of public accountability for the educational performance and success of all students, particularly those from both ends of the academic spectrum. In the state where this study was done, students with special needs must make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) targets. Therefore, principals and educational leaders must gain an understanding of what is known about effective leadership for implementing and managing instructional programs for special needs students. To that end, the research of leadership practices of principals from the perspectives of special education teachers provides important direction for improving student outcomes, monitoring instructional content and developing methods that will lead to the academic progress of special needs students (Hallinger, 2003). Understanding leadership practices employed by principals and the effect these practices have on the academic progress of special needs students will enhance our understanding of this relationship and provide the potential to increase student achievement, thus furthering state accountability efforts.

Research Questions

Prior to beginning the research, the following research questions were developed to provide the structure for data collection and analysis.

Research Question 1

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding vision, mission and culture (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 2

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding curriculum and instruction (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 3

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding collaboration and shared leadership (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 4

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding family and community involvement (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 5

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding effective management (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between

elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 6

What are the curriculum and instructional issues faced daily by elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Definition of Terms

The following key words are defined to provide the readers with a common language regarding the research study.

Academically Challenged- Students who are about two grade levels below other children of the same chronological age and have an individualized education plan (IEP).

Academically Gifted- Students who demonstrate high intellectual performance and are about two or more grade levels above other children of the same chronological age.

Giftedness- Academic giftedness is the type of giftedness typically associated with efficiency and success in traditional school learning situations. It is the kind most easily measured by IQ, achievement, or other cognitive ability tests.

Inclusion- Inclusion in education is an approach to educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled students.

Leadership Behaviors- The characteristics of a principal that contribute to school success.

Leadership Style- The manner and approach of providing direction, implementing projects, and motivating people.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)- The legislation that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also known as Public Law 107-87 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001b). NCLB focuses on (1) testing and achievement of all students, (2) adequate yearly progress, and (3) highly qualified teachers.

Powell Model- This model has identified effective school leadership behaviors and labeled them in domains. The five domains include: (1) vision, mission, and culture; (2) curriculum and classroom instruction; (3) collaboration and shared leadership; (4) family and community involvement; and (5) effective management. These domains influence principals' behaviors and practices.

Principal- The chief executive officer of a school site who manages the instructional program.

Special Education Teachers- Teachers who work with students who have learning deficiencies and others who have advanced cognitive abilities.

Limitations of the Study

1.   The findings of this study are limited to the perspectives of a small number of special education teachers who reside in the central area of this mid-Atlantic state.

2.   The findings of the study are limited to schools similar to the identified schools in this mid-Atlantic area.

3.   The findings of this study are limited to other groups of special education teachers who teach academically challenged students and academically gifted students.

4.   Since the principals distributed the surveys to the teachers, this may have caused some bias.

<p style="text-align: center;">Delimitations of the Study</p>

1. The study is bound only to those leadership practices detailed in the conceptual framework. Therefore, this study offers only a single perspective on principal leadership.

2. It should be noted that the researcher is an elementary school principal in the area where the study was conducted. Therefore, there might have been a concern for the potential of researcher bias. To limit such bias, the researcher used multiple methods of collecting data and did not lead the focus groups.

<p style="text-align: center;">Organization of Study</p>

This dissertation is organized in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction to the study, its significance, statement of the problem, definitions of terms, limitations and delimitations. The second chapter gives an overview of the literature relevant to the study. The third chapter outlines the methodology used in the study. The fourth chapter discusses the results of the data and the fifth chapter gives the conclusions of the study and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Over the past decade it has been reported that the practices of principals exert a powerful influence on teacher quality and student learning (Cotton, 2003; Quinn, 2002). Moreover, extensive studies demonstrate that particular leadership styles and practices can have positive impacts on teaching, learning environments, and processes, thus leading to improvements in student performance and academic achievements (Day, 2004; Harris, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Scholars further argue that the principal plays a key role in the implementation of educational programs designed to meet the individual needs of students. Case studies of exceptional schools indicate that school leaders influence learning primarily by establishing conditions that support teachers and that help students succeed (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Although school leadership has been the subject of much research, few studies have been done on the judgments of teachers about their school's leadership and the impact of that leadership on their academic programs, particularly those who teach elementary school students from opposite ends of the academic spectrum (i.e., academically gifted or academically challenged students) in inclusion classrooms. The examination of leadership from this perspective seems to be a relatively new area for evaluation. In recent years, calls from teachers for researchers to advance into this territory have been overwhelming.

The literature regarding leadership practices from the point of view of teachers who teach the academically gifted is limited. However, there is more literature regarding leadership practices from the point of view of teachers who teach the academically challenged. Some scholars argue that this gap in the literature is due to a decline in funding over the past 10 years for programs that serve the academically gifted and an increase in funding for programs that serve the academically challenged. Some scholars

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even question the notion of gifted education, asking if programs for the gifted are needed in elementary school classrooms across the nation.

The purpose of this study is to use quantitative and qualitative methodology to identify, compare, and contrast the leadership behaviors and practices of principals from the perspectives of elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms. The focus of this review of research is to highlight literature that makes a significant contribution to the deep understanding of this topic. To that end, the literature related to this topic addresses:

- The role of the principal
- The academically gifted
- The academically challenged
- The principal's role in implementing successful educational programs for the academically gifted or the academically challenged in inclusion classrooms
- The relationship of the literature to the present study

The Role of the Principal

In recent years the significance of the school principal and the critical role that he or she plays in school effectiveness have been highlighted in the literature. According to some authorities, school principals have one of the most demanding jobs in American education (Levine, 2005). As the person in charge of efforts to improve the learning climate in a school, the efforts to improve student test scores, and the daily operations of the school, the principal has become more pivotal and more important (Steyn, 2002). Researchers believe that principals of today not only run their schools from a managerial standpoint, but also play a vital multifaceted role in setting the direction for their schools and in developing vibrant learning environments for children. This trend has increased

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the workload for school principals, making their jobs more demanding and leaving them with very little time to provide leadership in improving instruction (Caldwell, 2002).

When the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law as the No Child Left Behind Act in January 2002, the revised legislation resulted in higher expectations for school districts to ensure proficient levels of student achievement (O'Donnell & White, 2005). For principals, the related mandates and regulations called for a renewed focus on instructional leadership, as the expectations regarding achievement for all students were raised to significantly higher levels (McLeod, D'Amico, & Protheroe, 2003).

When this new movement in leadership began in the 1980s, principals were specifically encouraged to become instructional leaders and to supervise the instructional process directly in order to ensure that their schools remained focused on learning and teaching. This role as learning expert remains important today, although principals are now expected to be not only instructional leaders, but also experts in many other areas such as special education. Keller (1998), in his article, "Principal Matters," identifies eight characteristics that are important in providing sound leadership. He states that a good principal:

1. Recognizes teaching and learning as the main business of a school

2. Communicates the school's mission clearly and consistently to staff members, parents, and students

3. Fosters standards for teaching and learning that are high and attainable

4. Provides clear goals and monitors the progress of students toward meeting them

5. Spends time in the classrooms and listening to teachers

6. Promotes an atmosphere of trust and sharing

7. Builds a good staff and makes professional development a top concern

8.   Does not tolerate bad teachers. (p.1)

Strong leadership is an important, perhaps the most critical, element in a school's effectiveness. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) contend that "there is a general belief that good school principals are the cornerstones of good schools and that without a principal's leadership all students may not succeed" (p.43). Moreover, it is clearly documented in the literature that a principal's behavior and practices have a significant impact on teaching, learning, school climate, and academic achievement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005).

Studies on school effectiveness and student achievement all reveal one commonality: the effectiveness of schools depends largely on the quality of school leadership (Norton, 2003). When Taylor and Tashakkori (1994) studied data from 9,987 teachers and 27,994 students concerning healthy school climates, they found that school leadership was one of the three major factors that determine school climate. Studies have underscored the positive impact of a healthy school climate on student achievement—and the importance of the principal in creating that healthy climate.

Instructional leadership appears to be the most important aspect of the school principal, including the maintenance of an environment conducive to learning and a supportive climate for teachers (Alvy & Robbins, 2005; Jerald, 2006). Researchers suggest that there is a strong link between educational leaders, particularly principals, and student outcomes. As the topic of student achievement and test scores dominates policy discussions at the local, state, and national levels, schools and districts face mounting pressure to improve student outcomes throughout America's schools (Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007).

In this new millennium, the principalship is more vital than ever, and the task of professional principals as leaders and strategists is to create successful schools. This literature further states that developing good leadership in the light of the multifaceted

tasks that are now required by principals is an enormous challenge for educators of today (Fullan, 2001).

In the last 30 years, significant changes have occurred not only in our understanding of the role of the principal, but also in the structures governing the duties and responsibilities of the principal. School boards have been reduced in number or eliminated; private partnerships have built new and often larger facilities to consolidate student populations (Lee, 2001); and school advisory councils have been newly created or given more power (Lashway, 2003). These initiatives have politically and structurally altered the educational context in which in-school administrators work and have reshaped, whether by design or default, the leadership that administrators provide. The effective schools movement in the 1980s placed its emphasis on instructional leadership through which the administrator participated in curriculum development, in the implementation of new instructional strategies, and in teacher supervision for professional development.

Leithwood and Riehl (2005) argue that instructional leadership is a key component of what in-school administrators do. With the changes to education and its organization, however, additional responsibilities and expectations have been placed on administrators, which have increased their managerial function and too often have removed them from an intimate, ongoing involvement with classrooms.

The literature further cites three examples of the changes in responsibilities and expectations: first, with the government cuts to education, administrators now attempt to supplement operating budgets through grant writing. Second, administrators are often engaged in negotiation with third-party stakeholders, including service agencies, community leaders, and business partners. Third, administrators have redefined the economic, social, and cultural roles and responsibilities of their schools vis-à-vis the communities served (Lashway, 2003).

While principals are struggling to transform themselves into better instructional leaders, the increasing number of special needs students further complicates the task. It is imperative leaders have the requisite knowledge base to effectively plan to meet the needs of these students. First, school leaders must determine how best to support the special needs population of students in their buildings. The climate created by principals influences the success of all special education programs. In fact, administrator support of special education teachers is viewed as imperative in stopping the wave of teachers leaving the profession within five years of earning their teaching degree. Administrators must have knowledge of special education issues, policies, instructional practices, curriculum, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) to effectively lead by example in regard to students with special needs.

In essence, the principal's role in the new educational environment represents a balance between instructional leadership and management (Portin et al., 2006). According to these authors, leadership deals with such areas as supervising the curriculum, improving the instructional program of the school, working with staff to identify a vision and mission for the school, and building a close relationship with the community. Management of the school, on the other hand, includes such activities as supervising the budget, maintaining the school buildings and grounds, and complying with educational policies and regulations, making the principal's job increasingly challenging.

Black (2007) distinguishes between three broad areas of leadership for the modern school principal: instructional, transformational, and facilitative. Instructional leadership involves educational leaders in setting clear expectations, maintaining discipline, and implementing high standards with the aim of improving teaching and learning at school. In this view, the principal is a visionary, leading the school

community in its development to use more effective teaching and curricular strategies, and supporting educators' efforts to implement new programs and processes.

Transformational leaders are leaders who not only are focused on a culture of learning and teaching, but also are future oriented, responsive to the changing educational climate, and able to utilize the symbolic and cultural aspects of schools to promote, above all, a culture of excellence. These leaders motivate, inspire, and unite educators on common goals. They have the ability to persuade their followers to join their vision and share their ideals. They also have the ability to achieve productivity through other people. The actions of transformational leaders convey the beliefs and commitments that they speak about.

Facilitative leaders are the center of school management. They involve educators, learners, parents, and others in adapting to new challenges, solving problems, and improving learners' performance (Black, 2007). This means that the principals have to accommodate team meetings where they participate as members of a small group. Unfortunately, principals who have been trained under power-centered role expectations often lack the skills and knowledge necessary to practice facilitative leadership. Furthermore, facilitative leadership requires considerable time and energy, and it may create confusion and ambiguity before educators and others become accustomed to their new roles and responsibilities.

Principals have an important role to play in connecting schools with the external world and bringing into schools a variety of knowledge. They are the persons in schools who have the greatest capacity to network with the wider community and to ensure that schools keep abreast of current initiatives and anticipate future trends. This role takes up more and more of the principals' time and takes principals away from their schools more often.

In summary, there are a few key messages in this body of literature. First, the role of the principal, even while evolving over the years, has remained a critical part of a successful school. Second, the principal plays an important role in the process of school improvement. Third, the school principal must accept the realities of changes and demands on principalship and, even more importantly, should act in a way that takes into account the world's emerging character. The literature also reminds us that as American education continues to move into a new era of accountability, the role of the principal has become a critical component in the educational process. Usdan, McCloud, and Podmostko (2000) state that "principals today must serve as leaders for student learning" (p.2). They list the following items as the requirements for fulfilling this role:

- Knowledge of academic content and pedagogy

- Ability to work with teachers to strengthen skills

- Skill in collecting, analyzing, and using data

- Willingness to rally all stakeholders to increase student performance

- Possession of the leadership skills to fulfill the role.

The Academically Gifted

The Gifted: Historical Context

To understand the research and literature on the term *academically gifted* it is useful to first define the term *gifted* from an historical perspective. For many years, psychologists and educators equated giftedness with a high IQ. The English scientist Sir Francis Galton has been credited with conducting the earliest research on intelligence—in 1869. He believed that intelligence was due to superior qualities that were passed down to offspring through heredity. These findings sparked the eugenics movement, which called for improving the biological make-up of the human species through selective parenthood.

