

Future School Leaders' Perceptions of their Roles in Reading Instruction

Nancy Zeller
zellern@mail.ecu.edu
East Carolina University

Lynn Bradshaw
bradshawl@mail.ecu.edu
East Carolina University

Sharon Haley
haleys@mail.ecu.edu
East Carolina University

Abstract

This qualitative study examines participants in a masters' degree level principal development program in terms of their preparation to be instructional leaders in the area of literacy. Data were collected by means of face-to-face interviews and focus group interviews. During the analysis of the data, we found it helpful to categorize the participants in terms of their own literacy background, what we term their "reading heritage." The four categories that emerged were "avid reader," "positive reader," "utilitarian reader," and "reluctant reader." We then looked at the data in terms of the value added by the principal development program, asking whether the "avid" and "positive" readers experienced the program differently than the "utilitarian" and "reluctant" readers. We found that the "avid" and "positive" readers had markedly different experiences and heard very different messages than the "utilitarian" and "reluctant" readers taking the same courses. We conclude that although principal development programs may include courses in instructional supervision and leadership, if there is no consideration of the participants' literacy background, these courses will not necessarily produce graduates prepared to practice instructional leadership with regard to literacy. We recommend, then, that a course, or at least a module, in the organization and management of reading instruction and/or reading programs be considered as a required component of a principal development program.

Introduction

Few people would disagree that reading is the basic enabling skill that children must acquire early in their schooling. Unfortunately, reading has been an instructional problem that has, over the last decades, witnessed innovation after innovation, with no agreed-upon instructional solution. Our study focuses not on methods of teaching reading, however, but on the role of a school leader (i.e., the principal) in the delivery of reading instruction. In our view, a principal is the key element in an effective reading program, and the literature tends to support this view. Among recent research is that by Ediger (1999), who argues that the principal is the curriculum leader of the school. As such, the principal is expected to assess the quality of instruction and also to recommend improvements. Because reading cuts across all areas of the curriculum, it is vital for school leaders to have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to help teachers provide the highest level of reading instruction possible. Ediger (2000) also argues that the principal, as the instructional leader, should be able to serve as a guide, model, and mentor to teachers. This finding means that the principal needs to understand the various approaches to reading and how and when to implement them.

In 2001 the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) published a collection of ideas submitted to that association by elementary and middle school principals offering strategies for teachers to raise students' reading levels. With regard to strategies for principals, Sanacore (1997) suggested five guidelines for successful leadership in reading: the principal should:

1. keep current by reading the professional literature;
2. work cooperatively with the staff;
3. support different learning styles and assessment strategies;
4. promote lifetime literacy through reading immersion; and
5. involve parents in their children's literacy learning.

In 1996, Hallinger and Bickman explored the nature and extent of the school principal's impact on reading achievement and found no direct effect of principal instructional leadership on student achievement. The authors conclude, however, that principals have an indirect effect on achievement and that they do, in fact, "make a difference" on reading test scores, but this effect is one that researchers probably can never measure.

Carbo and Cole (1995) published an article offering principals practical ideas on how to help students become competent, motivated readers. This article is the most recent in a long line of articles, printed mostly in reading journals in the 1980s (such as *Reading Improvement*, *Reading World*, and *Reading Teacher*), that are of a practical nature in attempting to engage administrators in instructional leadership in reading or in exploring relationships between principals and teachers with regard to reading issues. (See, e.g., Laffey, 1980; Manning & Manning, 1981; McNinch & Richmond, 1981; Mottley & McNinch, 1984)

In 1992 Jacobson, Reutzel, and Hollingsworth examined 1,244 elementary principals' understanding of current issues in elementary reading instruction and investigated the information sources they used to learn about reading issues. They found that although "the principals valued university-level reading courses, many of them had not used that information resource." The authors suggest that this finding "may indicate a need for institutions of higher learning to design more accessible means for disseminating current, practical information into schools and classrooms" (p. 377).

A study by Chance (1991) involving principals in Tennessee showed that the principals are involved with the management and evaluation of the school reading program more than with its planning or operation. This finding contradicts the literature, which suggests the importance of planning at the building level to ensure student success. Another finding of Chance's study was that female principals are more involved in all areas of the reading program than are their male counterparts. A third finding states the obvious, that the involvement of the principal in the reading program is directly related to amount of training in reading. Chance concludes that the "training, experience and demonstrated leadership skills of the building level administrator are directly related to his/her involvement in the school reading program" (p. 33).

