

**INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER FIELD EXPERIENCE AND  
POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN ALABAMA**

**Kimberly Joy Rushing**  
*Auburn University*

**Abstract**

This narrative study explored the administrative internship experiences of five assistant principals in Alabama for the purpose of better understanding how these school leaders perceived the benefits of Alabama's policy requirement for field experience in their practice. Attention towards this comparatively brief ten-day internship sought to describe the value early career practitioners placed on this experience and to better understand policy implications for instructional leaders. Through individual, semi-structured interviews with assistant principals from rural, suburban, and urban locales, this study asked 1) How do assistant principals describe their professional learning needs and 2) How do assistant principals describe the value of their administrative field experience? Findings show that participants believed practical, building level knowledge and experience was most needed in order to successfully manage their current duties. Those whose school leadership experience was limited to the ten-day internship experience expressed sentiments of being underprepared for their position while those who had longer field experiences and additional leadership responsibilities prior to their assistant role, expressed greater confidence in their abilities.

*Keywords:* Instructional Leader Field Experience, School Administrator Internship, Assistant Principal Learning, Alabama Field Experience Policy, School Leader Development.

*Lead author's note:* The authors provide permission to publish this manuscript. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to [joyrushing@gmail.com](mailto:joyrushing@gmail.com) or 205-616-1919.

## Introduction

School leaders, specifically building principals and assistant principals, shape a school environment in overarching and profound ways. Leaders directly and indirectly contribute to the successful outcomes of students (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020) and are the catalyst for change within their school (Ni et al., 2018). Because of the school leader's high level of influence in and upon a learning organization, the preparation experiences required for certification as an instructional leader are important to consider. Principals and assistant principals (APs) start their formal, professional leader learning with an experience in an academic credentialing program (Acton, 2021) that intends to prepare teachers for administrative positions where they will be equipped to serve students in the best possible ways. However, the quality of licensing and graduate programs that certify principals varies greatly (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016) and coursework has been criticized as being disconnected from practice (Cunningham et al., 2019). In the effort to provide practical experience in the school leadership role, most states have policies that require administrative field experience in the form of an internship prior to certification. These policies are notable because practical experience and mentorship opportunities are often cited as meaningful learning opportunities for emerging leaders (Cohen & Schechter, 2019).

Alabama's policy requires a ten-day residency (Alabama Education Code, 2015) which is comparatively brief when considering the requirements of other states. The length of the field experience requirement in Alabama is questionable, and in response, this research was an effort toward a better understanding of how this policy contributed to the preparation needs of current school leaders. This qualitative study explored the beliefs of five Alabama APs concerning their learning needs and preparation for their position. To do so, this research asked 1) *How do assistant principals describe their professional learning needs* and 2) *How do they describe the value of their administrative internship experience?* Using Clandinin's (2016) narrative inquiry method to allow for storied experiences, individual, semi-structured interviews between participants and researcher took place in the spring and fall of 2021. The theoretical framework of situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) was drawn upon to explain the perceived impact of contextual, site-based learning during the field experience.

Overall, the findings suggest that practical experience was more valuable to these school leaders than formal coursework. Participants used their field experience to see different perspectives, join social networks, and build their practical knowledge and capacity as administrators who could lead in the best interests of students. Social examples were perceived as most meaningful and relevant in their adaptation to their building level leadership position.

## Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

Situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) asserts that learners are shaped through the environments and contexts in which they learn. Based on this understanding, internship experiences that "draw in elements of the school context as learning resources for school leaders" (Cosner et al., 2018, p.241) are likely to be a valued way for candidates to learn. Situated learning theory gives reason to believe that aspiring school leaders will learn from being in a school site where they function as a leader in preparation to be certified and hireable as a school administrators. Situated learning is not replicated in the graduate program among candidates because the K-12 school setting must be utilized as a learning tool. This way, Alabama's field experience policy for future administrators aligns with a well-established theory.