In 1904, the psychologist Alfred Binet, with the aid of his student Theodore Simon, developed the first IQ test; it was designed to predict how well students may do in school. Binet, a director of the psychology laboratory at the Sorbonne, began his studies by examining skulls and using the data of his predecessor, Paul Broca, who had concluded that the size of a human's cranium determined the level of his intellect. Binet detected flaws in this notion and asserted that psychological, rather than physiological, factors were instrumental in the study of human intelligence.

Binet's test contained a potpourri of unlearned skills that were used to derive an estimate of the general potential of the child and to develop a single score to classify the subject; that score was termed the child's "mental age." In 1914, German psychologist William Stern proposed an alternative, the "intelligence quotient." Stern's revolutionary idea was very simple. He argued that dividing a child's measured mental age by his chronological age would produce the child's intelligence score, one that could be compared readily across subjects.

At the turn of the twentieth century, particularly during the second decade, advancements in education and psychology brought attention to children with superior abilities. The early studies of giftedness evolved from research that dealt with mental inheritance, subnormal children, and the realization that graded schools could not adequately meet the needs of all children. By 1916, reports on specific classes established for gifted students began to appear in the educational literature. Pioneers such as Lewis Terman and Leta Hollingworth spearheaded the movement and conducted some of the first widely published research studies on academically gifted children.

The field of gifted education continued to evolve mainly in response to the changing needs of the world, especially after the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in the late 1950s. Researchers believed that this step into space caused the United States to reexamine its human capital and the quality of American schooling, particularly in

mathematics and science. As a result, substantial amounts of money were poured into efforts to identify the brightest advanced mathematics, science, and technology programming students. Federal legislation in the early 1970s brought the plight of gifted school children back into the spotlight. The definition of giftedness expanded, along with the programming options now available for gifted students.

Toward the close of the twentieth century, federal monies from the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act provided grant monies for research on gifted programming and funded such entities as the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform* (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983) and *National excellence: A case for developing America's talent* (Ross, 1993) (reports issued by the federal government) highlighted the missed opportunities to identify and serve gifted students nationally. In turn, a call was made for additional research and programming in the field of gifted education. The issuance of national standards by the National Association for Gifted Children helped solidify goals and provided school districts across the United States with a set of programming criteria.

During the twenty-first century, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001) was passed as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Included in the NCLB Act, the Jacob Javits program was expanded to offer competitive statewide grants. However, recent literature has shown that funding for gifted education programs has decreased throughout the United States. A 2004 report entitled *A nation deceived: How schools hold back America's brightest students*, argues that gifted children are often kept behind and left out of the educational process. Initiated by the University of Iowa's Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank of the International Center for Gifted Education and Talented Development, this report dispels many of the myths about

accelerated education and argues that far more harm than good comes from holding back gifted students, not only for themselves but also for society.

Academically advanced students are more often bored by their daily experience than are average or below-average students for whom the material is, in many cases, challenging. Robinson (2005) calls it "the misery factor" and believes it behooves us to modify things for these students because we have, by requiring them to be in school 180 days times six hours times 13 years, created an especially uncomfortable situation for them.

As we examine the literature on academically gifted programs from an historical perspective, it is fitting to note that gifted education has proven to be a vital force in American education throughout history. Even with the evolution of the concept of giftedness and the currently decreased funding for gifted programs, the academically gifted have been and continue to be a large part of our education systems—in spite of all of the obstacles that are in place to make them invisible members of our American school communities.

Gifted Programs

Early literature revealed that little attention had been given to academically gifted students or to the establishment of programs to meet their educational needs. Many early scholars argued that academically gifted children had been largely neglected; however, Colangelo and Davis (1997) direct attention to some noteworthy significant exceptions:

1.   In 1870, St. Louis, Missouri initiated tracking, allowing some students to complete the first eight grades in fewer than 8 years.

2.   In 1884, Woburn, Massachusetts created the "Double Tillage Plan." After the first semester of the first grade, bright children were accelerated directly to the second semester of the second grade.

3. In 1886, Elizabeth, New Jersey began a tracking system that permitted bright students to progress more rapidly than others.

4. In 1891, schools in Cambridge, Massachusetts developed a double-track plan, similar to Woburn's plan. Students capable of even more accelerated work were taught by special tutors. About 1900, some "rapid progress" classes telescoped 3 years of school work into 2.

5. In 1901, Worchester, Massachusetts opened the first special school for gifted children.

These observations of Colangelo and Davis (1997) gave birth to the gifted education movement and sparked a new paradigm for gifted programs in the United States.

Programs for the academically gifted can be conceptualized on a continuum, ranging from activities that can be arranged in regular classrooms to activities exclusively tailored to the needs of the academically gifted. Many scholars argue that the purpose of programs for the academically gifted is to provide students who perform, or show potential for performing, at high levels of accomplishment with the opportunity to receive differentiated education services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular educational program. Shore (1998) gave a description of various kinds of gifted programs typically found in public schools.

1. Cluster groups: A cluster group is made up of four to eight students of high ability who attend the same regular class. This flexible-grouping arrangement keeps gifted students in regular classes with students of mixed ability, but allows them to be grouped with other exceptional students in their areas of strength for part of the day.

2. Acceleration : Exceptional elementary school students may be sent to a higher grade for a specific subject or even skipped to the next grade for all subjects.

3. Pull-out program: A student may be pulled out of regular class for one or more hours per week to work in a small group with a teacher of the gifted who provides enrichment activities.

4. Special classes: Some gifted students attend special classes with other gifted students for the entire day.

5. Advanced courses: Academically gifted high school students may be placed in honors advanced placement courses, or even college courses.

Research in a variety of gifted education programs has fostered the development of instructional procedures and programming alternatives that emphasize the need to (a) provide a broad range of advanced level enrichment experiences for all students and (b) use the many and varied ways that students respond to these experiences as stepping stones for relevant follow-up. These approaches are not new ways to identify who is or who is not gifted. Rather, the process simply identifies ways to support continuous escalations of student involvement in both required and self-selected activities through subsequent opportunities, resources, and encouragement. Renzulli (2005) offered a model for identifying the talent pool as a vehicle for targeting certain students. The steps in forming a talent pool are

1. Academic performance and test score nominations

2. Teacher nominations

3. Alternative pathways

4. Special nominations

5. Notification and orientation of parents

6. Action information nominations. (pp. 43-53)

Age and grade levels play a role in decision-making about these special services. Students' abilities, interests, and learning styles tend to become more differentiated and more focused as they grow older. There is, therefore, more justification for interest and

achievement level grouping as students progress through the grades. The nature of the subject matter and the degree to which classroom teachers can reasonably differentiate instruction also play a role in decisions about special services.

The first purpose of gifted education is to provide young people with maximum opportunities for self-fulfillment through the development and expression of one or a combination of performance areas where superior potential may be present (Renzulli, 2005, p.32). This purpose is consistent with the general goals of education in a democracy and the need of every student to be challenged to the level of his or her potential. Another reason gifted students deserve challenge is that they develop a sense of inner strength and a view of their own abilities as malleable in this way (Dweck & London, 2004). Students who are chronically underchallenged have little confidence that they could face real challenges successfully and tend to limit themselves to situations in which they can perform well, or be instant experts. And if they do meet with a lack of challenge, they may crumble.

The second purpose is to increase society's supply of persons who will help to solve the problems of contemporary civilization by becoming producers of knowledge and art rather than mere consumers of existing information (Renzulli, 2005, p.33). Although there may be some arguments for and against both of the above purposes, most people would agree that goals related to self-fulfillment and/or societal contributions are generally consistent with democratic philosophies of education. What is even more important is that the two goals are highly interactive and mutually supportive of each other. In other words, the self-satisfying work of scientists, artists, and leaders in all walks of life usually produces results that might be valuable contributions to society. If we agree with the goals of gifted education set here, and if we believe that our programs should produce the next generation of leaders, problem solvers, and persons who will

make important contributions to the arts and sciences, then does it not make good sense to model special programs after the *modus operandi* of these persons (Renzulli, 2005).

Meta-analyses of the outcomes of these programs reveal quite compelling positive effects. With respect to the issue of effectiveness, gifted students in pull-out, separate class, and special school programs performed better than their gifted peers in the within-class arrangements or in schools without gifted programs. Academic gains from acceleration and various benefits regarding content, process, and product aspects of objectives, as well as positive motivational effects, are also reported for enrichment programs. Among other issues, concerns about the social-emotional adjustment of students accelerated to higher levels or advanced gifted programs, about the impact of the gifted label on social interaction, and about self-concept changes when gifted students are placed with equally competent peers have also been addressed in the research.

From the late 1800s through the twenty-first century, gifted programs have been presented in a variety of venues. Additionally, the literature highlights the fact that gifted programs can vary based on location, age, a child's intellectual ability and other issues. One point is clear throughout the literature: Gifted programs, however varied, give much-needed educational support to the academically gifted and play a significant role in the subsequent academic success of these children.

Teachers of the Gifted

There is a wealth of literature regarding teachers who teach traditional students; however, literature on teachers who teach the academically gifted child is limited. Many scholars conclude that these teachers are the "forgotten pioneers," teachers who have been merged into the pot of the general population of teachers without a voice. Moreover, the research indicates that teachers hired to teach the gifted have not always completed certification in gifted education and are often hired because of the potential that they

demonstrate rather than the knowledge that they have acquired about giftedness (Renzulli, 2005).

Joffe (2001) argues that teachers of the gifted need additional educational support to effectively design and develop curriculum for academically gifted learners, particularly because many of these teachers do not come from solid undergraduate and graduate programs that prepare them in gifted education. Even though the literature is limited in this area, a few experts in the field of gifted education have examined the characteristics of gifted teachers during the last several decades. According to some of these experts, certain characteristics are essential for teachers who teach the gifted (Benbow & Stanley, 1983). It should be noted, however, that the characteristics that have been described by these scholars are not derived from any scientific study, but rather from the experts' own personal observations and experiences. Two major centers of research on gifted and talented students exist. One is located at the University of Connecticut and the other at Johns Hopkins University.

Gifted children have special educational, social, and emotional needs that differ from those of other children. Meeting these needs requires a special type of "good" teacher, although many of the characteristics of effective teachers of gifted children (e.g., a thorough understanding of subject matter, self-confidence, a good sense of humor, and organizational skills) are characteristics of all effective teachers.

Today, pressured by the NCLB Act that aims to have each student reach his or her full potential, teachers of the academically gifted are committed to guiding their students toward a curriculum that involves more advanced analyses and a higher level of thinking. Scholars believe that teachers of the gifted demonstrate an unwavering commitment to their students by motivating them and encouraging them to work to their highest potential (Renzulli, 2005). Scholars further argue that gifted students often use their superpowers to conceal their abilities so that identifying the beyond-bright, truly gifted student can be

a real challenge for gifted teachers (Renzulli). To that end, gifted teachers see themselves as facilitators of learning who help students develop the skills necessary to learn, understand, and interpret an appropriately differentiated curriculum.

Even though limited, this literature on teachers of the gifted brings out a few key points. Gifted teachers:

1.   Feel as if they are somewhat merged into the mainstream of teachers;

2.   Are not selected for positions because of their certifications, but because of the potential they demonstrate;

3.   See themselves as facilitators of learning rather than advancers of knowledge;

4.   Are the forgotten pioneers in education whose voices are seldom heard. (Renzulli, 2005)

The Academically Challenged

The Academically Challenged: Historical Context

Historically, children who have met failure in school and whose intellectual functioning has affected their ability to keep pace with their classmates have had many labels and titles associated with them. Recently, the term *academically challenged* has been used to describe such students. Students whom educators have labeled "*academically challenged*" may receive services under the special education umbrella, have below average cognitive abilities, and struggle with the traditional academic demands of the regular classroom.

From as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been discussion in the literature about the right of all students—regardless of their academic ability or intellectual capacity—to receive a quality education that meets their needs. Even with the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which required public schools to

provide students who have a broad range of disabilities with an appropriate education; the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, which extended equal protection under the law to minorities and also paved the way for similar gains for students with disabilities; and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1966), which provided services to millions of students who had previously been denied access to an appropriate education, many students still find their educational needs unmet in American schools.

The Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) was founded in 1950 by a small group of parents and other concerned individuals. These parents were determined to find or start programs that would give their children the same opportunities provided to other children. Their early efforts were resisted by the educational establishment because of the high cost. At that time, little was known about the condition of intellectual disabilities (then referred to as mental retardation) or its causes; there were virtually no programs and activities in communities to assist in the development and care of children and adults with intellectual disabilities and or to help support families. In the early days the organization worked to change the public's perception of children with intellectual disabilities and to educate parents and others regarding the potential of people with intellectual disabilities. The ARC also worked to obtain services for children and adults who were denied day care, preschool, education and work programs. In 2010, The ARC celebrated its 60th anniversary.

For the purpose of this research, as indicated in chapter I of this dissertation, the term *academically challenged* refers to students who are about two grade levels below other children of the same chronological age in reading and math and have an individualized education plan (IEP) to address those areas.

Programs for the Academically Challenged

For decades, educators have argued that children who have been identified as academically challenged are the most difficult to teach (Stuebing& Shaywitz, 2002).

Despite the increased focus on academic standards and the accountability procedures in place to ensure that the individual educational needs of children are being met, many educators believe that the quality of instruction and the programs designed to help these students are inadequate and do not alleviate the learning problems that these students have. In other words, many scholars argue that the needs of students who are academically challenged are not being met in classrooms across the United States.