The remaining literature on the role of school leaders in reading instruction consists of a variety of monographs and reports (e.g., Binkley, 1989; Braughton & Riley, 1991; Doan & Doan, 1984; Kurth, 1985; Seidman, 1982). The most interesting of these monographs discuss what a principal

should know about reading (Binkley, 1989) and how principals should be trained to be instructional leaders in reading (Kurth, 1985). One study (Doan & Doan, 1984) found that teachers perceive principals to be less involved in the reading program than the principals perceive themselves to be.

Worth noting here also is one of the theories of the characteristics of a good leader. Of special interest is the work of Mendez-Morse (1992), who identifies six leadership characteristics that facilitate school change (her work is based on that of Leithwood and Montgomery [1984]): having vision, believing that schools are for students' learning, valuing human resources, communicating and listening well, being proactive, and being a risk-taker (see <http://www.sedl.org/change/leadership/character.html#summ>).

The Case in North Carolina

Our research focuses on a principal development program in the state of North Carolina, where the need for school leaders is dire: in a recent study by the University of North Carolina System (Jones, 2002), it was estimated that between 5,186 and 6,052 principals or assistant principals would need to be replaced before the year 2010. At the same time, there was growing state and national interest in creating stronger preparation programs for school leaders. A common criticism was an absence of instruction that enabled aspiring school leaders to apply theoretical learning to practice (Murphy, 1998). In addition, there were “newly identified demands for more direct involvement in the quality of teaching and learning and focus on the needs of students at the center of each school” (Daresh, 1999, p. 32). Clark and Clark (1997) identified five strategies common to programs that were redesigned to strengthen principals' preparation for the instructional leadership role: the ability to use knowledge appropriately on the job, a practical knowledge base that supported problem-solving, facilitative instructional methods, professional learning communities including cohort models, and quality selection procedures. As new sets of standards for school leaders were developed, common themes centred on the need for school leaders who involved faculty, parents, and community members in decision-making, made decisions that were in the best interest of students, and supported teaching and learning. For example, see the Standards for School Leaders developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium at <http://www.ccsso.org/pdfs/isllcstd.pdf>.

Education leaders and state legislators in North Carolina took seriously recommendations for a renewed focus on instructional leadership, full-time study, and stronger field experiences, including full-time, year-long internships. In 1993, existing principal preparation programs were closed, and interested campuses of the University of North Carolina were invited to submit proposals for Master of School Administration programs that responded to national standards for school leaders and reflected best practices. Initially, six new MSA programs were approved, and by 2001 that number had grown to nine.

In addition, to address the projected shortage of school administrators, the State of North Carolina in 1994 initiated the Principal Fellows Program, a merit-based effort to attract new school leaders. The Principal Fellows Program targets successful classroom teachers with four or more years of teaching experience. Successful applicants enroll in a two-year MSA program as full-time students, and they receive annual stipends of \$20,000. During the second year of study,

they complete a year-long, full-time internship. Recipients of the scholarship loan repay the award by serving as a full-time school-based administrator in North Carolina for four years within six years of finishing the program. In eight years, 535 Principal Fellows representing 84 school districts have participated in the program. The major benefit of the Principal Fellows Program has been the development of this pool of well-trained, highly qualified candidates for school leadership positions who are available to all North Carolina school systems. More information on the Principal Fellows Program may be found at <http://leed.soe.ecu.edu/pfmsa.htm>.

During the same period of time, North Carolina has implemented a series of accountability programs that hold schools and districts accountable for improved student performance on standardized tests in core content areas. From Senate Bill 2 in the late 1980s, which emphasized local accountability with flexibility, to the Excellent Schools Act in 1997 and the ABCs Accountability Model, there has been growing emphasis on students' ability to score well on standardized tests. (See <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/abcs/>.) Not only has it been important for students to score well on reading tests, but it has also become more critical than ever for students to be able to read well enough to score well on standardized tests in other areas. A major challenge for instructional leaders is to be able to provide appropriate support to teachers whose students are reading below grade level or not reading at all. Reading instruction or literacy has been a special problem among children attending low-performing schools. (See <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/nclb/>.) A few principals in such schools have attempted to meet the needs of their children with such special programs as Reading Recovery, Direct Instruction (SRA), or Reading Renaissance, but principals are often distracted by day-to-day crises in their schools or believe they should delegate instructional problems or issues to their classroom teachers.