## **Policy Requirements**

The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Program Recognition Standards provide expectations for emerging school and district-level leaders. “The NELP standards specify what novice leaders and program graduates should know and be able to do as a result of completing a high-quality educational leadership preparation program” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration). Under these standards, “At least 38 states require field experience as part of traditional school leader preparation programs” (Education Commission of the States), although the number of hours required appears to vary considerably from state to state. According to the Education Commission of the States (2021), twelve states have no state policy on field experience. Of those that do have a requirement, most states do not specify a specific amount of time individuals must be in the field during their preparation program. Notably, several states require candidates to commit to a significant amount of time in an internship. Instructional leadership students in Michigan must fulfill a six-month residency; New York requires a fifteen-week internship, and Georgia requires 750 hours for those seeking school administration credentialing. Comparatively, Alabama requires a residency of “uninterrupted service in an active school with students present for the equivalent of ten full days” (Alabama Education Code, 2015) as part of its instructional leadership credentialing. This ten-day service is typically required to be split between the elementary/intermediate and the middle/high school levels. Consequently, administrative candidates in Alabama spend five days in each placement.

## **Policy Purpose**

In Alabama, field experience for candidates is detailed in sections 290-3-3-.48 (3) (e) of the Alabama Education Code. This policy requires university credentialing programs to work with local education agencies (LEAs) to provide candidates with experience observing and participating in school leadership tasks and responsibilities in a school setting under the support and guidance of a building-level administrator. Student leaders are to have school-based assignments that will provide practical, real-life opportunities that teach aspiring leaders how to apply their instructional leadership knowledge in a school context. Alabama’s instructional leadership residency requirement is designed to provide candidates with a way to experience and fulfill the Alabama Leadership Standard indicators and intends to give candidates “purposeful hands-on experiences designed to prepare them to lead the essential work of school improvement and higher student achievement” (Alabama Education Code, 2015). Field experience provides teachers who desire to become administrators with experience functioning as school leader under the supervision of university faculty and local education agency leadership.

## **School Leader Learning**

The purpose of Alabama’s field experience policy is supported by research. Literature on school leadership development affirms that even strong principal preparation programs “have demonstrated the difficulty of cultivating highly proficient levels of practice” (Cosner et al., 2018, p.239) because leadership skills take considerable time to learn and come through experiences (Day et al., 2009), and so embedding situated and experiential learning into a preparation program offers a measure of practical practice to candidates. The value practitioners find in these practical experiences is important because, as Huber (2011) explains, how learning experiences are “judged by the participants is an important factor in the leaders’ willingness to use the learning in practice”

(p.845). In Kim's (2020) work on the transformative learning of school principals, he asserts "engagement in informal and personally significant experiences are important for leader learning" (p.354). Furthermore, the social learning opportunities that field experiences and internships provide are likely to be highly meaningful to aspiring and novice leaders. As noted in Rushing's (2022) review of school leader learning literature, principals and APs rely on social examples to learn their role. Considering this, the judged value of the field experience for early career leaders is an important phenomenon to investigate.

## **Methods**

The study was a qualitative analysis that described and interpreted the expressed beliefs of assistant principals in Alabama regarding their self-reported perceived learning needs and administrator field experience. As qualitative inquiry seeks to understand participants' individual perspectives (Merriam, 2002), five participants were seeking to understand how Alabama's internship policy influenced their practice. Using narrative inquiry, stories of individual experiences were recorded through dialogue between researcher and participant (Clandinin, 2013). Using a purposeful sampling of leaders based on their school location and experience level, interviews were recorded and transcribed between March and November of 2021. Data were analyzed through open value coding (Saldaña, 2021) and synoptic charts (Attride-Stirling, 2001) to identify emerging themes and patterns. Thematic analysis was used to structure and synthesize data and generate insight (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **Participants**

Assistant principals were sought with the assumption that they would have had a more recent credentialing experience than a principal would. Therefore APs would have a better recollection of their initial learning needs and preparation experience. In this study, the participants were APs employed in a public school at the time of interviewing; four of these individuals had less than two years of experience in their role. The fifth individual had eight years' experience in his role. This participant's perspective was sought to gain insight from one who could speak to the differences in learning needs and practices of new and experienced school leaders. Three participants held an Ed.S, and two were pursuing PhDs in educational leadership. One participant was in the process of earning the Ed.S. These participants represented four different university programs in Alabama.

### **Data and Analysis**

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each AP. Interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed in their entirety using AI software. The audio recordings were used to reconcile transcripts, and handwritten notes were created to capture reflections during and immediately after the interviews. Each transcript was read in its entirety and then open coding to identify emerging ideas (Saldaña, 2021) drawn from the participant's responses to interview questions. Next, transcripts were value coded (Saldaña, 2021), and a codebook of themes was developed. The third round of coding then occurred where participant responses were connected to the theoretical frame and review of the literature. To ensure the validity of findings, peer debriefing, an audit trail, and researcher reflexivity in the form of a reflexive journal were used.