Many researchers believe that students who are identified as academically challenged are as individual as any other group of students. Programs for these students are individualized as well and vary from pull-out programs to inclusion programs in the regular classroom. For the purposes of this study, the students who are academically challenged are receiving instruction in a regular classroom setting, however modified to meet the students' needs.

The key to addressing the needs of academically challenged students is individualization, which is achieved through a planning process and written into an Individualized Education Plan, the IEP noted earlier. This plan is an assurance that the student will have real opportunities to gain the support necessary to meet his or her educational goals. For students who are academically challenged, there is no document more significant; however, the functioning of IEPs as currently formulated by public school professionals and the planning and implementation of procedurally sound IEPs is now and will continue to be a challenge for educators (Smith & Brownell, 1995). Table 2 shows the required content of the IEP.

Table 2

Required Content of the IEP

The student's present levels of academic achievement and optional performance, including:
1. The effect of the student's disability on the student's involvement and progress in the general curriculum
2. A description of the benchmarks or short-term objectives for students who take alternate assessments that are aligned to alternate achievement standards
3. Measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, designed to meet the student's needs
4. Measures to be used to determine the student's progress toward annual goals and the timing of periodic reports on the student's progress toward meeting annual goals

By the law's intent, the IEP should guide classroom practice. That is, the IEP should be an essential component of instructional design and delivery that enhances and accounts for students' learning and teachers' teaching. Researchers argue that with appropriate educational planning with the IEP process, students who are academically challenged can be effective learners in many schools.

In summary, the programs for the academically challenged student are individualized and are based on the specific needs of each child. The importance of the IEP process in guiding this individualized approach cannot be minimized or ignored. Succinctly, the IEP process provides administrators with proof of compliance, teachers with formalized plans, parents with a voice, and students with an appropriate education (Smith & Brownell, 1995).

Teachers of the Academically Challenged

Decades of research concerning teachers who teach students who face academic challenges can be found intertwined within the general literature on teachers. Because many of the teachers who teach the academically challenged do not label themselves as

specialty teachers, finding literature that addresses these teachers specifically is extremely difficult.

However, the importance of these teachers and the challenges these teachers encounter daily in their classrooms are enormous. Developing and implementing effective instructional and management strategies while working to close the educational gap that exists among the students in their classrooms are their greatest challenges. Teachers who teach students with academic deficits must implement lessons that are engaging and enjoyable, as researchers believe such lessons will make the learning process more effective (MacDonald & Speece, 2001).

Much in the literature speaks to effective teaching in classrooms with students with academic challenges. In his review of the literature, Westwood (2003) found that teachers who teach the academically challenged student should maintain good classroom management techniques, develop strong academic skills, be enthusiastic, and have the ability to keep students on task. Westwood further argues that effective teachers who teach students with academic challenges must have the ability and skills both to plan for the content coverage and to take into account the students' individual differences. Moreover, effective teachers in this setting should develop good teaching strategies, make efficient use of time, and have good presentation skills. Even though some researchers would argue that these characteristics are those required for any effective teacher, research suggests that these characteristics are particularly critical for teachers who must create appropriate conditions for instructional support and a strong learning environment for academically challenged students (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

A review of the literature related to teachers, particularly those who teach academically challenged students, produced findings that recognized that students have different learning abilities and noted that, in addressing these differences, teachers must find a way to accommodate the needs of each student without insulting or damaging the

self-esteem of other students in the classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004; Westwood, 2003). To that end, as classrooms become more inclusive and instructional needs become more individualized, teachers must move to a more individualized approach to teaching. Research further indicates that adopting this individualized approach to teaching while creating curricula appropriate for students with diverse and complex needs is the biggest challenge facing all teachers today (Silver, Strong, & Perini, 2000).

The literature also examines the importance of providing support and guidance to these teachers. Some researchers argue that support for these teachers is the most essential element for their success. Researchers further believe that the challenges of managing the diverse learning needs of their students with insufficient resources cause some teachers who teach students with academic challenges to feel overloaded and stressed, and thus make them ineffective in their relationships with students. Therefore, the support of principals and other educational professionals is a critical component for the academic success of these students. Billingsley and Tomchin (1992) argue that teachers who teach the academically challenged generally perceive their administrators as uninterested in the education of their students. The literature also indicates that unsupportive environments for these teachers reduce teacher efficacy and commitment to the work place (Rosenholz, 1989).

In summary, the literature on teachers who teach the academically challenged—although intertwined with the literature on teachers in general—clearly points to one critical fact: Accommodating the individual needs of their students is the biggest challenge facing teachers of the academically challenged. It is also important to note that the school administrators' support of their teachers plays a pivotal role in meeting the needs of academically challenged students. In addition, effective teaching plays a vital role in the academic success of academically challenged students.

The Role of the Principal in Implementing Successful Education Programs

for the Academically Challenged and the Academically Gifted

Increasingly over the past quarter of a century, principals have been challenged to implement programs that meet the needs of both gifted students and academically challenged students. In the midst of calls for change and the need to safeguard the educational rights of students, it is the job of the principal to ensure that no children, especially those with the greatest learning needs, are neglected or left out of the learning process. This concept of meeting the needs of *all* children and implementing programs to meet their needs places additional pressures on principals as they perform their already challenging job (Bender, 2002).

As expectations and pressures for principals continue to rise, the need for principal leadership in the implementation of school programs has become increasingly more important (Peterson & Deal, 2009). Much of the literature supports the belief that leadership is pivotal for the implementation and improvement of educational opportunities for all students, especially those with unique learning needs.

The relationship between the principal's leadership and the effectiveness of teachers who teach students with special needs has been somewhat left out of the literature. In essence, this omission is the reason for this research. Literature relating to the roles and responsibilities of principals in implementing programs for gifted and academically challenged students is meshed with the literature of effective schools in general and does not make specific references to the needs of students with special challenges and their teachers. During the past decade, however, emerging research has demonstrated a significant relationship between teachers, the implementation of programs, and school leadership.

Much in the literature over the past 30 years has emphasized the importance of effective instructional leadership (Gates, Ross, & Brewer, 2001). Peterson and Deal

(2009) contend that school principals hold the key to shaping a positive school culture that promotes learning. Peterson and Deal further argue that effective principals should skillfully engage stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, other support personnel, families, and business partners) in the learning process. Together, they can develop child-centered communities that are based on shared values and beliefs, a coherent vision of the future, and a mission to educate all students well.

Today principals see themselves as stewards and coaches in the development of school culture and in the implementation and success of programs that meet the needs of students (National Research Council [NRC], 1997). The literature also states that successful principals maintain a clear focus on programs that meet the individual needs of their students and the impact that these programs have on the academic outcomes of their students.

Principal's Role in the Implementation of Programs for the Academically Gifted

There is a small, but important, body of literature that focuses on the principal's role in providing leadership for gifted programs (Taylor, 1984, 1987). This literature highlights the importance of the principal in emphasizing:

1. Collaboration, shared decision-making, and facilitation of group processes relative to gifted programs

2. Teacher effectiveness in meeting gifted students' developmental and creative needs

3. Teacher evaluation

4. Gifted program development and implementation

5. Grade advancement and curriculum policies and practices.

Taylor's (1984) checklist of leadership activities outlines ways in which the principal can be an integral part of gifted programs (see Table 3). This body of research

speaks to the principal's role as instructional leader and includes the principal as a key component in improving gifted programs.

In addition to the research on gifted education, an important literature base in the area of educational administration and leadership helps to emphasize the value of principal instructional leadership in school improvement. The role of the principal as instructional leader has been defined as a critical element in improving the academic performance of students (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). They found that effective principals' instructional leadership was related to students' positive perceptions of their classroom environment and social climate. These findings are important, because researchers and practitioners have acknowledged the impact of students' perceptions on their achievement in school and their motivation to participate in gifted programs.

Table 3

Taylor's 1984 Suggestions for Principal Leadership in Gifted Education

1. Become well-informed regarding gifted students and their educational needs

2. Provide adequate specialized materials to the regular classroom teachers and/or teachers of the gifted

3. Assist teachers in developing instructional strategies appropriate for gifted students

4. Counsel parents of gifted students

5. Provide enrichment opportunities in the form of assemblies, speakers, performers, displays, etc.

6. Provide leadership and direction in gifted program development

7. Make the education of gifted students an item on each teacher's personal evaluation

8. Supply information on gifted education to the staff through professional journals, inservice, staff meetings, etc.

9. Assign and support county and/or local gifted and talented program personnel

10. Assist in the scheduling and staffing of the gifted program

11. Commit to an appropriate education for gifted students

12. Serve as a liaison between the superintendent, the gifted program personnel, and classroom teachers who express an interest in gifted education

13. Urge teachers to identify and serve the needs of gifted students

14. Assist in the identification of gifted students

15. Seek suggestions from staff for continued gifted program improvement

16. Become acquainted with gifted students in school

17. Work cooperatively with other personnel in objectively evaluating the program

Taylor, C. (1984), in *Gifted Child Today*, pp.16-18.

Principal's Role in the Implementation of Programs for the Academically Challenged

The literature that speaks to the importance of leadership in meeting the needs of students, particularly those with academic challenges, refers to the principal as a powerful advocate for these students. Researchers argue that principals should model inclusive thinking and strong leadership in their support of students with academic challenges, their families, and their teachers (Gates et al., 2001). Mixed with literature on general education, the literature on educational leadership indicates that principals of successful schools set high standards and expectations for all of their students, and students with academic challenges are no exception. Researchers further argue that principals should communicate the message throughout the entire school that all students, no matter what their academic challenges, are their shared responsibility (Kearns, Kleinert, & Clayton, 1998).

The principals' role in monitoring the academic progress of the academically challenged students is to implement an evaluation process for teachers that holds them accountable for providing quality learning experiences for all students, particularly the academically challenged students. In addition, researchers argue that principals should encourage initiatives to help teachers examine the way they think about instruction and the extent to which they can recognize and nurture the potential among diverse groupings of their students (Fenwick, 2000).

In summary, providing appropriate educational opportunities for all students is an ambitious goal. To ensure that no child is left behind in school, capable and caring leaders are needed in every school in America. Given the principals' critical roles and responsibilities in the implementation of programs for the academically gifted and the academically challenged, appropriate support and resources should be given to principals to carry out their duties (Fenwick, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 1995). As Fenwick argues,

without capable instructional leaders and dedicated advocates for students and for the teachers, educating these students will not succeed.

The Relationship of the Literature to the Present Course of Study

The literature review presented here outlines the critical role of the principal and the importance of the principal's leadership practices in implementing programs and strategies that help exceptional students learn. Furthermore, the literature suggests that the way in which leadership works may be better understood from the perspectives of teachers. The need for this research is especially pertinent in view of the growing academic diversity in classrooms and the accountability efforts at the federal and state level.

Teachers of the twenty-first century have been characterized as primary leaders of instructional change, and they need strong leadership to do their job. Today, as principals have the responsibility for leading the instruction of students from both ends of the academic spectrum, understanding leadership practices employed by principals and the effects these practices have on programs that are designed to meet the needs of these students is a pivotal part of moving forward, leaving no child behind academically.

Understanding leadership practices from the perspectives of teachers will enhance our knowledge of the relationship between teacher and principal, and it will have the potential to increase student achievement. In this way, it will promote successful academic outcomes for children whose needs, according to some researchers, have not been met.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Instructional change requires school leadership. Principals at all school levels must be actively involved in improving a school's instructional program. School principals have responsibility for leading instruction for a wide range of student abilities. Principals can play a key role as leaders to promote high-quality instruction for all children (Nelson, 1999). Research shows that their understanding of instructional leadership, and their ideas about how they can support it, are significantly influenced by their thoughts about teaching and learning (Reys, Chavez, & Reys, 2003). However, a better understanding of elementary school leadership practices in schools is needed in order to support principals with their efforts to improve achievement of academically gifted and academically challenged students.

In this chapter, the methodology of the study is presented. It includes the research questions and overview of the research design, a description of the study population, a discussion of the instrumentation, and the methods and procedures used for collecting and analyzing the data.

Overview of Research Methods

For this research study, the data were collected using a mixed-method approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data were gathered through the use of a survey and focus groups to answer the research questions.

The first phase of this research focused on quantitative methods. According to Palmquist (2003), "surveys can be useful when a researcher wants to collect data on phenomena that cannot be directly observed" (p.4). For this study, a survey was used to judge elementary school principal leadership practices and behaviors from the viewpoints

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of teachers of academically gifted or academically challenged students, who teach third, fourth, and fifth grades in elementary schools.

As stated in Chapter 1, this study used a static-group comparison. Campbell and Stanley (1963), in their article *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research*, said that eight sources of internal validity are of concern in all designs. They said that for static-group comparison, the design controls for the following threats to internal validity: history, testing, instrumentation, and regression. It does not control for selection, mortality, and interaction of selection and maturation. They are uncertain whether it controls for maturation itself. This design does not control for one threat to external validity, interaction of selection and x. The other three—interaction of testing and x, reactive rearrangements, and multiple x interference—are not relevant. This formative study is primarily concerned with internal generalizability to the school districts in which it will be conducted. Therefore, the threats to external validity are of less concern. In terms of internal validity, Campbell and Stanley said that it does not control for selection. The researcher believes that it may do so, because all of the candidates for this study come from very similar backgrounds (i.e., they are all educators and are teachers of either academically challenged or academically gifted students).