Although the new Master of School Administration programs and the Principal Fellows Program have been remarkably successful in preparing new school leaders for openings in North Carolina, questions have arisen regarding the extent to which they are prepared to be instructional leaders. Even if they are well prepared as instructional leaders, will they be able to make instructional leadership a priority when they are employed as principals or assistant principals? Graduates themselves reported that during their coursework and second-year internships, routine, daily concerns of real schools (e.g., books, buses, dealing with parents, and discipline) tended to consume their time and attention. When talking about their internships, few described experiences of an instructional nature. Our study was undertaken to address questions and concerns pertaining to the preparation of one group of Principal Fellows for their role as an instructional leader, especially with regard to reading—the primary enabling skill of all school children. We concluded that in order for these Principal Fellows to be successful administrators, it was vitally important for them to leave the program with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that would enable them to support the teaching of reading and to be strong instructional leaders.

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative approach: most of the data were collected from a series of three phenomenologically oriented face-to-face interviews (Seidman, 1998) with Principal Fellows conducted by 14 students in an educational leadership doctoral class in qualitative research

methods. Data were also collected from three focus group interviews conducted by the doctoral students with first- and second-year Principal Fellows. We (the authors) conducted a content analysis on several documents related to the study, including the interview transcripts and resulting case studies prepared by the doctoral students. Interviews, both individual and focus group, were either audio- or video-taped, and taped materials were, for the most part, transcribed.

For the individual interviews, we developed an interview guide for use by the 14 doctoral students in interviewing each respondent. This strategy allowed us to compare responses on each question. The first interview focused on the respondents' backgrounds, especially as related to learning how to read (as a child), reading experiences during their lifetime, and experiences in teaching others to read (primarily as a classroom teacher). The second interview dealt with the respondents' current internship as an assistant principal, Principal Fellows program courses, and other Principal Fellows program experiences, especially with regard to instructional leadership. The third interview was future oriented: here respondents were asked to estimate the applicability of the Principal Fellows program to their role as a leader (i.e., principal) with regard to reading instruction in a future school setting.

The three focus group interviews sought to identify the Fellows' attitudes about reading instruction and instructional leadership for a classroom teacher, as well as for a school administrator.

All of the data were analyzed with the assistance of QSR NVivo, a highly-advanced software program for handling qualitative data analysis research projects. With this software we were able to handle data as rich text; it allowed us to edit and visually code and link documents as they were created, coded, filtered, managed, and searched.

Data Sources

Several sources of data, then, were used in this study: (1) a series of three face-to-face interviews of 60 to 90 minutes each were conducted by 14 doctoral students with 14 Principal Fellows (this activity was supervised by the authors); (2) three focus group interviews were conducted by six of the doctoral students with several of the Principal Fellows (this activity was supervised by the authors); and (3) a qualitative content analysis was performed by the authors on the many documents connected with the study

Results

On first examination, the results of our study are somewhat troubling. First, many of the Principal Fellows seemed truly unconcerned about or uninterested in reading. For example:

Interviewer: Did you have any memorable reading experiences as a teacher?

Respondent: I didn't do much with reading. [This comment was made by a Fellow who was certified in both science and language arts.]

And:

Interviewer: Was there anything in your college experience about reading?

Respondent: All right. Well, I wish you'd have told me that last night. I might could've thought about reading. But I don't think I thought very much. Ah, reading ...

And:

Interviewer: Describe any reading-related instruction or experience you have had as a Principal Fellow.

Respondent: Outside of my internship, I don't recall anything about reading. I almost hate to say, yeah, but I don't remember talking about reading specifically. I mean, I don't recall any.

Or, to the same question:

Respondent: I really haven't had any [reading-related instruction or experience].

Getting the Principal Fellows to talk about reading instruction, or the reading process, or even their own reading experiences, was akin to pulling teeth. The Fellows were clearly puzzled by our focus on reading instruction as an area of concern for an assistant principal or principal. "Why?" we wondered. Perhaps those who had been elementary school teachers believed that they had left reading instructional matters behind them when they rose in the ranks to become school administrators; those who had never been elementary school teachers may have believed that they had never had nor should have had a role as a leader of reading instruction. Some examples of their reluctance to talk about the topic of reading follow.

One of the case reports begins, "Rebecca reluctantly settled in and began to provide me with some insight into the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program." Another Fellow, when asked to describe a typical day in his life as a reader, either in elementary or high school, responded: "You realize how long ago that was?" Yet another Fellow, when asked to describe any college preparation related to reading, replied, "Oh Lord! Reading instruction again!" and, later, responding to another reading-related question, quipped, "Oh God, no!"

During the focus group interviews, the Principal Fellows managed to think more creatively about reading than they had (or would later) in their individual interviews; and, as a result, they even identified several strategies for improving reading instruction in schools.

