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by

Tonya Goree

December 2014

THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN IDENTIFYING, ADDRESSING AND MOVING
MEDIocre TEACHERS BEYOND THE PLATEAU OF INEFFECTIVENESS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband, Kelton, and my daughters, Braelyn and Brelle, for traveling with me through the pathways of impossibilities without hesitation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This doctoral journey has been filled with wonders I could not have imagined. I am truly a better person and leader because of the people and opportunities I encountered along the way.

My family has been instrumental in helping me accomplish every goal I set my sights on. To my husband, Kelton, who shows unwavering support and believes in all my dreams, and my children, Braelyn and Brelle, my motivation to live an uncompromising life with untiring determination, thank you for allowing me to spend countless hours completing this project and sacrificing family time. To my sisters, Barbara Nwokocha, Hester Williams, and Tracey Dorsey, who allowed me to stand on their shoulders throughout life, your support, friendship, and love allows me to be who I am. To my mother, Mary Sullivan, from whom I learned the epitome of independence, thank you for teaching me the value of education. And to my father, Rochester Dorsey, who would move a mountain so that I would not have to climb it, thank you for being my greatest supporter.

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An Abstract
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“The Principal’s Role in Identifying, Addressing, and Moving Mediocre Teachers Beyond the Plateau of Ineffectiveness.” Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Houston, December, 2014.

Abstract

As state and federal accountability standards continue to require more from the classroom teacher, principals, who play the most crucial role in ensuring a successful campus, have the insurmountable task of ensuring that schools show adequate progress for school improvement. A well-trained and intuitive principal will make sure that teachers who are mediocre—those who fail to provide reliable, consistent, high quality instruction every day—are expeditiously identified and addressed by providing the needed resources, training, and support.

This qualitative study provides insight on the characteristics of mediocre teachers and determines the principal’s role in raising student achievement by identifying, addressing, and moving their performance beyond ineffectiveness.

Data collected from a focus group of six elementary school principals of schools with varying demographics located within the same school district identified common themes and consistent trends as well as the barriers faced when supervising mediocre teachers.

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CHAPTER I

“To begin confronting mediocrity, we need to recognize its existence,
be convinced that it is a problem, and believe we can make improvements”

(Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000, p. 4).

INTRODUCTION

One of the most pressing issues today in education is accountability. Student performance is rated across the nation and schools are deemed adequate or inadequate based on that performance. In some cases, students may not be promoted or not allowed to graduate due to their performance on state assessments. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates the school as the responsible party when it comes to effectiveness (Muhammad, 2009). But should a student be held accountable for the mediocre teaching that could have contributed to their lack of successful performance? School leaders, when asked to describe the biggest problem they face in trying to raise student achievement responded – mediocre instruction – the inability to provide reliable, consistent, high quality teaching in every classroom (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

Mediocre and marginal teachers reflect many of the same characteristics; therefore, for the purpose of this study, these terms will be used to represent the same types of teachers and teaching styles. This level of teaching cannot be documented as complete incompetence but, rather borders on incompetence and prompts a supervisor to believe that teaching needs to change or improvements made to the performance level of those particular teachers (Kaye, 2004). When school leaders are pressed to elaborate, mediocre teaching is described as “just getting by” (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Performance is seldom seen as bad enough by these teachers to lead to teacher dismissal,

but student learning is diminished (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). While they lack the academic skill set desired by school administrators to impact student learning in a challenging way, mediocre performers are not unpleasant. These teachers care about their students, can be well organized, and appear enthusiastic (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Endeavors outside the classroom are much more appealing to their level of interest. Many mediocre teachers are hosts for off campus events, are planners and organizers of social gatherings, and many other non-academic related events. Mediocre teachers can best be described as resistant to hard work (Whitaker, 2010). The ability is there, but the drive and desire to consistently do more, or to challenge students more is not. Because of their pleasant nature, mediocre teachers have the unchaining ability to influence other teachers to do the leg work of academic tasks while they make marginal contributions.