The second phase of this research focused on qualitative methods. In order to describe persons' stories, behavior, organizational functioning, or interactional relationships, the use of qualitative analysis is warranted (Creswell, 2003). Specifically, the source for data collection was focus group interviews of third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers of academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms. Focus groups were used to obtain participants' judgments of principals' leadership. According to Merriam (1998), focus groups allow for the opportunity to collect data about a lived experience and the ability to explore topics and generate

hypotheses from the participants' perspective as compared to other forms of qualitative research.

Research Design

This study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods as a means to provide relevant insight and potential answers to the research questions. The researcher surveyed elementary school teachers in a mid-Atlantic state. The primary reason for selecting these particular teachers for the study was because they teach either academically challenged or academically gifted students in inclusion classrooms. Little research has been done on these teachers' judgments of the effectiveness of their principals' instructional leadership in this important area. The sampling methodology used for this study was non-probability sampling (Mertler & Charles, 2005). This is a procedure in which the probability of inclusion of each member of the population cannot be specified. It is used when probability sampling is not feasible. Types of non-probability sampling include convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, snowball sampling, and quota sampling. For this study, purposeful sampling was used. It is used to select certain segments of the population for study.

For the quantitative portion of the study, the Powell School Leadership survey (2004) (Appendix A) was administered to two groups of teachers. The instrument was designed to solicit judgments about principal leadership behaviors. Of the 60 questions on the survey, 13 were questions for the school vision, mission and culture domain, 13 were questions for the curriculum and classroom instruction domain, 13 were questions for the family and community involvement domain, 9 were questions for collaboration and shared leadership, and 12 were questions for effective management.

For the qualitative design, focus group interviews were used. Teachers who teach the academically challenged and the academically gifted formed the focus groups. An invitation included in the survey instrument asked these teachers to volunteer to

participate in the focus group sessions. The sessions were tape-recorded and a moderator guide was used to facilitate the discussion of the research questions. The data were transcribed and transcripts were shared with the study participants to check for accuracy and verification. The reporting of the focus group does not identify names of persons or individual schools. Information about the focus groups was gathered exclusively from these transcripts and from moderator's notes.

Research Questions

Prior to beginning the research, the following research questions were developed to provide the structure for data collection and analysis.

Research Question 1

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding vision, mission and culture (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 2

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding curriculum and instruction (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 3

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding collaboration and shared leadership (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 4

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding family and community involvement (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 5

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding effective management (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Research Question 6

What are the curriculum and instructional issues faced daily by elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms?

Pilot Studies

To gain a deeper understanding of the relevance of the research topic, two pilot studies were completed. A convenience sample of special education teachers from two institutions of higher education were asked to complete a survey in which they responded to questions related to the five domains of leadership in Powell's theory to obtain their judgments on principal leadership. One group consisted of 15 teachers of academically gifted students; a second group of 20 were teaching academically challenged students. The results are displayed in Appendix B.

The results of the two pilot studies showed that there were mean differences in the two groups' views on the leadership practices of their principals. The response rate for this pilot study was 73% for the teachers who teach the academically gifted students and

60% for the teachers who teach the academically challenged students, both response rates quite high for a pilot study. There were few differences in responses to the demographic section, except for gender. There were far more females in the group of teachers of academically challenged students than of academically gifted students.

The pilot study showed that the means of the special education teachers who teach the academically challenged students were lower than the means of the teachers who teach the gifted students. The results of these pilot studies show that there are potential differences in the two groups' views of their principal leadership practices. The results of the pilot study examining principals' leadership practices from the views of special education teachers from both ends of the academic spectrum is worth pursuing in today's climate of heightened expectations and widening range of student needs. The participants in the pilot study reported no difficulties in responding to the survey. In previous studies, the survey has been shown to be both valid and reliable. The data to support this appear in the section on instrumentation in this chapter.

Study Setting

Warner County is situated in the geographic center of the mid-Atlantic state where this study took place. The county is the largest jurisdiction in this mid-Atlantic metro area with a population in excess of 2.6 million.

Over the past few decades, the basic demography of the county has changed from predominantly rural to an urban and rural mix. The county is the third largest land area in this mid-Atlantic state, 612 square miles. Warner County, the largest jurisdiction in the metropolitan area, increased its population 14.1% from 1990 to 2009. The racial makeup of the county in 2009 was 25.75% African American, 68.1% white, 0.3% native American, 4.3% Asian, 0.03% Pacific islander. 3.3% of the population was Hispanic or Latino of any race.

In Warner County there are 104,331 total students and over 17,000 staff. The 103 elementary, 27 middle, 24 high, 1 middle/high, and 4 special education schools in the county make the Warner County Public School system one of the largest in the United States. The county also offers unique and successful magnet school programs in which students are given the opportunity to focus on courses of study in which they are truly interested. Students in 47 magnet programs study Finance, International Studies, Career & Technology, Law & Public Policy, Literary Arts, Math, Science & Computer Science, Pre-Engineering and Environmental Science.

Warner County Public Schools' master plan, known as the Blueprint for Progress, provides the vision for implementing a quality education focused on excellence (Blueprint for Progress, 2011). At its core, the master plan outlines goals and indicators developed to ensure the essential curriculum is implemented in all content areas. When implementing curriculum, the blueprint makes it clear that lessons should be differentiated for English language learners, special education students, and gifted and talented students. In addition, the county embraces the Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC). SECAC members advocate at the county, state, and federal level to assist the school system on issues including, but not limited to, inclusion.

Specific "inclusive" education language is found throughout the master plan. For instance, Performance Goal 1, Indicator 1.1, refers to expanding inclusive service options for gifted and talented students in elementary school programs. Performance Goal 5, Key Strategy A, refers to providing professional development activities to support general and special education teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of inclusive practices. Other performance goals, indicators, and key strategies directly address differentiation in terms of providing reading support and supporting primary talent development for students preK-5 who may be eligible for gifted and talented instruction. This includes identification of minority students for inclusion in these programs. The model identifies

speakers of other languages (ESOL services) who may also be considered for inclusion in gifted and talented programs.

In general, the master plan sets the tone for how teachers, administrators, and others are to approach inclusive education. Aligned with that philosophy is the Guide for Inclusive Education Handbook, which was developed in 2004. The handbook was recently updated and is based on the principles of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA), and the master plan.

More specific to students receiving special education services, the handbook defines inclusion as a commitment to the belief that all students can learn and succeed in the general education classroom with non-disabled peers with appropriate special education services, related services, supplementary aids, assistive technology, and program modifications. Assistive technology could include low-tech items such as a pencil grip, or more high tech-technology such as a screen reader.

The overarching philosophy of inclusive education described in the handbook is that placement of students with challenges begins in the general education setting with age-appropriate peers or what is referred to as the least restrictive environment. The county's Office of Special Education mission statement reflects that sentiment and states that students receiving special education services should be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. The office provides the following comprehensive definition for inclusive education:

> Students with IEPs in need of inclusive education services are those with
> learning, communication, and/or behavioral needs significantly impacting
> their academic or social achievement. Students requiring these services
> have varied disabilities and multiple needs that can be met in the general
> setting with support and related services. Services offered may include:
> instruction in the general education curriculum with modifications, small

group pullout, resource support, and consultation with general education

teachers (Office of Special Education, 2012).

Procedures

Following the approval of the dissertation proposal by the research committee, the

researcher applied to the university's Human Subjects Review Board for approval to

conduct the study. After receiving that approval, the researcher contacted a county school

systems in the mid-Atlantic state to request permission to approach teachers of

academically gifted or academically challenged students in order to involve them in the

study.

The researcher had been in contact with the director of research at the Warner

County Board of Education. He indicated an interest in involvement in the study.

The researcher's goal was to select 50 elementary school teachers of academically

gifted students and 50 teachers of academically challenged students taught in inclusion

classrooms. Five teachers from each group were invited to join a focus group. The

researcher believed that teachers in this study would be a purposeful sample from this

mid-Atlantic state.

Instrumentation

Powell (2004) developed a conceptual framework regarding effective principal

practices and leadership behaviors based on the review of literature and her case study

findings. Powell's survey instrument was designed to measure the extent to which

principals exhibit behaviors in the following five domains: vision, mission, and culture;

curriculum and classroom instruction; collaboration and shared leadership; family and

community involvement; and effective management.

In developing the survey, Powell (2004) began with 110 questions which were

examined and assessed by 13 doctoral students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State

University to establish face and construct validity. The validation process resulted in the elimination of questions based on "appropriate domain, importance, and understandability." Powell's final instrument contained 76 questions. Felder (2006) and McLeod (2008) modified the instrument and reduced the number of questions to 60.

For this study, the validity of the instrument was reviewed by special education teachers from several institutions of higher education. It was judged to be valid. These reviewers suggested a number of changes, which were incorporated into the survey to be used for this study. The survey used a four-point Likert scale in which the judgments of special education teachers are measured on a continuum from highly unfavorable (1=strongly disagree) to highly favorable (4=strongly agree). According to the survey information sheet, respondents were asked to indicate their perspective about leadership behaviors and practices of their principal. The survey also included a request for demographic information from the participants.

Of the 60 questions on the survey, 13 questions addressed the school vision, mission and culture domain, 13 were questions regarding the curriculum and classroom instruction domain, 13 were questions for the family and community involvement domain, 9 were questions focused upon collaboration and shared leadership, and 12 were questions related to effective management.

The reliability of Powell's original instrument was verified by three researchers: Powell (2004), Felder (2006), and McLeod (2008). All computed Cronbach alphas for each of the five domains. For domain 1, Powell's alpha score was .88, Felder's was .92, and McLeod's was .89. For domain 2, the scores were .79, .77, and .87, respectively. For domain 3, they were .95, .87, and .83. For domain 4, they were .86, .79, and .80, and for domain 5, they were .95, .95, and .83. The Cronbach alphas all indicated that the survey had high inter-item reliability.

Data Collection

The researcher requested permission from Warner County to conduct the study and to identify potential subjects for the study. Following agreement from the county, packages were sent to each school with the materials to conduct the study. The principal was requested to distribute study materials to the teachers selected to participate.

Data Analysis

This study used quantitative and qualitative research methods. As Chappelle (2001) shared, "in social and behavioral research how to combine qualitative and quantitative thinking is a way that helps provide relevant insights and solve social problems" (p.23). Quantitative methods were used by the researcher to answer research questions 1 through 5. The survey data were analyzed by computing Cronbach alphas to establish inter-item reliability. Correlations were computed for responses of the subjects across the five domains of the survey. Independent t-tests of analysis of variance of the subjects' responses were computed between the groups.

Qualitative methods were used to answer research question 6. A focus group interview is defined as a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest" (Krueger, 1988, p. 18). Another definition of this qualitative research method is a "technique used to obtain data about feelings and opinions of small groups of participants about a given problem, experience, service or other phenomenon" (Basch, 1987, p.414).

The primary source for qualitative data collection was through focus group interviews because this method allows for (a) the opportunity to collect data through group interaction, (b) the ability to explore topics and generate hypotheses, (c) the ease of data collection, and (d) the researcher's moderate control of the focus groups as compared to other forms of qualitative research (Livesey, 2002). Livesey states two other advantages—high face validity and speedy results.

To ensure that the question paths developed by this researcher had face validity, the questions were reviewed by special education teachers in areas other than the area of the study. The review of the focus group questions generated suggestions for change and the final draft includes these changes. The researcher pilot tested the questions through a series of focus group interviews on a sample group of participants.

Summary

In summary, this chapter has outlined the procedures of inquiry used to investigate the extent to which differences in leadership practices and behaviors exist in the judgment of elementary school teachers of both academically gifted students and academically challenged students in third, fourth, and fifth grade. This chapter describes the research design, and the methods and procedures used for collecting and analyzing the data. The results of the data were used to confirm or refute the study's hypotheses and to draw conclusions about the behaviors and practices of principals.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter IV presents the results of the data analysis. This mixed-method study was designed to investigate the extent to which principals' leadership practices and behaviors differ in elementary school grades 3, 4, and 5 classrooms as judged by elementary school teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusion classrooms. The conceptual framework of this study is built on the assumption that the practices of a principal have a significant influence on the learning community of a school.

Procedures

Following the approval of the research proposal by the research committee, the researcher submitted her proposal to the institutional review board of the mid-Atlantic state university. The IRB board approved the study's protocols in accordance with the *Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (OHRP)* (Appendix C). The office of the research supervisor in Warner County gave approval to conduct the study (Appendix D).

Data collection activities included the administration of a survey and focus group discussions. The first phase of this research focused on quantitative methods. The supervisor of research of Warner County provided the researcher with the names and addresses of 10 elementary schools randomly chosen from each of the five catchment areas of the county. There were 124 classroom teachers in grades 3, 4, and 5 of the 10 schools selected, and about 2, 256 students in those classrooms.

At the beginning of the study, a large package was sent to the principal of each school by the county's interoffice mail. The letter to the principal (Appendix E) contained

a letter of invitation to the teachers to participate in the study (Appendix F) and a survey (Appendix A). The principal was asked that he or she distribute a set of those items (already enclosed in a #10 envelope) to each third, fourth, and fifth grade teacher in the school with a request to complete the survey if their class included students classified as either academically gifted or academically challenged. Warner County has a policy of inclusion in its elementary schools. To the degree possible, gifted and talented or academically challenged students are included in a regular classroom. The letter to the teachers invited them to complete the survey and return it to the research supervisor's office through the county school system's internal mail. The cover letter contained the purpose of the study and background information regarding the survey instrument (Appendix A). At the mid-point, the decision was made to send a follow-up request to each principal asking them to encourage the teachers who were given the original request to participate in the study. A copy of the second request letter is included in Appendix D. The final total of responses was 92, a response rate of 74%, which is judged to be an adequate response rate (Fink, 1995, p. 53). Because some of the respondents did not completely answer all of the statements in the survey, the number of usable complete surveys was 81, or 65% (see Table 4).