- Modelling reading instruction
- Finding outside help and looking at other programs
- Involving parents more deeply in reading instruction
- Monitoring reading instruction more carefully
- Providing staff development, especially for teachers not prepared to help with reading
- Being a cheerleader for reading instruction (setting reading as a high priority in the school)
- Arranging for early identification of children with reading problems
- Empowering teachers to "do those things that they know they need to do"
- Providing support and materials where they are needed

Some of these strategies seemed more useful to us than others; for example, we tended to react somewhat negatively at the overuse of such terms as *vision*, *empowerment*, and *modelling*; but then we had to remind ourselves that vision, empowerment, and modelling really are possible paths to improving instructional leadership in reading.

It was during the focus group interviews, which occurred rather early in the study, that we discovered among the former elementary teachers a genuine concern for children's literacy. At

the same time, we also learned that because none of these former teachers had ever experienced administrative support of an instructional nature, it was difficult for them to figure out how to provide this kind of support to the teachers in their own schools (where they were interning as assistant principals).

When we looked at the reading background of the individual Principal Fellows, we found striking differences: some seemed to be born almost with a book in their little fists and/or had parents who were avid readers; others stated that they didn't like to read and had never liked to read. This factor, which we labeled reading heritage, was, interestingly, unrelated to the Fellow's college major, teacher preparation area, teaching experiences, or level: one of the strongest advocates for reading among the Fellows was a high school math teacher; three of the least interested in reading were certified or had taught in English or language arts or elementary special education. As an aid to our analysis, we categorized each Fellow as to his or her reading heritage; four categories emerged based on answers to questions about how each person had learned to read, their early reading memories, the involvement of their parents in their learning to read, their school and teaching experiences in reading, and their current reading habits. Below are the four categories, a definition of each, and the names (pseudonyms) of the Principal Fellows in each category:

Avid Reader (can't wait to get into a book; reading is one of his/her favourite activities)

· David, Lauren, Hope, Quinn, Abigail

Positive Reader (reading is enjoyable; often has a fiction or nonfiction book going)

· Liz, Angela, Sharon, Owen

Utilitarian Reader (reads to be informed about topics he/she needs to know about)

· Echo, Rebecca

Reluctant Reader (takes no pleasure in reading—has to force him/herself to read)

· Gail, Wiley, Sandy

We then looked at the interview data in terms of the value added by the Principal Fellows Program to the individual Fellows. In other words, did the avid and positive readers experience the Principal Fellows Program differently than the occasional/utilitarian and reluctant readers? Did they hear the same messages in classes? Did they behave in a similar fashion during their internships? Did they see a school leader's role with regard to reading differently? In short, how similarly or differently were they affected by the Principal Fellows Program experience?

What follows is our analysis of the data using the reading heritage factor to assess the value added by the Principal Fellows Program.

Reading Heritage and the Value Added by the Principal Fellows Program

When asked (during the second interviews) what they recalled faculty telling them about instructional leadership, the avid and positive readers recalled more information, tended to be more positive about the concept of *instructional leadership*, and responded to the question without hesitation, giving various examples from their program. David, an avid reader, for example, said:

The message is that the wave of administration that is going to change our schools and change our schools for the better is instructional leadership. The old managerial leader who makes sure that there's toilet paper in the bathrooms and the lights all work and that the building's open and closed and all those things has really gone by the wayside.

Quinn, another avid reader, heard a similar message.

I think the message is we have to have a strong knowledge base to be good instructional leaders. They're not saying we need to know everything there is to know, but the importance of being an instructional leader was stressed. The fact that this may be a new role, as a principal, has also been stressed. But that we set the tone for that, and we do have to take the lead there. And almost be the best teacher in the building.

Abigail, also an avid reader, stated:

Well, the first time I heard the term *instructional leader*, I heard it from Dr. B. She wanted to get across the idea that the principal is not manager or administrator. The principal is the instructional leader in the school, the most important position, most important job you will ever have.

In contrast, reluctant reader Sandy's questioning went this way:

Interviewer: Do you recall faculty in your program addressing the instructional leadership role of the school administrator?

Sandy: Yeah, a lot in Dr. B's class. Talking about how you are an instructional leader and what you need to do.

Interviewer: What kind of things did she tell you?

Sandy: It doesn't seem like it was real specific, but I just remember talking about you have to be an instructional leader. We weren't really told how to be that. But I guess getting involved in the curriculum and working with the teachers.

Interviewer: Like setting a vision? Did you talk about ...