## Results

**RQ1 How do school leaders describe their early career learning needs?** Informal, context-specific, experiential learning was more valuable to these APs than college coursework or theory. These participants wanted site-specific training and sought social networks to build their knowledge and capacity as school leaders. Local mentorship and social examples were perceived as important in the adaptation to the leadership position.

### Situated Learning for Experience

College coursework leading to administrative credentialing enables teachers to qualify for school administrative positions (Grissom et al., 2019; Huber, 2011), but these APs did not highly value the program coursework program. Assistant 1 reflected upon her master's degree and leadership certification coursework and concluded:

*I don't think there is any class that is going to teach you for this [assistant principal] position. Assistant 1*

*I can't say there is an instructional leadership class that I took...that can teach you everything as an administrator--just can't. And a lot of it you learn by doing, and you fake it till you make it. Assistant 1*

Considering the responsibilities of an assistant principal, she added,

*Well, they don't train you for that. Classes don't train you for that. You're just learning it. Assistant 1*

Assistant 2 and Assistant 3 discussed their preparation for school leadership and affirmed the value of on-site leadership experience over reading leadership literature.

*I think previous leadership experience really, really helps...But I think once you get inside of a school building is when you see things that maybe you can impact or things that you can directly be in charge of. Assistant 2*

*There's no research to tell us how to make it through this. Assistant 3*

Even the most experienced AP, Assistant 5, who was pursuing his Ph.D. in educational leadership, emphasized the importance of experiential learning as he considered site-level learning more valuable than the theories discussed in classes.

*But books or none of that stuff could really prepare you, like I said, theory is always good. And they'll tell you the things that you're supposed to do. But you're not, you have to actually be in the job to really be prepared for--that's going to be the best training ever. Assistant 5*

Likewise, both Assistant 4 and Assistant 1 believed they needed to know context-specific policies and procedures that were not taught in class environments.

*[I need to learn] how to discipline kids. Because that is like, it's ridiculous. Yeah, effective discipline. Because I mean, like my Ed.S program at XX, I don't think we had a single class on school discipline. Assistant 4*

*You know, so you get, you get thrown into this position. And then all the little intricate details that are really the most important, kind of like they always say, do the little things. We don't get trained on that.* Assistant 1

*[assistant principals] just kind of learn...we wish we had training for this...I think it's almost more like this local level training...but I guess you just learn about doing--you just like, sink or swim. You just gotta figure it out.* Assistant 1

The feeling of needing to “figure it out” implies that she judged her prior knowledge to be lacking or misaligned with the practical needs she had as a new administrator. Assistant 3 expressed this sentiment 3 expressed this sentiment as well, who spoke of the disconnection between what she needed and what her school district assumed what was needed:

*And it's not okay to just say, well, you're an admin because you are great in the classroom, or you are great at the district level. So you got it. We don't got it, for lack of better words.* Assistant 3

Teachers are credentialed and move into the assistant principal roles, but it is important to remember that these roles and their corresponding duties are distinctly different. Each of the participants spoke about these differences and pointed out that teachers do not get experience with administrative tasks except, to a degree, through field experience.

Both Assistant 3 and Assistant 1's comments suggested that valuable learning should not be far removed from the contextual experience. Still, rather it needed to be connected to personal involvement and action at a school. Assistant 5 continued to point out the importance of gaining experience in preparation for an administrative position and emphasized that aspiring leaders must go through situations in a school to learn.

*It just comes through experience because as a school teacher, you're not going to encounter the same things that we deal with as administrators. You know, you are not going to even handle those things to gain that experience. And I think that's where most, you know, some administrators fall short when they first start off as administrators, because they have never dealt with it before.* Assistant 5

Likewise, Assistant G did not believe she learned her job through a structured curriculum and reading but through practice and modeling aligned with the school's context and population.

*You know, we get all these great books about, you know, what a PLC is, and you need to implement PLCs in your building, and you need to be supporting your teachers and instruction. But then, what does that really look like and making it specific to the demographic in which you serve? So, like what I need here at XX is very different than what the AP at XX may need.* Assistant 5

## **Social Learning**

In addition to a preference for context-specific, experiential learning, the participants pointed to their need for social examples and mentors to help them build their leadership capacity. The desire to look toward social models reinforces the need for aspiring principals to have placement opportunities within school settings.