After the surveys were returned, a sample of five teachers from each group of elementary school grade 3, 4, and 5 teachers was asked to participate in a focus group discussion. An initial request for participation in a focus group appeared at the end of their survey. Teachers were asked to sign that form to agree to respond to the focus group questions (Appendix G).

The discussions were taped and transcribed. Focus group interviews were arranged at a time and location convenient to participants. Each focus group lasted for one hour. The responses were coded, based upon the questions they addressed and the

variables of the individual respondents in the groups. Focus group data were analyzed by the researcher and sorted by topics, clusters, and patterns.

Table 4

Response Rates of Elementary School Teachers of Academically Gifted and Academically Challenged Students

Surveys	Responses and Percentage
Number of Surveys Sent	124
Number of Surveys Received at Midpoint	57 (.46)
Total Number of Surveys Received	92 (.74)
Number of Usable Surveys	81 (.65)

Reliability

Cronbach alphas were used to compute reliability of the Leadership Survey. Cronbach alphas measure inter-item reliability and consistency of the survey instrument. They are used when no pretest-posttest reliability measures are available. Cronbach alphas were computed on all five domains and were checked for internal consistency. The results were compared to the results of Powell (2004), Felder (2006), and McLeod (2008), and are presented in Table 5. The Cronbach alphas for Powell, Felder, and McLeod, as well as for this study, are very similar. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (2006),

> If a scale has a high alpha coefficient [typically, .60 or higher, with the
> highest possible coefficient being 1.00], it means that individuals who
> respond in a certain way to one item on the scale are likely to respond in
> the same way to the other items on that scale. (p. 196)

The data in Table 5 show that the survey has a total reliability score of .95 for Powell and Felder, .93 for McLeod, and .94 for this study, indicating strong inter-item reliability. The Cronbach alphas shown in Table 5 for Powell and Felder are consistently

higher than those of McLeod and this study. The reason may be that the number of statements used by the two more recent studies was fewer than those on the Powell and Felder surveys. It also may be the result of a more diverse group of educators who were asked to respond to the survey. Felder only surveyed elementary school principals and teachers, while McLeod surveyed middle school principals, mathematics resource teachers and mathematics teachers. In this present study, elementary school teachers of gifted and talented students and academically challenged students were surveyed.

Table 5

Cronbach Alphas for Powell Study, Felder Study, McLeod Study, and Cassell Study

Domain	No. of Items	Alpha Score – Powell (2004)	Alpha Score – Felder (2006)	No. of Items	Alpha Score – McLeod (2006)	Alpha Score – Cassell (2012)
Domain 1: Vision, Mission, & Culture	16	.88	.92	13	.89	.90
Domain 2: Curriculum & Classroom Instruction	22	.79	.77	13	.87	.81
Domain 3: Collaboration & Shared Leadership	9	.85	.87	9	.83	.85
Domain 4: Family & Community Involvement	16	.86	.79	13	.80	.82
Domain 5: Effective Management	13	.80	.76	12	.83	.80
Total Instrument	76	.95	.95	60	.93	.94

Correlation Coefficients

The researcher next computed Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficients to describe the magnitude of the relationship between the five different domains for teachers of both gifted and talented and academically challenged students. A correlation coefficient can range from -1.00 to +1.00. The results are displayed in Tables 6 and 7. In interpreting these data, the researcher used an established set of criteria to make judgments about the significance of the correlations (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009). If a correlation was between 0.0 and .30, it was considered to be weak; if it were between .31 and .70 it was considered modest; and if it were .71 or above, it was considered to be strong (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009). The .05 level was used to identify those correlations that were statistically significant.

The data presented in Table 6 show that most of the correlations were modest, .30 to .69. The highest correlation in Table 6 is .84, between vision, mission, and culture and effective management; it is statistically significant at the .001 level. The correlations for curriculum and classroom instruction and family and community involvement are the lowest in the table and are not statistically significant. All other correlations in Table 6 are statistically significant at the .05 level or less. It should be remembered that the higher the correlation, the stronger the relationship among the variables.

Table 6

Correlation Coefficients for Domains 1 – 5 for Teachers of Academically Gifted Students

	Domain 1	Domain 2	Domain 3	Domain 4	Domain 5
DOMAIN 1	1.00 (32)	.59 (32) P=.001***	.38 (32) P=.05*	.50 (32) P=.001***	.84 (32) P=.001***
DOMAIN 2		1.00 (32)	.36 (32) P=.05*	.20 (32) P=.30	.62 (32) P=.001***
DOMAIN 3			1.00 (32)	.61 (32) P=.001***	.22 (32) P=.24
DOMAIN 4				1.00 (32)	.39 (32) P=.01**
DOMAIN 5					1.00 (32)

P = < .05*; <.01**; <.001***

Domain 1 – Vision, Mission and Culture; Domain 2 –Curriculum and Classroom Instruction; Domain 3 – Collaboration and Shared Leadership; Domain 4 – Family and Community Involvement; Domain 5 – Effective Management

Table 7 presents the correlations for elementary school teachers of academically challenged students. In general, the correlations for these teachers are lower than for the teachers of gifted and talented students. There are two correlations in the strong range. One is vision, mission and culture and curriculum and classroom instruction. The other is vision, mission, and culture and effective management. Three other correlations are very low and are not statistically significant. They are curriculum and classroom instruction and collaboration and shared leadership, collaboration and shared leadership and family and community relations, and family and community relations and effective management. All the other correlations are in the modest range and are statistically significant. The correlations presented in Table 7 show less agreement about the domains and their relationships to each other than do those presented in Table 6.

Table 7

Correlation Coefficients for Domains 1 – 5 for Teachers of Academically Challenged

Students

	Domain 1	Domain 2	Domain 3	Domain 4	Domain 5
DOMAIN 1	1.00 (49)	.72 (49) P=.001***	.49 (49) P=.001***	.35 (49) P=.01**	.73 (49) P=.001***
DOMAIN 2		1.00 (49)	.24 (49) P=.09	.42 (49) P=.01**	.63 (49) P=.001***
DOMAIN 3			1.00 (49)	.06 (49) P=.068	.54 (49) P=.001***
DOMAIN 4				1.00 (49)	.12 (49) P=.043
DOMAIN 5					1.00 (49)

P = < .05*; <.01**; <.001***
Domain 1 – Vision, Mission and Culture; Domain 2 –Curriculum and Classroom Instruction; Domain 3 – Collaboration and Shared Leadership; Domain 4 – Family and Community Relations; Domain 5 – Effective Management

Research Questions and Statistical Hypotheses

The research questions and statistical hypotheses are presented here with discussion of the findings for each question.

Research Question 1

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding vision, mission and culture (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Hypothesis 1

There is no statistically significant difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding vision, mission and culture (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students.

The data presented in Table 8 indicate that the statistical hypothesis of no difference in the means is rejected at the .001 level. There is a statistically significant difference between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students. The teachers of academically gifted students hold a higher opinion of the assistance given them by the principal than do the teachers of the academically challenged students. It is interesting to note that the amount of variance for the teachers of the gifted students is greater than for the teachers of challenged students.

Table 8

Independent t-Test of Judgments of Principals' Leadership Practices in Domain 1

Between Teachers of Academically Gifted and Academically Challenged Students

<u>Vision, Mission, and Culture – Domain 1</u>

	No. of Cases	Mean	S.D.	t-Value	D.F.	2-Tail Sig.
A.G.	32	43.44	5.88			
				3.50	79	.001***
A.C.	49	38.98	5.14			

A.G. – Academically Gifted; A.C. – Academically Challenged
P = < .05*; <.01**; <.001***

Research Question 2

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding curriculum and instruction (one of the five domains identified by Powell)

between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Hypothesis 2

There is no statistically significant difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding curriculum and instruction (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students.

The data presented in Table 9 indicate that the statistical hypothesis of no difference in the means is accepted. There is no statistically significant difference between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students.

Table 9

Independent t-Test of Judgments of Principals' Leadership Practices in Domain 2 Between Teachers of Academically Gifted and Academically Challenged Students

Curriculum and Classroom Instruction – Domain 2

	No. of Cases	Mean	S.D.	t-Value	D.F.	2-Tail Sig.
A.G.	32	42.03	4.43			
				.69	79	.492
A. C.	49	41.36	3.89			

A.G. – Academically Gifted; A.C. – Academically Challenged
P = < .05*; <.01**; <.001***

Research Question 3

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding collaboration and shared leadership (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Hypothesis 3

There is no statistically significant difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding collaboration and shared leadership (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students.

The data presented in Table 10 indicate that the statistical hypothesis of no difference in the means is rejected at the .01 level. There is a statistically significant difference between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students. The teachers of academically gifted students hold a higher opinion of the assistance given them by the principal than do the teachers of the academically challenged students. It is interesting to note that the amount of variance for the teachers of the challenged students is greater than for the teachers of gifted students.

Table 10

Independent t-Test of Judgments of Principals' Leadership Practices in Domain 3

Between Teachers of Academically Gifted and Academically Challenged Students

Collaboration and Shared Leadership- Domain 3

	No. of Cases	Mean	S.D.	t-Value	D.F.	2-Tail Sig.
A.G.	32	26.40	2.43			
				2.94	79	.01**
A. C.	49	24.47	3.49			

A.G. – Academically Gifted; A.C. – Academically Challenged
P = < .05*; <.01**; <.001***

Research Question 4

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding family and community involvement (one of the five domains identified by

Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Hypothesis 4

There is no statistically significant difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding family and community involvement (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students.

The data presented in Table 11 indicate that the statistical hypothesis of no difference in the means is rejected at the .01 level. There is a statistically significant difference between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students. The teachers of academically gifted students hold a higher opinion of the assistance given them by the principal than do the teachers of the academically challenged students. It is interesting to note that the amount of variance for the teachers of the gifted students is greater than for the teachers of challenged students.

Table 11

Independent t-Test of Judgments of Principals' Leadership Practices in Domain 4

Between Teachers of Academically Gifted and Academically Challenged Students

<u>Family and Community Relations – Domain 4</u>

	No. of Cases	Mean	S.D.	t-Value	D.F.	2-Tail Sig.
A.G.	32	39.13	5.86			
				2.47	79	.01**
A. C.	49	35.96	5.29			

A.G. – Academically Gifted; A.C. – Academically Challenged
P = < .05*; <.01**; <.001***

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Research Question 5

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding effective management (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Hypothesis 5

There is no statistically significant difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding effective management (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students.

The data presented in Table 12 show that the statistical hypothesis of no difference in the means is rejected at the .001 level. There is a statistically significant difference between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students. The teachers of academically gifted students hold a higher opinion of the assistance given them by the principal than do the teachers of the academically challenged students. Interestingly, the amount of variance for teachers of the gifted is greater than for the teachers of challenged students.

Table 12

Independent t-Test of Judgments of Principals' Leadership Practices in Domain 5

Between Teachers of Academically Gifted and Academically Challenged Students

Effective Management – Domain 5

	No. of Cases	Mean	S.D.	t-Value	D.F.	2-Tail Sig.
A.G.	32	38.75	4.44			
				3.93	79	.001***
A. C.	49	35.08	3.56			

A.G. – Academically Gifted; A.C. – Academically Challenged
P = < .05*; <.01**; <.001***

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In Table 13 are displayed the demographics of the elementary school third, fourth, and fifth `grade teachers of either academically gifted or academically challenged students. In terms of Gender, it is interesting to note that there are 20 males teaching the gifted and talented students, but no male teachers teaching the academically challenged students. In Years in Education, there is no important difference in length of service between the two groups. The same is true for Number of Years at This School, Educational Level, and Age of Teachers in the two groups.

Table 13

Demographics of Elementary School Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Teachers of Either Academically Gifted or Academically Challenged Students

	Group	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Teacher Gender						
Male	Acad.	20 (.63)				
Female	Gifted	12 (.37)				
Male	Acad.	0 (.00)				
Female	Challenged	49 (1.00)				
		1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+
Years in Education	Acad. Gifted	6 (.19)	6 (.19)	8 (.25)	4 (.13)	8 (.25)
	Acad. Challenged	10 (.20)	16 (.33)	13 (.27)	3 (.06)	7 (.14)
		1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+
Years at This School	Acad. Gifted	12 (.38)	12 (.38)	4 (.13)	2 (.06)	2 (.06)
	Acad. Challenged	18 (.37)	19 (.39)	7 (.14)	5 (.10)	0 (.00)
		BA/BS	MA	MA+30	Ph.D/ Ed. D.	
Educational Level	Acad. Gifted	8 (.25)	10 (.31)	14 (.44)		
	Acad. Challenged	13 (.27)	19 (.39)	17 (.35)		
		21-30	31-40	41-50	51+	
Age	Acad. Gifted	10 (.31)	10 (.32)	8 (.25)	4 (.13)	
	Acad. Challenged	13 (.27)	15 (.31)	12 (.25)	9 (.18)	

Research Question 6

What are the curriculum and instructional issues faced daily by elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

For the qualitative portion of this study a focus group interview was conducted. Thirteen teachers—6 who teach academically gifted students and 7 who teach academically challenged students—participated (Appendix G). This focus group interview gave teachers of both academically gifted and academically challenged students the opportunity to voice from their perspectives the leadership practices of their principals and how these practices impact their academic program. Crotty (1998) believed, "Only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent (pp. 75-76).