Sandy: A little bit we talked about that you have to have a vision for the school. We talked about that some too this year in our issues class with breaking down the standards. Standard one, the administrator yada yada yada ... the issue. And then the learner.

Wiley, another reluctant reader, also struggled to find an appropriate answer to the question about what faculty told them about instructional leadership:

Oh yeah. Um, definitely addressed that. It's not to, um, it's to ... It's like to be a true teacher. You know, a true teacher is one who facilitates learning. You show 'em what to do and then you let 'em go. So, if you're gonna be a good instructional leader ... I mean you ... you pull from them ... you make it a "we" thing and not here's what I want us to do.

The next question (during the second interview) had to do with how the Principal Fellows Program prepared the Fellows to be effective school leaders *with regard to reading*. Many of the Fellows struggled with this question. Abigail, an avid reader (and former math teacher), responded:

We were asked to take an elective our second semester last year, and I took an elective with Dr. M, *Reading in the Content Area* ... I think that helped me a lot ... Concurrently ... I took the curriculum class with Dr. G. It was really interesting to ... look at reading or the English curriculums in the state of North Carolina and how totally vague they are and then try to apply some of that in Dr. M's reading class. That helped me a lot.

In comparison, Echo, an occasional/utilitarian reader, provided a much less detailed answer:

Our class with Dr. G was very helpful. We had to do some staff development activity. I did reading across the curriculum with D [a doctoral student]. I probably needed more help in this area, but at least I knew that things are out there.

Rebecca, another occasional/utilitarian reader, had to dig deep for her answer:

Interviewer: What if anything in the Principal Fellow's program prepared you to be an effective school leader with regard to instruction in reading?

Rebecca: (Laughed. Long pause.) The closest thing to that would probably be Dr. G's class, [curriculum and] instruction. That would be the closest thing. We did a lot with the standard course of study and those things in his particular class than anything else in other classes.

Interviewer: Was it addressed enough? With reading being a tested subject these days, does it need to be addressed more?

Rebecca: I think it was addressed enough. I think so.

When the Principal Fellows were asked how they had functioned as an instructional leader during their internship (also in the second interview), Abigail, an avid reader, responded at length:

Well, I've been asked to figure out an idea. I've been asked to solve the problem of how to get the English teachers to use the Reading Plus Program. As far as working as an instructional leader, I guess that's observing teachers, conferences with teachers about teaching in the classroom ... We had departmental meetings. This was a big focus for the last couple of months. Each week we would meet with one department for a good two hours after school.

Lauren, another avid reader, stated:

One thing that I think is very important in implementing any new program is to provide the teachers with adequate training. I brought in outside trainers for both programs. These programs include Accelerated Reader and Success Maker. You have to monitor both programs to make sure all of the teachers are following through with the requirements. Another reading program I started we call the Breakfast Reading Club. The students read in the mornings when they arrive at school while waiting in the cafeteria for the day to begin. Everyone has bought into this concept as well.

Hope, yet another avid reader, responded:

Realistically, it is hard to push reading at all ... [There are] so many other things to handle ... you must have good intentions to getting things done, but it is hard to accomplish. You must have complete "buy-in" from the top down. Everyone from the principal to assistant principal to counselor to teachers must believe in the program. You must sell it ... The principal is like a car salesman. You must sell it! It's like being a cheerleader for your school.

Liz, a positive reader, related that she was a storyteller:

Probably the big thing that I do is I'm the storyteller around here. I enjoy going around and doing stories. And sometimes, lots of times, I don't even read it. I just have to make up if don't remember the story or that type of thing ... That's probably the closest thing to reading that I've been able to participate in.

Sharon, another positive reader, also responded enthusiastically to this question.

I see my administrative support to reading come in some part with dealing with teachers and parents, trying to find that match. That's a wonderful opportunity right there to impact reading. I also see it in working with teachers as an empowerment sort of thing, encouraging them, making sure that there's that communication of learned teachers who are doing those reading sorts of things. More interest in great part is helping children who are having a difficult time because I know that some of those kids ... not only do they have difficulty learning, but they also do not

have the advocates at home that know how to help them. So it's important to me that our teachers are better prepared to offer them whatever it's going to take to get through, to get them in better shape. But if I can work with teachers to invest in th[em] with opportunities to expand their knowledge base, they can go help those students. I believe in reading across the curriculum ... To me, language arts should be taught within another content because it's real. That I see as a way, administratively, to impact reading. You need to work at reading every day. To really work at it, you've got to look like you are really doing something. Reading is not just the stuff you do at school to get a grade. It gives you access to pleasure. If you get bored you can read for pleasure.