*[I learn from] a lot of conversations, mentoring, just talking with people.* Assistant 4

*I say it over and over again, I feel like new admin need mentors.* Assistant 3

Not only does a field experience provide a measure of practical experience, but it can allow for social networks to form that could help support new leaders after they are placed in their future administrative roles. This may be especially valuable since all, but the newest assistant principal spoke of the principal at their school being too busy to mentor them.

*And so and you know, when you're in the building, and you're doing the daily grind of it, the principal doesn't have time to mentor the AP. And that's what is perceived to be how it works. And that's not the reality. Assistant 3*

*You really need to probably find that assistant principal that you can kind of latch on to because, of course, the principal's always busy. Assistant 2*

Although a college cohort of peers can provide a measure of social learning, working alongside experienced administrators during a field experience may provide a better fitting mentorship relationship. In their assistant role, participants expressed a strong need to interact with other administrators to learn, and as Assistant 1 concluded,

*This is a job where you need to be with other people. Assistant 1*

### **RQ2 How do new school leaders describe the value of their administrative field experience?**

Participants credit their field experience as the most valuable part of their administrative credentialing program because they felt it was most practical in providing relevant learning and social networking opportunities. Although each participant found their field experience valuable and helpful, the three participants who only had the required ten days of experience expressed a sense of being unprepared for their current role and feeling isolated and lonely. The participants with the extended internship and the most school leadership experience expressed a sense of self-efficacy and confidence in their capabilities and performance as assistant principals.

### **Field Experience**

Regarding her 10-day residency requirement, Assistant 1 recognized value in seeing different approaches during her field experience.

*I wanted to get out and see what the different city systems and schools do. That was that was big--those 10 days. Because you might see truancy over here. You might see discipline over here, you might see something there. Like, I'll never do that over here. You know...it was interesting to see how different personalities different administrators handled different situations. Assistant 1*

Furthermore, Assistant 4 noted that her field experience gave the experience she did not have as a teacher and could not get at her school.

*I didn't really have a lot of experience managing people, not students--but adults. That has been a challenge and figuring out how to do that with adults because managing students and managing adults is a lot different. Assistant 4*

Speaking of the elementary/intermediate placement that she did not think she wanted, Assistant 3 reflected:

*Once I got in there, there were lots and lots of things that I learned at my intermediate placement, that I feel like has carried over into even how I lead now. And so it was very beneficial. For me, it was the practical part of all the reading and the writing and the discussions that I'd had in class...it was great for me. Assistant 3*

In contrast to the others, Assistant 2 participated in a semester-long administrative internship at the school where he had been teaching. During his certification program, he received a grant from the Alabama State Department of Education, which paid for his classroom substitute to work in his school as an assistant to the administrative team. He explained that ten days split between two schools is too short a time to see what happens at the administrator level. Still, his longer field experience provided many more opportunities to learn.

*It does give you some insight into, you know, how to handle discipline, how to input discipline, how to work with teachers, how to PLC, there's a lot of different things, you know, how to aggregate and disaggregate data, there's a lot of those types of things that in [a longer internship] you can do. Assistant 2*

Notably, Assistant 2 was hired into his leadership position mid-year, immediately after his internship. His prolonged experience not only deepened his learning experience by offering months of work experience in the role, but it also made him a more desirable candidate compared with individuals who could only speak from ten days of field experience.

### **Experience and Self-Perception**

Assistant 2 and Assistant 5, the participants with the most experience before entering their assistant role, showed self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities. Assistant L did not question his current skills but instead looked forward and spoke of future opportunities to “specialize in lanes” of leadership. During his field experience, he had time to plan what his future as an administrator could look like.

*I was able to have a vision for how I would want things to be run or how I might do something differently. And that really empowered me. Assistant 2*

Speaking of his transition from his credentialing program into the assistant role, Assistant 5 believed his experience with administrative responsibilities, his background in the special education behavior unit, and internship provided him with a successful first year.

*So, it was kind of a smooth transition. For me, it wasn't hard at all, just because like I said, I had already had that experience. Assistant 5*

In contrast, the three participants with minimal time in the field spoke of their role as overwhelming, lonely, and questioned their abilities. Assistant 3 described her effort to reach out to an assistant principal at another school for help.