The focus group moderator's guide was developed using Powell's domains as a framework to elicit detailed descriptions regarding principal leadership behaviors. The guide also used probes to encourage clarification regarding curricular issues faced by teachers of academically gifted or academically challenged students. The moderator's guide was field tested with subjects from schools in another county in preparation for the interview phase of the study's data collection process.

Focus Group Questions

The focus areas were Vision, Mission and Culture; Curriculum and Classroom Instruction, Collaboration and Shared Leadership, Family and Community Involvement, and Effective Management. The questions were:

1.   Vision- What is the vision of the school and how does it influence your school culture?

2. Curriculum and Instruction- What are the daily curriculum and instructional issues that you face?

3. Collaboration and Shared Leadership**-** Describe collaboration and shared leadership in your school. In what ways do you collaborate with school leadership to identify, define and evaluate instructional goals?

4. Family and Community- In what ways do you support family and community involvement?

5. Effective Management- In what ways do you collaborate with school leadership to identify, define and evaluate instructional goals?

All focus group discussions were audio taped and transcribed. The data were categorized using the conceptual framework outlined in chapter one in order to group the interview data into domains associated with the school leadership practices. Codes were developed to capture the data. The transcripts were reviewed using a data analysis template and were color coded for descriptors. The descriptors were then categorized into themes.

Focus Group Themes

<u>Area</u>	<u>Theme</u>
Vision	Influence/Responsibility
Curriculum and Instruction	Accountability/Student Progress
Collaboration and shared leadership	Teacher Participation/Teacher Input
Family and Community Involvement	Affirmation of Community/Parent Support
Effective Management	Priorities/Resources/Leadership

The results of the analysis of focus group data are described for each focus group area. Abridged forms of the interview questions serve as subheadings.

Vision/Environment (Theme 1)

The first interview question focused on vision: What is the vision for the school and how does it influence your school culture? From this discussion two areas of concern evolved. First, the responses indicated how having a clear vision influences the cultural norms within the school environment. Second, the responses centered on the role of the principal in applying the vision and goals.

Influence/Responsibility (Teachers of Academically Gifted)

Most of the teachers who teach students who are academically gifted argued vividly that the vision of the school comes directly from the principal. One teacher shared,

"During my years as a teacher it has been the principal who creates the vision and the environment for the vision to be realized. My principal articulates the vision daily to us through many venues and expects us to support her in carrying out the school's vision."

Another teacher reported,

"My principal sets high expectations for us and verbally articulates the vision to the students, teachers and parents regularly."

A third teacher remarked, "The vision of the school is the responsibility of the principal; however, it should include the voices of the stakeholders." She further stated that "I believe that stakeholders should work with the principal to set the vision and to achieve success for all students, particularly students who are gifted."

Another teacher commented that "the principal influences the vision and the learning environment within the school. The culture of the school is established by the school leadership. I believe that our job as teachers is to ensure, support and trust the school's vision that is created by the principal."

<u>Influence/Responsibility (Teachers of Academically Challenged)</u>

Teachers who teach the academically challenged students echoed the sentiment that the principal sets the vision of the school. One teacher shared that her principal makes the vision very clear to all stakeholders. It is written in the Faculty Handbook and Parent Handbook. She also stated that in her school the vision statement is posted throughout the school.

Other teachers commented that "the principal sets the vision for the school; however, whether or not the teachers support that vision is questionable." "I believe that most of them at our grade level do support the principal's vision; however, there are some who do not." "I believe that the vision is reflective of the principal's influence with the school environment."

Another teacher commented, "We, the teachers, influence the vision by doing our jobs. Teach students the best we can despite the tremendous differences in learning styles. We inspire the vision by building strong schools."

An additional teacher said, "My principal sets the vision and has the fundamental knowledge and skills that will enable her to develop the vision; however, I feel that she does not have the field experience needed to mold a vision that includes the needs for children who have academic challenges."

Another teacher said, "The principal is the leader of the school and the leader should set the vision.

Lastly, a teacher shared that some of us have lost the opportunity to assist principals in developing the vision. "If we want to improve achievement of all subgroups, we must work collaboratively with principals to develop a vision that is meaningful for all students."

Curriculum and Instruction (Theme 2)

The second interview questions focused on curriculum and instruction: What are the daily curriculum and instructional issues that you face? From this discussion two areas emerged: teacher accountability and student progress. First, the responses revealed that student performance is in the forefront of what teachers are thinking and doing with regard to instruction.

Accountability and Student Progress (Teachers of Academically Gifted)

One teacher responded "I think that teaching academically gifted students is challenging yet rewarding. In some cases gifted students are forgotten in the learning process and are placed at the bottom of priorities. I would further argue that gifted education for elementary students is looked upon as an added thing to the program, not necessary. I think that the academically gifted students are the lowest priority".

A second teacher stated that: "Because these students score high on the standardized test they are a plus to the school and the worries of meeting AYP are not a part of the mix. With schools struggling to make AYP, the focus is on the students who test poorly, not the gifted students. It's a shame because even though gifted students may test well on standardized tests, it does not mean that they are learning. We need to continue to work hard to provide better educational experiences for these students."

Another teacher said, "We need more structure and guidance on how and what we teach. I want to provide the best education possible for my students. Sometimes I feel left alone to solve my own problems. My colleagues believe that gifted students teach themselves and that teachers who teach them need little direction with the implementation of instruction. This is not true. Teachers who teach gifted students, in many cases, need more direction about instruction."

A different teacher responded that "at my school, time is built into the schedule to allow teachers to meet weekly to discuss test data and curriculum updates. We also have

Content Area Administrators who assist in developing formative assessments that will ultimately improve instruction."

Another teacher answered: "We understand that effective practices are needed to enhance instruction in the classroom; however, our school leaders must recognize the instructional demands that have been placed on us. With gifted students there are always new instructional initiatives for us to implement which places a tremendous amount of pressure on us to complete tasks."

<u>Accountability and Student Progress (Teachers of Academically Challenged)</u>

One teacher commented: "Our principal identifies teachers who have exemplary knowledge and skills related to effective instruction and uses those teachers in their area of expertise. This enhances instruction at our school, particularly for the academically challenged student. Our challenge, however, is trying to find the opportunity to share our skills and talents with our colleagues so that we can develop a collaboration among us that will encourage continuous professional growth."

Another teacher responded: "I believe that we are held accountable for student progress at a higher level than other teachers. We must design working and learning environments to accommodate specialist assignments and support classroom needs accurately."

A third teacher commented: "One challenge that I face is trying to meet the complex individual diverse needs of my students. We need to devise policies and procedures that facilitate classroom support. We need more regular scheduled common planning time with other teachers and specialists to address instructional needs and classroom concerns.

Another teacher said: "We need help in the implementation stage of special programs that will help our students and we need to become stewards and coaches in the development of these programs."

A different teacher stated that the pressure is on with greater demands for accountability, particularly for students with academic challenges. There is always a conflict between teaching students what they need to know and preparing them for state exams.

Collaboration and Shared Leadership (Theme 3)

<u>Teacher Participation and Teacher Input (Teachers of Academically Gifted)</u>

The next question in the focus group focused on collaboration and shared leadership. Two areas emerged in these interviews: Teacher participation and teacher input. The guiding question was "Describe collaboration and shared leadership in your school."

One teacher revealed, "My principal is open and fair. She meets with us each week to discuss the progress of our students. We focus on school climate, management and instructional issues. These meetings make me feel as if I am sharing in the leadership. My voice is being heard."

A second teacher indicated that "my principal does not expect the students to accomplish as much as I expect them to and therefore does not work together with me on anything. My principal is not aware of what a gifted program for 4th graders should be and has a hard time leading gifted teachers. I believe that principals need to be more informed about academically gifted students."

Another teacher commented that "my principal supports us with student discipline, curriculum and instruction. We meet once a month to discuss instructional strategies to improve student achievement. We work together and in support of each other. We always work with an instructional plan for our students."

A teacher indicated that "I am not quite prepared for being a teacher of the academically gifted; however, I worked with my principal to develop instructional strategies to teach these students and to fulfill our school goals. My principal has guided

me to take additional courses to enhance my knowledge of teaching academically gifted students. She understands the gifted program in our school and has a wealth of knowledge about teaching the academically gifted student."

Another teacher replied that "We need to have more time to collaborate with other teachers on our team. This is critical so that we can share ideas with each other and support each other. We also need to have more of a voice in how to implement teaching strategies in our classrooms. More meetings with the principal and the entire team of teachers would be helpful."

Teacher Participation and Teacher Input (Teachers of Academically Challenged)

One teacher revealed: "Children who are academically challenged have diverse needs that must be addressed. I believe that my principal does not clearly understand those needs and the instructional challenges that these students face. We need more collaboration with the entire team regarding this issue."

Another teacher responded: "Good leaders should understand the importance of a well-designed learning and working environment which is an essential component for the success of academically challenged students. We need to have more of a voice in how our classrooms are designed and the kind of working environment in which we are teaching. We should collaborate together, principal and teacher, regarding these matters so that together we can facilitate the development of appropriate student instruction that represents student needs accurately."

A third teacher responded: "My principal is an effective leader who is committed to the success of all students and collaborates with others to achieve this goal. She assures that classroom teachers, particularly those who teach students who are academically challenged, have regularly scheduled planning times to address the instructional needs of the students and classroom concerns."

A teacher added: "The administration works hard to build relationships that facilitate dialogue, support, and sharing between teachers."

Another teacher said: "I believe that my principal has a limited experience in working with students with academic challenges and therefore is poorly prepared for the responsibilities of guiding teachers in this area. To that end collaboration is extremely limited."

Family and Community Involvement (Theme 4)

The fourth interview question was: In what ways do you support family and community involvement? In analyzing the responses of teachers, the majority of the responses were clustered in the theme of "affirmation of the community".

Affirmation of Community and Family Support (Teachers of Academically Gifted)

One teacher responded: "At my school we work to develop strong partnerships with parents. We meet with parents regularly and co-sponsor activities that support the students as well as the community. We also sponsor a reception night for the parents to discuss the program and to share instructional ideas that parents can use at home to help their students."

Another teacher answered, "I support family involvement by having an open door policy in my classroom. Parents can come at any time to observe what we are doing. I also send out a monthly newsletter which highlights the many activities going on in the classroom. I feel that it is important to affirm parents and the community."

A third teacher responded: "I believe that I support the family and the community by being welcoming. I want the parents as well as the students to feel validated and valued in my presence. I support the parents not only with issues involving school but with family problems that may occur."

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Another teacher stated: "I support the family and community by meeting with civic leaders, local newspaper staff and community organizers, etc. This allows me to share activities that are going on at the school with the community leaders."

A popular descriptor within the theme focused on student recognition programs (honor roll, student of the month, etc.) to support community involvement. One teacher responded: "We recognize students for their achievements, efforts and citizenship. We invite parents to these award recognitions and we seek volunteers to support our program."

Affirmation of Community and Family Support (Teachers of Academically Challenged)

One teacher responded: "It is the responsibility of the school to foster community partnerships, not the individual teacher. I support the family and the community but my job is to teach these students."

A second teacher answered: "I meet with the PTA each month to give parents an overview of what is going on in my classroom. I am the representative from my team to the PTA. I support community involvement but it is not my priority. My goal is to improve academic achievement. I spend more time working on the school improvement team."

Another teacher responded: "We create family and community involvement by having a family game night with hands-on activities to support current instructional strategies that are being used in the classroom."

A different teacher added, "I support community involvement by participating in community meetings, community forums and community festivals. My class had a float in the community parade last year."

A teacher stated that "I support the family and community involvement; however, I do not have the time to spend on that. If you have a good school family, community

involvement will be there. However, each year I sponsor an instructional night for parents to help them to understand how to help their children at home. That is the only project that I have time to do."

Effective Leadership (Theme 5)

Priorities, Resources and Leadership (Teachers of Academically Gifted)

The fifth interview question focused on Effective Leadership. In what ways do you collaborate with school leadership to identify, define and evaluate instructional goals? Quite a few teachers' responses focused on the notion that effective leadership helps to build positive relationships in the school. They further believe that these positive relationships enhance the learning environment for students.

One teacher responded: "My principal recognizes that it is her responsibility to serve as the instructional leader of the school. She works together with us (the teachers) to improve the educational opportunities for students. She helps to tackle the challenging issues facing teachers and mobilizes support from the teachers to assist her in addressing these challenges."

Another teacher added: "My principal sees herself as a change agent and works collaboratively with others, particularly teachers, to make a better future for all of the students, including those who are academically gifted. She sets priorities and sustaining a strong instructional program for all students is one of them."

A third teacher responded: "The leadership team at my school has a clear understanding of how the students are progressing and ways to improve their academic performance. The leadership team is in constant communication with the teachers and progress charts are created by the teacher and the leadership team to monitor students' progress. This collaboration helps to increase student achievement and student learning."

An additional teacher said: "Good leaders in schools set high expectations and standards for their students. That is what our principal does. The teachers share that

vision and help the principal to create a common set of instructional goals for all of our students, including students who are academically gifted."

Another teacher answered: "I feel as if the leadership at my school does not take the academically gifted student seriously. To that end the resources for these students are not being mobilized properly and fairly. Leaders in schools must be able to garner public understanding and support for educational programs that serve the needs of all students."

Priorities, Resources and Leadership (Teachers of Academically Challenged)

One teacher responded: "At my school the principal has developed a school leadership team. This helps us to organize our schools in ways to capitalize the experience of others. This structure helps us to focus more on critical instructional issues."