Echo, an occasional/utilitarian reader, responds to this question from a completely different, somewhat legalistic or rule-dominated perspective.

Interviewer: In what ways have you functioned as an instructional leader in your school, especially with regard to reading instruction (i.e., what are you doing to support reading instruction right now)?

Echo: The administrative staff and myself split the staff up into three parts, and I do observations on my part. *I do pop-ins* two times a week *to see what they are covering* and how it relates to the standard course of study. If they are not, then I work with them *on getting them in line*. It is quite clear *the law* says that is what we are supposed to do. The principal gave me one particular teacher that she wanted me to work with one-on-one. *I try to hit everyone with my Mick Dundee walk-throughs* once per week. *I check out the board* and see what the kids are doing. *I jot down notes, then talk to the teacher afterwards.* [emphasis ours]

Rebecca, another occasional/utilitarian reader, catalogues, without much enthusiasm, her set of activities:

The reading to the classes is one thing. It doesn't take much time because I only read to 2 classes each month and it could be 15, 30 minutes. That's one thing that I'm doing. I headed up the Sony Playstation project, the workshops and things. That has been my pet project. Um, I was assigned to be a mentor to a new reading teacher, which again she's not really a reading teacher ... I've looked at the last three years of data and look at where our areas of weaknesses are and where we need to put our focus. So, definitely working with data.

Wiley, a reluctant reader, when asked how he has functioned as an instructional leader in reading, really struggles for an answer.

I haven't. I haven't at all. Not where I am now ... um ... what I'm doing ... is it in line? Well, I mean, it's part of the nuts and bolts stuff. I mean, um, you got to do some of the dirty work, uh, so yeah, in that sense, um ... uh, yeah. But uh, as far as doing some of the things that I did at the elementary school; then, no I'm not ... I'm not doing that ... which would be to me a whole lot more important than the nuts and bolts things.

Sandy replies simply: "I really haven't [functioned as an instructional leader in reading]."

Next the Fellows were asked what they saw as an administrator's role in reading in a school. David, another avid reader, replied:

I think reading at the high school level is something that has to be involved in every subject. I think as the instructional leader at the school it's my responsibility to ensure that it is being included in every subject. You know it is real easy for us to use that old catchphrase "Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum." And it's quite another thing to be sure that reading and writing is being involved across the curriculum. Because it is so fundamental.

Sandy, a reluctant reader, replied:

To support all reading teachers and to ensure that the program is being carried out so that children do learn to read. I guess providing what they need, what their teachers need in order to teach reading.

And Wiley, another reluctant reader, racked his brain to find an appropriate answer to the question “How will you serve as an instructional leader in the area of reading?” He proffered some suggestions—and then realized that none of them had anything to do with reading.

I think, just like I would in any other area. Um ... observing you ... pointing out things to you that ... that need to change, patting you on the back, making sure you have the things you need (the materials you need). Um ... allowing you to watch other reading teachers teach it. Not just at our school, but at other schools. Um, bringing in ... uh (what do you call it?) consultants, you know if ... if ... if our reading scores are low, and it's just not fitting in the bill ... well let's ... let's go talk to some schools that have scores and see what they did and how they did it. Did they have somebody come in and help 'em, or let's get that person to come in and help us. I mean, that's ... what I'm saying' is ... but that fits anything.

Lauren, another avid reader, replied:

I hope to become an administrator that creates a community of readers. Just like I had at home when I was growing up. To do this I must give everyone, parents included, the assistance they need to make reading a pleasurable and memorable experience ... As an administrator of a school, I see myself being the person responsible for providing the materials the staff needs to teach the skills. I must be the person that encourages the success of both the teachers and the students, while motivating all of them to continue.

David, also an avid reader, was brimming with ideas about facilitating reading in a school. I think you've got to have reading programs and name [them] that. At the elementary level, of course, the advanced reading courses ... those little things they do where they read certain books and get points. Those things, I think, are wonderful. Something along those lines, actually, could work at the high school level. Being sure that your media center is appropriately stocked, I think, is a major concern for high school administrators ... And I never realized what a crucial part that is in the literature/English curriculum ... I think it would be if you'll make the reward an appropriate thing. Kids at the high school levels, things like, if you read a certain number of books over the course of a year we'll give you a \$10 gift certificate to Red Lobster. We'll give you a \$10 gift certificate to Advance Auto. Something that they can ... that is practical for them, something that they can genuinely use.

Abigail, an avid reader, related a story from her earlier days as a math teacher that illustrates that facilitating reading instruction can begin in any kind of situation and requires some alertness on the part of teachers.