*And that was huge. Because, you know, my personality, I usually don't connect until I'm at a breaking point, and I probably should have already connected....The admin world can be very lonely, and you're always putting out fires. Assistant 3*

Assistant 1 shared the isolation she felt in her new role.

*We're human, you know...I'll tell you, it's kind of like you're on this little island. And you have your people up here. But the teacher friends go away. Assistant 1*

When speaking of her responsibilities in her position, Assistant 4 felt she was not doing well in the two areas assigned to her.

*Discipline and attendance, which is like, I'm not doing a good job with that....I would love to be able to be an instructional leader. Like, that's the fun part. Like, it's, I mean, going*

*into the classrooms and helping teachers, like, with their instruction, that's so much fun. But I never get to do that because I'm dealing with discipline. So, I mean, until I get discipline, you know, you can't have instruction unless the discipline is, you know, good. Until unless the management is where it's supposed to be.* Assistant 4

The differences in perceived capability and relationships among those with more and less experience in the field before entering their position may serve as reasons for a longer internship for administrators than is currently required.

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the perceived learning needs of assistant principals and understand the value they placed on their administrative field experience. Because school leaders are uniquely influential in their position (Leithwood, 2020), and their professional learning can be a pathway to greater organizational outcomes and overall school improvement (Andreoli et al., 2020), preparation policies are meant to examine. In this study, participants clearly articulated a preference for on-site learning above the course content in their credentialing programs. At the graduate level, these practitioners believed experience in the role of administrator was the best preparation for the role because each APS valued the situated learning they gained from working in a school.

Situated learning theory (SLT) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) helps us understand that adult learners rely upon “practice development” (Cosner et al., 2018, p.240) in authentic contexts as ways to learn and improve their abilities. Cosner et al. (2018) explain that SLT “emphasizes the situated and social nature of learning and brings attention to the situational, environmental, and social contexts of the learner during learning experiences as factors that shape learning and development” (p.241). These participants believed they learned in context during their preparation phase, but those with the least amount of field experience expressed feeling underprepared and isolated in their position. Considering the practical value these participants placed on their situated experience, there may be a reason to consider redistributing credentialing requirements to prioritize the field experience.

While these leaders did not express an appreciation for their coursework preparation, that does not mean there is little value in formal course content. A possible explanation for the belief that formal learning does not teach or train an individual to be an AP may connect to divergent priorities between program objectives and immediate AP experiences. Preemptive course work intended to prepare school leaders may include emphasis theory and leadership development (e.g., visionary and transformational leadership, change agency, organizational theory, etc., as in Daniëls et al. 2019, Huber, 2011). Yet, in the moment, new leaders may feel the urgency to know context level policy and procedures. Since the assistant principal position generally leads to the principalship (Goldring, 2021), early career practitioners will need to be equipped for their future role as there is no other formal schooling or certification between the level of assistant and principal. For this reason, policymakers may want to emphasize the field experience, but not to the extent that the theoretical underpinnings of leadership are dismissed.

## **Implications**

Alabama's field experience policy for instructional leader certification reflects an awareness of how learning happens in situational and social contexts that require applying skills. The policy for field experience assumes that all field experiences effectively provide quality leadership experiences to a candidate within 10 school days. In reality, field experiences are likely to vary considerably, and therefore, so would participant learning and preparation. Like other educational policies, this state requirement needs feedback from practitioners. Tyack and Cuban (1995) recognize that implementation cannot be controlled from a distance and that there is value in practitioners who bring their 'wisdom of practice' to reform efforts (p. 83). For this reason, practitioners' insights are important to know and consider in making meaningful adjustments.

Changes to the policy implementation at the university and school level may increase the likelihood of successful learning during this relatively brief internship. The policy cannot ensure a quality field experience, but university program faculty, LEA leadership, and candidates have the joint responsibility to ensure these days are meaningful. University faculty and cooperating LEAs may offer guidance and training for their principals who will host an intern to better align their expectations to research on learning through mentorship and contextual experiences. Universities may need to add policy guidelines that identify principals and schools successfully prepared to mentor student leaders. While the state of Alabama sets a field experience requirement, it is ultimately the implementation by local stakeholders that will ensure it fulfills its intended purpose.