A second teacher added: "I believe that we are leaving children behind in school reform, particularly students with academic challenges. The leadership at our school does not focus on these kinds of students and does not provide the right kind of instructional support to teach these students. Leadership, which I believe is a critical element needed to guide teachers who work with academically challenged students, is not there. We need to explore new leadership models at my school."

A third teacher responded: "Collaboration is the key to creating and evaluating instructional goals. At our school we have team leaders. As a result I meet with the team leaders and the principal weekly to discuss academic issues regarding my students. We only discuss instructional issues; however, there are other issues that need to be addressed. Since many of my students have cognitive and social issues, broadening the topics for these team meetings would be helpful."

Another teacher stated: "The principal at my school is always open to having a discussion about the instructional goals that we set for our students as well as our personal goals. However, we have no formal structures in place to enable a more in-depth

discussion of these matters. We never really evaluate our instructional goals unless it is in the context of meeting AYP gains."

Another teacher added: "Ensuring appropriate instruction for students with academic challenges is very difficult; however, I believe that good interventions that are designed to improve student performance are the key to student improvement. Many of my colleagues lack the essential knowledge needed to meet the complex challenges that these students bring to the classroom. Students with academic challenges are just not the priority."

Summary

This chapter presented the findings associated with the study. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to address the five research questions from Chapter 1. A number of recommendations for practice and for further research were drawn from these findings and are presented in Chapter 5, as are conclusions reached as a result of this study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proposed to use quantitative and qualitative methodology to identify, compare and contrast the leadership behaviors and practices of principals from the perspectives of elementary education third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach either academically gifted or academically challenged students in inclusive classrooms. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher draws conclusions and offers recommendations for further research.

The first phase of this research focused on quantitative methods. The supervisor of research of Warner County provided the researcher with the names and addresses of 10 elementary schools randomly chosen from each of the five catchment areas of the county. There were 124 classroom teachers in grades 3, 4, and 5 of the 10 schools selected, and about 2, 256 students in those classrooms. For the quantitative portion of the study, the researcher used Powell's (2004) five domains of effective principal leadership behaviors and practices as lenses through which the teachers could view the principals' leadership. The Powell School Leadership survey was administered to teachers of academically gifted or academically challenged students.

The qualitative portion of this study used focus group interviews of elementary education 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers as a nondirective method to obtain information about principals' leadership behavior and practices that may not be available through general quantitative research methods. The researcher prepared a series of probes to guide the focus group discussion.

Research Questions

Prior to beginning the research, research questions 1 through 5 were developed to provide the structure for data collection and analysis. Question 6 was structured to gather perceptions in a qualitative way through focus groups.

Research Question 1

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding vision, mission and culture (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Research Question 2

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding curriculum and instruction (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Research Question 3

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding collaboration and shared leadership (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Research Question 4

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding family and community involvement (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Research Question 5

Is there a difference in the mean judgment of principals' leadership practices regarding effective management (one of the five domains identified by Powell) between elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Research Question 6

What are the curriculum and instructional issues faced daily by elementary school third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach academically gifted or academically challenged students?

Conclusions Based on Quantitative Results

The director of research of Warren County identified 10 elementary schools to study that use inclusive practices. The response rate for both groups of teachers was 74%. The researcher concluded that this was an acceptable rate, given the fact that the study was conducted in April while the elementary schools were preparing to take the state-mandated tests.

The content validity of the instrument was documented by Powell and re-documented by this researcher through the pilot study she conducted and by the group of educators who reviewed the instrument. The researcher computed Cronbach alphas to establish the inter-item reliability of the survey and concluded that the survey had high inter-item reliability, given the Cronbach alpha of .94 across the five domains.

The researcher computed correlation coefficients for both groups of teachers. The correlations for teachers of academically gifted students were modest, .30 to .69. The highest correlation was between vision, mission, and culture and effective management. Seven of the 10 correlations were statistically significant. The correlations presented for teachers of the academically challenged were lower than the other group of teachers. The

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researcher concluded that teachers of the gifted felt that the instrument measured their perceptions of the principal's practices more consistently than did the teachers of the academically challenged.

The researcher conducted five independent t-tests to examine the teachers' judgments about the principal's practices in educating gifted as well as challenged students. The first research question sought an answer to the principal's leadership practices on vision, mission, and culture. The results of that analysis led the researcher to conclude that the teachers of academically gifted students felt that the principal helped them more than the teachers of academically challenged students. This difference was statistically significant at the .001 level.

Research question two concerned the principal's leadership practices on curriculum and instruction. The results of the analysis showed no statistically significant difference in the means between the two groups of teachers. The researcher concluded that the principal's practices had no differential effect in that area.

The third research question concerned collaboration and shared leadership. The results of the statistical analysis indicate that there was a statistically significant difference at the .01 level concerning the principal's leadership favoring the teachers of the gifted students. The researcher concluded that the teachers of the gifted felt they shared more leadership with the principal than did the teachers of academically challenged students.

Research question four was concerned with the principal's leadership practices in the area of family and community relationships. Here again there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups of teachers. Again, the teachers of the gifted had a statistically significantly higher mean than did the teachers of the challenged students. The researcher concluded that the teachers of the gifted students believed the

principal's practices of outreach to families and community relationships were more effective than did the teachers of the challenged students.

The fifth question was concerned with effective management. Once again, there was a statistically significant difference in the means between the two groups of teachers. The researcher concluded that the teachers of the academically gifted felt they and the principal are more involved with the management of the school than did the teachers of the academically challenged.

<p style="text-align:center">Conclusions Based on Qualitative Results</p>

Based on the focus group interviews with elementary third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms, the researcher arrived at the following conclusions: Both sets of focus group participants believe that developing a strong vision for their school is a critical component of making their schools successful. The teachers further argue that working collaboratively as a team to create the school's vision is important. Some teachers believe that sharing in the development of the vision will provide opportunities and support for the vision. They argue that by having input from everyone, the school vision will represent the thoughts and ideas of the total school community, not just the principal. To that end, the school vision will be not just the articulation of statements and beliefs but a realistic perception of the school beliefs and a platform for school improvement. It is also important to note that the teachers who teach the academically gifted seemed more likely to embrace the school vision and support the principal in implementing the vision than the teachers who teach the academically challenged students. Many felt that this was because the teachers who teach the academically gifted shared in the process of developing their school's vision. Both groups of teachers voiced the opinion that the school vision should be one that all members and stakeholders should embrace; however, the principal should be the primary promoter of the vision.

In the area of curriculum and instruction, the teachers of both the academically gifted and the academically challenged placed student performance in the forefront of what teachers are thinking and doing with regard to instruction. Both groups of teachers also focused on the need to gain a deeper understanding of how to use instructional strategies to meet the unique needs of their students. It is worthy to note that the teachers who teach students who are academically challenged felt pressure from the principal and the school system as a whole to have students make annual yearly progress on standardized tests. The teachers of the academically gifted indicated that there were very few pressures placed on them regarding standardized tests or AYP. Additionally, the teachers who teach the academically challenged students expressed a need for more support and guidance from their principals in the area of instruction. They believe that this additional support will provide them with the framework for action steps toward school improvement.

In the area of collaboration and shared leadership, the focus group analysis indicated that both groups of teachers felt the importance of collaboration and sharing in the leadership of the school. However, there was much discussion about which aspects of collaboration affect students' educational experiences. The teachers of students who teach the academically gifted felt as if they were sharing in the leadership of their schools; the majority of the teachers who teach the academically challenged students felt that they do not share in that leadership. This area caused an obvious split in the conversations. The teachers of the academically gifted students argued that collaboration and shared leadership helps them to create good communication among teachers and the administrators and thus helps to create successful academically gifted programs. The academically gifted teachers saw benefits of collaboration. The teachers of the academically challenged students did not talk a lot about collaborative leadership and felt that because collaborative structures were not used throughout the school year, their

school did not have a collaborative culture and therefore collaboration in leadership was almost non-existent. The teachers of the academically challenged students did feel, however, that teachers who are leaders within schools are an important element in strengthening schools and improving them.

In the area of family involvement there was agreement among the groups. Both groups felt the importance of family involvement and affirmed their school communities. The relevance of the participants' tones and the facial expressions affirmed that they had a deep understanding of the importance of this area. Both groups believed that family and parental support were key components of successful schools and school improvement.

The area of effective management opened a group interaction that suggests that effective management in schools is important if schools are to be successful. This sentiment was felt by both groups of teachers. Both groups of teachers argued that management of schools in the twenty-first century is very complex and that administrators have multiple tasks to complete and organize. Both groups of teachers discussed how principals have a difficult time balancing their roles as instructional leaders and effective managers. The teachers of the academically gifted students felt that their principals managed their schools better than the teachers of the academically challenged students. The teachers of the academically challenged students felt their principals were overwhelmed with so many other things and the management and organization part of the schools needed improving.

<center>Areas of Future Research</center>

The researcher recommends that this study be replicated in a similar suburban/urban environment to see if the findings are similar to those of this study. It is also recommended that the study be repeated in urban situations with different populations of students. The study also needs to be replicated in middle or high schools.

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Perhaps the study should be done in charter schools or private and parochial schools at the elementary level.

1.   Replication in other contexts:

    a.   Similar suburban/urban environments

    b.   Urban school systems with different student and teacher demographics

    c.   Middle and high schools

    d.   Charter schools or parochial schools

    e.   How teachers adapt to inclusion classrooms with academically gifted or academically challenged students

    f.   Measuring student outcomes in these environments

    g.   Effects of AYP and standardized testing on teachers of the academically gifted vs. teachers of the academically challenged.

Implications for Policy and Practice

1.   Principal training programs

    a.   Training principals to address the diverse needs of teachers who work with students with a range of academic abilities

    b.   Principals as instructional leaders

2.   Teacher involvement in development of school vision

3.   Need for more consistent and clear understandings of "Special Education"

Appendix A

Leadership Survey

Leadership Survey

Using this 60-item survey instrument, you are asked to indicate your perspective about your principal's (administrator's) leadership behaviors and practices. <u>Please be discriminating!</u> The results will be more helpful if you think about each item as it pertains to their leadership behaviors and practices only. Please answer all questions and complete the five background questions as well. Thank you for your time and input. Please use the following scale in answering these items.

1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please circle your answers on this survey form and include your comments at the end.

Survey Questions	1 = Strongly Disagree	2 = Disagree	3 = Agree	4 = Strongly Agree
1. Curriculum needs determine the type and frequency of staff development	1	2	3	4
2. The principal and staff together develop the school plan.	1	2	3	4
3. Teachers provide instruction using an instructional model (warm-up, guided practice, independent practice, and closure)	1	2	3	4
4. The school staff embraces the vision of the principal for school success.	1	2	3	4
5. Teachers facilitate interactive student discussions about concepts and process.	1	2	3	4
6. Teachers use assessment data to plan instruction.	1	2	3	4
7. The principal, not the district, makes hiring decisions.	1	2	3	4
8. The principal supports the discipline plan.	1	2	3	4
9. Teachers address the individual academic needs of students.	1	2	3	4
10. Outside organizations support the school monetarily.	1	2	3	4

Survey Questions	1 = Strongly Disagree	2 = Disagree	3 = Agree	4 = Strongly Agree
11. Teachers know what resources to use for students' social and educational needs.	1	2	3	4
12. Family members feel comfortable in the school.	1	2	3	4
13. The principal provides teachers with enough supplies, books, and materials to deliver instruction.	1	2	3	4
14. There is a feeling of respect among and between staff members and students.	1	2	3	4
15. Teachers focus on the state standards when teaching the curriculum.	1	2	3	4
16. The teachers are encouraged to give the principal input on the purchase of resources.	1	2	3	4
17. Most parents attend conferences concerning student progress.	1	2	3	4
18. Parents are seen frequently in the school.	1	2	3	4
19. Family members are encouraged to come to school.	1	2	3	4
20. Teachers in this school believe all children can learn.	1	2	3	4
21. Successes are celebrated frequently by the principal and teachers.	1	2	3	4
22. Leadership in the school is shared between the principal and teachers.	1	2	3	4
23. The internet is used for communication between school and home.	1	2	3	4
24. Students in this school understand and follow the discipline plan for behavior.	1	2	3	4
25. The school vision sets the stage for how the staff proceeds with instruction.	1	2	3	4

Survey Questions	1 = Strongly Disagree	2 = Disagree	3 = Agree	4 = Strongly Agree
26. After-school programs are well attended by parents.	1	2	3	4
27. The principal is seen frequently throughout the building.	1	2	3	4
28. Teachers are encouraged to participate in decision-making.	1	2	3	4
29. Community members volunteer at the school.	1	2	3	4
30. The principal understands good classroom instruction.	1	2	3	4
31. Teachers frequently assess students on state standards.	1	2	3	4
32. The staff makes decisions with the principal concerning teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4
33. The principal manages funds to ensure the school has the best resources to teach the students.	1	2	3	4
34. There are uninterrupted blocks of time for instruction.	1	2	3	4
35. The teachers plan the educational program in collaboration with the principal.	1	2	3	4
36. The culture of the school is conducive to learning.	1	2	3	4
37. The school develops a plan to ensure all students are successful.	1	2	3	4
38. Teachers maintain a high level of student engagement in the curriculum.	1	2	3	4
39. The principal visits classrooms frequently.	1	2	3	4
40. Teachers in the school work for the success of all students.	1	2	3	4
41. The principal keeps the teacher-student ratio low.	1	2	3	4
42. The principal makes some academic decisions without the input of teachers.	1	2	3	4