I worked with the kids [in algebra], and I evaluated where they were at the beginning of the year and I thought, “Well, they're not dumb,” [but] when I would show them some of the sample problems from the competency test, they just couldn't do it. By the time I finished kind of surveying and planning how I'm going to accomplish this thing here, accomplish that they were going to pass the competency test, I realized that they just could not understand the way the question was worded, the phrases that were used, just the context that they might use it. They had just never seen it like that. So we spent a lot of time reading problems and looking at different words and just looking at a lot of sample problems every day. They'd look at one or two sample problems that were based on the competency test, and that was the trick; and it was just for the fluency thing I guess so they can be familiar with it. Once they get over that fear—because

they've never seen that word before, seen it used that way—then it's like they can move on ... They were familiar with the questions. By the end of the year, 90 percent of those kids had passed the competency test, and that was just from reading, from reading the questions; and it made all the difference in the world. We could have done math problems down one side and then another and done every math problem they had seen; but it was the reading that did it for them. In contrast, Rebecca, an occasional/utilitarian reader, was at a loss as to how to go about creating a community of learners: "Mmm. That's a difficult question. Well, stressing the importance of school and of learning. And ... trying to tie in everything they do to the learning aspect." Her interviewer tried to help by asking, "Is there anything you could do for your teachers to help them be able to teach reading more easily?" Rebecca apparently then recalled the world of Dick and Jane:

I think in teaching reading, a small group would be really important. Trying to build up a volunteer program at school is important, having tutors come in. But small group instruction is so important that if you could get more bodies in the school to sit with two or three students and let them read together that would be a real big plus to the school.

Wiley, a reluctant reader, tried to offer something useful about creating a community of learners: Um, now let's say you've got a staff that's not too into it, and the scores are low ... Probably what's going on is they're not teaching [the] standard course of study. Whatever that is. Well then, let's pull it out, and let's hear what you're going to teach. And if you're not going to teach it, then you're [not] going to work here. Period. That's ... that's the bottom line.

At the end of the third interview the Principal Fellows were asked if they felt more or less positive, having gone through the Principal Fellows Program, about facilitating reading instruction. Here is how some of them replied.

David (avid reader): Well, I think more positively. It's made me aware of a lot of things and the value of a lot of things that as a teacher I never thought about. And an outgrowth of the Principal Fellow's Program is being chosen to do these interviews which in turn has had a strong effect on that whole process and especially in the area of reading and made me see its value.

Abigail (avid reader): Yes. More positive. ["*Why?*"] I feel knowledgeable, more comfortable with it.

Angela (a positive reader): I now know that I don't have to have all the answers ... I can go in as a sounding board ... and listen to what teachers have to say and possibly give them some feedback ... a lot of times the teachers have the answers themselves; they simply need someone to help identify them.

Echo (occasional/utilitarian reader): I didn't feel it was overemphasized or underemphasized for me in particular as I had just finished a reading across the curriculum program at the school I was teaching at. If I hadn't just gone through that, I feel we probably needed more of it. We talked about the importance of it, and I always felt it was beneficial.

Rebecca (occasional/utilitarian reader): [*Pause.*] Read it again. [*The question was read again.*] ... I feel more neutral. I don't feel any less towards it. Possibly seeing more of a need for it, due to this. I understand my role a little bit better now.

Wiley (reluctant reader): I don't know! More or less than when? What's my reference point? Before I went in the program? [*Yes, before you went into the program.*] Uh ... um ... more ... all right. Read that last part again. [*The question was read again.*] Oh, more. Definitely more. Definitely more. But, see, I feel ... I feel more positive about being involved in any of it then. [*OK, and the question is why? Why do you feel more positive?*] Because being an instructional leader fits it all. Um, you know, even though we don't test it all. That's where we're going.

Probably where we need to go.

Sandy (reluctant reader): No change really from being in the Principal Fellow's Program. [*Because you really got nothing?*] I really got nothing. I had the opportunity. I could have taken a reading class, but it would have an extra one above and beyond what was required; and once I got in there and saw what was going on in that course, I decided that that wasn't really something I really wanted to do.

Discussion

Preparing future principals to be instructional leaders is a complex challenge. Although redesigned preparation programs may include courses in instructional supervision and curriculum leadership, as was the case at this university, there is no guarantee that these courses will produce graduates who are prepared to practice instructional leadership. Clearly, instructional leadership in the area of reading seemed to be a missing or at best sketchy element in the backgrounds and current training of this group of North Carolina Principal Fellows. We conclude from our study that in order to be truly effective as instructional leaders, graduates of principal preparation programs need more emphasis on instructional leadership and the teaching of reading in their program. We further recommend, with Jacobson, Reutzell, and Hollingsworth (1992, p. 377), that a university-delivered course or module in the organization and management of reading instruction or reading programs be examined as a possible required component of a principal development program.