## **Limitations and Further Research**

The small number of participants in this study is a limitation of the research. While the effort was made to diversify participants, a larger sample size would provide additional depth on this issue. Furthermore, this study focused only on the self-reported experiences of Aps, and future work could pair participant responses with data from host school administrators and current supervisors. The data of this study showed a difference between the experience opportunities the male participants received compared to what the female had access to. Although the different experiences of participants by gender were beyond the scope of this work, further research could explore this issue. Overall, the field experience policy appears to benefit candidates and does not need significant redesign or alteration, except perhaps in its duration based on the overwhelming preference of these participants for experience in the role of administrator. Comparatively, Alabama's ten days of residency is brief, but because candidates are school employees who must leave their teaching position for ten days to work in another capacity, an extended length of time may be counterproductive to candidates, their schools, and the students they leave to a substitute teacher. The impact of longer field experiences at the administrative level needs further study.

## References

- Acton, K. S. (2021). School leaders as change agents: Do principals have the tools they need?. *Management in Education*, 35(1), 43-51.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020620927415>
- Alabama Education Code 290-3-3-.48 (3) (e) 2015.
- Anderson, L. M., & Turnbull, B. J. (2016). *Building a Stronger Principalship: Vol. 4. Evaluating and supporting principals*. The Wallace Foundation.  
<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/Building-a-Stronger-Principalship-Vol-4-Evaluating-and-Supporting-Principals.aspx>
- Andreoli, P. M., Klar, H. W., Huggins, K. S., & Buskey, F. C. (2020). Learning to lead school improvement: An analysis of rural school leadership development. *Journal of Educational Change*, 21(4), 517-542. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-019-09357-z>
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: An analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385-405.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F146879410100100307>
- Clandinin, D. J. (2016). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Routledge.
- Cohen, R., & Schechter, C. (2019). Becoming an assistant principal: Mapping factors that facilitate or hinder entering the role. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 14(1), 99-112.
- Cosner, S., De Voto, C., & Andry Rah'man, A. (2018). Drawing in the school context as a learning resource in school leader development: Application-oriented projects in active learning designs. *Journal of research on leadership education*, 13(3), 238-255. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1942775118763872>
- Cunningham, K. M., Van Gronigen, B. A., Tucker, P. D., & Young, M. D. (2019). Using powerful learning experiences to prepare school leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 14(1), 74-97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775118819672>
- Daniëls, E., Hondeghem, A., & Dochy, F. (2019). A review on leadership and leadership development in educational settings. *Educational Research Review*, 27, 110-125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.02.003>
- Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 221-258.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0013161X15616863>
- Day, D. V., Harrison, M. M., & Halpin, S. M. (2009). *An integrative approach to leader development*. Routledge.
- Education Commission of the States. (2020). 50-State Comparison: School Leader Certification and Preparation Programs. <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-school-leader-certification-and-preparation-programs/>
- Goldring, E., Rubin, M., & Herrmann, M. (2021). The role of assistant principals: Evidence and insights for advancing school leadership. *Wallace Foundation*.

<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/the-role-of-assistantprincipals-evidence-insights-for-advancing-school-leadership.aspx>.

- Grissom, J. A., Mitani, H., & Woo, D. S. (2019). Principal preparation programs and principal outcomes. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(1), 73-115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18785865>
- Huber, S. G. (2011). The impact of professional development: a theoretical model for empirical research, evaluation, planning and conducting training and development programmes. *Professional Development in Education*, 37(5), 837-853. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2011.616102>
- Kim, T. (2020). Becoming skillful leaders: American school principals' transformative learning. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 48(2), 353-378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143218802596>
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leithwood, K., Sun, J., & Schumacker, R. (2020). How school leadership influences student learning: A test of "The four paths model." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(4), 570-599. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0013161X19878772>
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*, 1(1), 1-17.
- National Policy Board for Educational Administration. NELP and ELCC. <https://www.npbea.org/>
- Ni, Y., Yan, R., & Pounder, D. (2018). Collective leadership: Principals' decision influence and the supportive or inhibiting decision influence of other stakeholders. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(2), 216-248. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0013161X17723427>
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1609406917733847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Rushing, K. J. (2022). *The professional learning and development of principals and assistant principals* [Doctoral dissertation, Auburn University]. AUEDT.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Tyack, D. B., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. Harvard University Press.