Survey Questions	1 = Strongly Disagree	2 = Disagree	3 = Agree	4 = Strongly Agree
43. Members of civic or social organizations volunteer in the school.	1	2	3	4
44. Teachers are leaders in the school.	1	2	3	4
45. The school forms partnerships with businesses.	1	2	3	4
46. The principal uses a variety of funding sources to sustain academic programs at the school.	1	2	3	4
47. The principal knows the names of the students.	1	2	3	4
48. The school is the center of the community.	1	2	3	4
49. Teachers help students make connections to prior knowledge in the curriculum.	1	2	3	4
50. Most people in our school believe the principal is an ethical leader.	1	2	3	4
51. Teachers differentiate instruction to meet students' needs.	1	2	3	4
52. There is a parent liaison to assist parents.	1	2	3	4
53. Most teachers participate in staff development.	1	2	3	4
54. The discipline plan for student behavior is effective.	1	2	3	4
55. A nurse on staff addresses the medical needs of students.	1	2	3	4
56. Teachers in our school are free to be risk-takers.	1	2	3	4
57. The staff participates in the hiring process.	1	2	3	4
58. The curriculum is the focus of classroom instruction.	1	2	3	4

Survey Questions	1 = Strongly Disagree	2 = Disagree	3 = Agree	4 = Strongly Agree
59. Teachers are honest with parents concerning student progress.	1	2	3	4
60. Instructional time is protected from interruptions.	1	2	3	4

Please provide the following background information:

61.   Are you: A) Male___   B) Female____

62.   How many years have you been in education, including the years at your current school?

1	2	3	4	5
0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+

63.   How many years have you been teaching at this school?

1	2	3	4	5
0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+

64.   Indicate your educational level

1	2	3	4
BA/BS	MA	MA+30	Doctorate

65.   To what age group do you belong?

1	2	3	4
22-30	31-40	41-50	51+

Appendix B

Results of Pilot Study of Teachers of Academically Gifted
And Teachers of Academically Challenged Students

The survey measured five domains of concern about principal leadership: vision, mission, and culture; curriculum and classroom instruction; collaboration and shared leadership; family and community involvement; and effective management. The survey had already been judged to be valid in two previous studies. Its reliability was judged to be strong, based on Cronbach alphas ranging from .80 for domain 4 to .89 for domain 1. Correlation coefficients among the five domains ranged from .54 (modest) for domains 4 and 2 to .91 (strong) for domains 5 and 1.

The following tables display the means, standard deviation, and range for each domain evaluated by the teachers for both the academically gifted and the academically challenged groups (Table 1 and Table 2). The means for the gifted group are somewhat higher than those for the teachers of the challenged students. Also included is a list of the item numbers on the survey that go with each domain, and the responses to the demographic questions. .

Table 1
Teachers of Gifted and Talented

Vision, Mission, and Culture				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
43.27	5.44	50.00	32.00	18.00

N=13

Curriculum and Classroom Instruction				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
41.64	4.06	46.00	34.00	12.00

N=13

Collaboration and Shared Leadership				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
26.18	1.78	30.00	23.00	7.00

N=9

Family and Community Involvement				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
37.70	4.22	46.00	33.00	13.00

N=13

Effective Management				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
37.44	4.13	46.00	32.00	14.00

N=12

Vision, Mission, and Culture – 4, 14, 20, 21, 25, 27, 36, 37, 39, 40, 47, 50, 55

Curriculum and Classroom Instruction – 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 15, 30, 31, 38, 49, 51, 53, 58

Collaboration and Shared Leadership – 2, 16, 22, 28, 32, 35, 42, 44, 57

Family and Community Involvement – 10, 12, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 29, 43, 45, 48, 52, 59

Effective Management – 7, 8, 11, 13, 24, 33, 34, 41, 46, 54, 55, 60

Demographics of Respondents

Male   7
Female   4

Years in Education

0-5   2
6-10   3
11-15   3
16-20   2
21+   1

Years at This School

0-5   4
6-10   4
11-15   2
16-20   0
21+   1

Educational Level

BA/BS   3
MA   5
MA+30   3
Doctorate   0

Age Group

22-30   4
31-40   3
41-50   3
51+   1

Table 2
Teachers of Challenged Students

Vision, Mission, and Culture				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
40.82	4.35	50.00	38.00	12.00

N=13

Curriculum and Classroom Instruction				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
41.46	3.75	49.00	37.00	12.00

N=13

Collaboration and Shared Leadership				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
23.80	2.90	29.00	20.00	9.00

N=9

Family and Community Involvement				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
33.30	3.74	40.00	30.00	10.00

N=13

Effective Management				
Mean	Standard Deviation	Maximum	Minimum	Range
34.18	3.09	41.00	31.00	10.00

N=12

Vision, Mission, and Culture – 4, 14, 20, 21, 25, 27, 36, 37, 39, 40, 47, 50, 55

Curriculum and Classroom Instruction – 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 15, 30, 31, 38, 49, 51, 53, 58

Collaboration and Shared Leadership – 2, 16, 22, 28, 32, 35, 42, 44, 57

Family and Community Involvement – 10, 12, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 29, 43, 45, 48, 52, 59

Effective Management – 7, 8, 11, 13, 24, 33, 34, 41, 46, 54, 55, 60

Demographics of Respondents

Male   0
Female   12

Years in Education

0-5   4
6-10   3
11-15   3
16-20   0
21+   2

Years at This School

0-5   5
6-10   3
11-15   2
16-20   2
21+   0

Educational Level

BA/BS   3
MA   8
MA+30   1
Doctorate   0

Age Group

22-30   4
31-40   0
41-50   4
51+   4

Appendix C

IRB Approval

From: University of Maryland IRB [no-reply@umresearch.umd.edu]
Sent: Thursday, January 12, 2012 3:13 PM
To: Carol Sheffey Parham; lkingcas-contact
Subject: IRB Protocol Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Initial Application Approval

DO NOT REPLY TO THIS EMAIL ADDRESS AS IT IS UNMONITORED

To:	Principal Investigator, Dr. Carol Parham, EDHI Student, LaUanah King-Cassell, EDHI
From:	James M. Hagberg IRB Co-Chair University of Maryland College Park
Re:	IRB Protocol: 11-0806 - An Examination of Principals' Leadership Practices: Perspectives of Those Who Teacher the Academically Gifted and Academically Challenged
Approval Date:	January 12, 2012
Expiration Date:	January 12, 2013
Application:	Initial
Review Path:	Expedited

The University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office approved your Initial IRB Application. This transaction was approved in accordance with the University's IRB policies and procedures and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. Please reference the above-cited IRB Protocol number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Recruitment/Consent: For research requiring written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped informed consent document will be sent via mail. The IRB approval expiration date has been stamped on the informed consent document. Please note that research participants must sign a stamped version of the informed consent form and receive a copy.

Continuing Review: If you intend to continue to collect data from human subjects or to analyze private, identifiable data collected from human subjects, beyond the expiration date of this protocol, you must submit a Renewal Application to the IRB Office 45 days prior to the expiration date. If IRB Approval of your protocol expires, all human subject research activities including enrollment of new subjects, data collection and analysis of identifiable, private information must cease until the Renewal Application is approved. If work on the human subject portion of your project is complete and you wish to close the protocol, please submit a Closure Report to irb@umd.edu.

Modifications: Any changes to the approved protocol must be approved by the IRB before the change is implemented, except when a change is necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the subjects. If you would like to modify an approved protocol, please submit an Addendum request to the IRB Office.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks: You must promptly report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others to the IRB Manager at 301-405-0678 or jsmith@umresearch.umd.edu

Additional Information: Please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 if you have any IRB-related questions or concerns. Email: irb@umd.edu

The UMCP IRB is organized and operated according to guidelines of the United States Office for Human Research Protections and the United States Code of Federal Regulations and operates under Federal Wide Assurance No. FWA00005856.

1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212
FAX 301.314.1475
irb@umd.edu
http://www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB

Appendix D

Warner County Approval Letter

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Joe A. Hairston, Superintendent   6901 Charles Street   Towson, MD • 21204-3711

March 12, 2012

Ms. LaUanah King-Cassell
9405 Wandering Way
Columbia, MD 21045

Dear Ms. King-Cassell:

Subject: BCPS Research Project #2280

We have received your request to conduct a research study in the Baltimore County Public Schools
BCPS). The proposal, *An Examination of Principals' Leadership Practices: Perspectives of Those Who
Teach the Academically Gifted and the Academically Challenged,* has been approved as submitted.

The following elementary schools have been identified for possible participation in your research study:
Bedford, Catonsville, Chapel Hill, Logan, Middleborough, Perry Hall, Pinewood, Rodgers Forge,
Wellwood, and Winfield. While we have informed personnel of your study, it is your responsibility to
contact the appropriate staff and make arrangements to gain access to your subjects. **Participation in
this study is strictly voluntary and informed consent must be signed by each participant.**

**Upon completion of the study, you agree to share any written results, videos or dissertation
summaries with the Baltimore County Public Schools through the Department of Research,
Accountability, and Assessment, 9611 Pulaski Park Drive, Suite 305, Baltimore, Maryland 21220.**

I wish you good luck in your research endeavors.

Sincerely,

Renard A. Adams, Ed.D.
Coordinator of Research
Department of Research, Accountability, and Assessment

raa/jls
 cc: Joe A. Hairston, Superintendent
       Renee Foose, Deputy Superintendent
       Michele Prumo, Chief of Staff
       Karen Blannard, Assistant Superintendent, Elementary Schools, Zone 1
       Patricia Lawton, Assistant Superintendent, Elementary Schools, Zone 2
       Verletta White, Assistant Superintendent, Elementary Schools, Zone 3
       E. Grace Chesney, Executive Director of Research, Accountability, and Assessment
       Kelly Woodham, Acting Director of Research
       Elementary School Principals
       Gary Brager, Supervisor of Research
       File

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Appendix E

Letter to the Principal

April 16, 2012

Dear Principal:

The Office of Research has given me permission to contact BCPS principals in Baltimore County to conduct a study in a selected number of elementary schools. I am writing to invite the teachers in your school to participate in this study of leadership practices of school principals. The study, which is being conducted as part of my doctoral program at the University of Maryland College Park, will examine the principal's leadership practices and the education of students who receive gifted and talented services or special education services.

Please distribute these letters of request for participation to all teachers of core subjects in Grades 3, 4, and 5. Your teachers will be asked to respond to a Leadership Survey. The survey asks them to give their judgments about school leadership practices. The survey also asks about their background and experience. Participation in the survey should take approximately 15 minutes. Each teacher will receive a pre-addressed envelope to return the completed survey by interoffice mail to Dr. Gary Brager, Research Office, Pulaski Park, BCPS.

Their responses are confidential. All identifying information will be removed and survey data will be maintained in secure files and will be accessible only to me. Reports and other communications related to the study will not identify respondents by name, nor will they identify any schools. Study results will be available in a summary report.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me by calling 301-596-6957 (home) or you may send me an e-mail at LaUuanah@comcast.net. You may also contact Dr. Carol Parham, chairperson of my committee, by directly calling the university at 301-405-3580.

Thank you for your participation.

LaUanah King-Cassell

May 7, 2012

Dear Principal:

In April of this year, the Office of Research gave me permission to contact BCPS principals in Baltimore County to invite the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers in your school to participate in a study of leadership practices in elementary schools. The study is part of my doctoral program at the University of Maryland College Park.

Your teachers were asked to respond to a survey asking them to give their judgments about school leadership practices. Participation in the survey should only take about 15 minutes. Each teacher received a pre-addressed envelope to return the completed survey by interoffice mail to Dr. Gary Brager, Research Office, Pulaski Park, BCPS.

The response from your teachers has so far been modest. I would greatly appreciate it if you could remind them to complete and return the survey. I know the teachers are busy but I very much need their help to complete my study and would be grateful for their response.

Thank you for your assistance.

LaUanah King-Cassell

Appendix F

Letter of Invitation to the Teacher

April 16, 2012

Dear Teacher:

I invite you to participate in a study of leadership practices of elementary school principals. The study, which is being conducted as part of my doctoral program at the University of Maryland College Park, will examine the principal's leadership practices and the education of students who receive gifted and talented services or special education services.

You are asked to respond to the Leadership Survey, which asks you to give your judgments about principal leadership practices. The survey also asks about your background and experience. Participation should take only about 15 minutes. Please respond on the survey form. You may make any additional comments. Then place the survey (it can be folded) in the pre-addressed envelope and forward the envelope by interoffice mail to Dr. Gary Brager, Research Office, Pulaski Park, BCPS. I would appreciate it if you would return the survey by May 5.

Your responses are confidential. All identifying information will be removed and survey data will be maintained in secure files and will be accessible only to me. Reports and other communications related to the study will not identify respondents by name, nor will they identify any schools. Study results will be available in a summary report.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me by calling 301-596-6957 (home) or you may send me an e-mail at LaUuanah@comcast.net. You may also contact Dr. Carol Parham, chairperson of my committee, by directly calling the university at 301-405-3580.

Thank you so much for your participation.

LaUanah King-Cassell

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

The focus areas were Vision, Mission and Culture; Curriculum and Classroom Instruction, Collaboration and Shared Leadership, Family and Community Involvement, and Effective Management. The questions were:

1. Vision- What is the vision of the school and how does it influence your school culture?

2. Curriculum and Instruction- What are the daily curriculum and instructional issues that you face?

3. Collaboration and Shared Leadership- Describe collaboration and shared leadership in your school. In what ways do you collaborate with school leadership to identify, define and evaluate instructional goals?

4. Family and Community- In what ways do you support family and community involvement?

5. Effective Management- In what ways do you collaborate with school leadership to identify, define and evaluate instructional goals?

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