Areas for Further Investigation

As a result of this study, we are interested in exploring a variety of issues: How might we identify students' attitudes towards reading and their experiences with reading instruction as they enter a principal preparation program? What experiences do students need to have in order to become successful instructional leaders and, specifically, to support instruction in reading? Also, to what extent are these needs related to their attitudes towards and experiences with reading?

In addition, the results of this study raised concerns about graduates' abilities to provide support for instruction in areas other than reading. With heightened expectations that new school leaders will support and improve teaching and learning in all areas and for all students in their schools, it will be critical to evaluate the impact of preparation program strategies and modify them when necessary to assure that graduates, their teachers, and their students will be successful.

References

Binkley, M.R. (1989). *Becoming a nation of readers: What principals can do*. Monograph, ERIC# ED301872.

Broughton, R.D., & Riley, J.D. (1991). *The relationship between principals' knowledge of reading process and elementary school reading achievement*. Monograph, ERIC# ED341952.

Carbo, M., & Cole, R. (1995). What every principal should know about teaching reading. *Principal*, 75(5), 28–29.

Chance, C. (1991). Principals' perceptions of their involvement in the elementary school reading program. *Reading Improvement*, 28(1), 26–34.

Clark, D.C., & Clark, S.N. (1997). Addressing dilemmas inherent in educational leadership preparation programs through collaborative restructuring. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 72(2), 21–41.

Daresh, J.C. (1999). Preparing school leaders to break ranks. *Connections: NASSP Journal of Secondary and Higher Education*, 2(2), 20–32.

Doan, M.F., & Doan, R.L. (1984). *A comparison of elementary principals' and teachers' perceptions of reading instruction and staff development*. Monograph, ERIC# ED313329.

Ediger, M. (1999). *The principal and the reading curriculum*. Monograph, ERIC# ED432006.

Ediger, M. (2000). The school principal as leader in reading instruction. *Reading Improvement*, 37(1), 20–29.

Hallinger, P., & Bickman, L. (1996). School context, principal leadership, and student reading achievement. *Elementary School Journal*, 96(5), 527–549.

Jacobson, J.E., Reutzell, D.R., & Hollingsworth, P.M. (1992). Reading instruction: Perceptions of elementary school principals. *Journal of Educational Research*, 85(6), 370–380.

Jones, S. (2002). Changing of the guard: New Hanover County trains principals-to-be. *Wilmington Morning Star*, March 25, 2002, pp. 1A, 9A.

Kurth, R.J. (1985). *Problems court: The role of the reading educator in the training of elementary school principals*. Monograph, ERIC# ED267380.

Laffey, J.L. (1980). The role of the elementary principal in the school reading program: Research and practice. *Reading Teacher*, 33(5), 632–636.

Leithwood, K., & Montgomery, D. (1984, April). *Patterns of growth in principal effectiveness*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Manning, G.L., & Manning, M. (1981). What is the role of the principal in an excellent reading program? Principals give their views. *Reading World*, 21(2), 130–133.

McNinch, G., & Richmond, M. (1981). Defining the principals' roles in reading instruction. *Reading Improvement*, 18(3), 235–242.

Mendez-Morse, S. (1992). *Leadership characteristics that facilitate school change*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
<http://www.sedl.org/change/leadership/character.html#summ>

Mottley, R.R., & McNinch, G.H. (1984). The principal and the reading program. *Reading World*, 24(2), 81–86.

Murphy, J. (1998). What's ahead for tomorrow's principals? *Principal*, 78(1), 13–16.

National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2001). *What principals need to know about teaching reading*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Sanacore, J. (1997). Guidelines for successful reading leaders. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 41(1), 64–68.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Seidman, I. (1982). *Principal-reading: The vital connection*. (Guide for administrators and practitioners). Oklahoma City, OK: Oklahoma State Department of Education.

Author Notes

Nancy Zeller, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Research Coordinator, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 27858 (tel: 252-328-1128; FAX 252-328-2585; email: zellern@mail.ecu.edu)

Sharon Haley, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Reading Area, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, 27858 East Carolina University (email: haleys@mail.ecu.edu)

Lynn Bradshaw, Ed.D., Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, East Carolina University (email: bradshawl@mail.ecu.edu)