As noted by Guskey (2005), the accountability movement continues to present challenges for principals. Emerging from the national movement, researchers have emphasized the role that principals play in improving schools. The school principal affects virtually all aspects of school life (Blase & Kirby, 2000). As principals, the quality of the teaching force is of great concern (Bridges, 1990). Identifying mediocre teaching is only a minor portion of combating ineffectiveness in the classroom. The principal must also address the needs of these teachers, find ways to move their mediocre teaching beyond the plateau, and ultimately improve instruction. “The key to improved student learning is to ensure good teaching in more classrooms more of the time” (DuFour & Mattos, 2013, p. 34). In order for this to occur, intentionality is required every step of the way (Whitaker, Leading School Change, 2010). Through the use of

meaningful evaluations to provide feedback, active monitoring with walkthroughs, and student surveys, mediocre performance can be identified. Professional development opportunities, conferences, and self-reflection through videotaped lesson reviews are ways to address mediocrity. To move these teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness, coaching, mentors, intervention plans, and as a last resort, removal or non-renewal are options. Through purposeful planning mediocre teaching can be transformed.

The goal of the evaluation is to increase student learning by improving the effectiveness of teaching, which leads to high levels of quality instruction (Daneilson, 2002). Attempting to use evaluations to identify mediocre teaching can pose difficulty because many teacher evaluation instruments depend on simplistic rating scales (Feeney, 2007). Ratings of “proficient”, “below expectations”, or “unsatisfactory” are too simplistic and fail to motivate a mediocre teacher to improve (Marshall, 2008). Hence, an evaluation instrument alone is not enough to identify mediocrity. A combination of modalities which include various ways to collect data is the most reliable. In her report, Marshall (2008) asserts, the best way for principals to get a reality check on teachers’ practices and to stay in close touch with classrooms’ instructional practices is to make several unannounced classroom visits a day, and then have candid face-to-face conversations with each observed teacher within 24 hours. These methods of addressing mediocre teaching provide a broad span of options for principals.

Addressing mediocrity requires the same type of diversity as identifying mediocrity. Professional development will play a leading role in this process. According to the research results from Marzano, Walters, & McNulty (2005), professional

development opportunities for teachers is one of the most important resources to the effective functioning of a school. The Carnegie Foundation (1986), the Holmes Group (1986), and the National Governors' Association (1989), articulated a widespread belief that schools need a clear vision and mission, more emphasis on professional development, and a stronger evaluation process. Aiding in the identification of mediocre teaching is the use of self-reflection and videotaping lessons. A teaching portfolio is a description of a self- assessment tool, consisting of a collection of information about a teacher's practice and development. Wolf (1996) stated, "Portfolios *can* include a variety of information, such as lesson plans, student assignments, teachers' written descriptions and videotapes of their instruction, and formal evaluations by supervisors" (p. 34).

Supervision strategies that involve intervention plans, mentorships and coaching are a possibility when responding to mediocre teaching (Marshall, 2008). Moving mediocrity beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness is multi-faceted. Teachers can engage in coaching sessions with a colleague who is an effective teacher, instructional specialists, curriculum coaches or any other teacher leader on campus. In peer coaching or collegial partnerships, two or more colleagues work together to better understand teaching and learning. Joyce and Showers (1995) describe peer coaching programs as components of professional development models that focused on teacher partnerships and provide effective, non-judgmental feedback; voluntary partnerships built on support, caring, and collaboration. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) supported the concept that an organizational culture that valued collegial interactions among teachers promoted the spread of ideas and shared professional learning. A mentorship can be established to allow the mediocre teacher the opportunity to have a direct support system. As a last

resort, when all else fails, the mediocre teacher should, through the proper documentation process, choose an alternative profession.

If accountability is a campus priority, and student success is tied to accountability, the campus principal must address mediocre teaching in order to change the impact of instruction on student outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

If asked to categorize their teaching staff by the effectiveness of classroom instruction, every school leader would be able to complete this task effortlessly. However, effectively addressing mediocre teaching is one recurring issue, within the field of supervision and evaluation, faced by policy makers, superintendents, and administrators. The dual purposes of accountability and professional development have added to this complexity. Teacher performance affects student performance, which affects school accountability. Poor school accountability can lead to a poor school culture. Therefore, in essence, teacher performance is one of the most vital components of schools today. The MET Project, Measures of Effective Teaching, describe teacher performance as the one thing that matters more than anything else within a school (The MET Project, 2013). Understanding the importance of the classroom teacher, many researchers have weighed in on the identification of teachers based on skill level, performance, or contributions to the overall campus culture and climate.

Anthony Muhammad (2009) categorizes teachers into four distinct groups by their characteristics which have a divisive impact on the school culture. Tweeners are new teachers. They typically start out enthusiastic and compliant with requests from administrators. Early experiences can have major impacts on how they see their career as

teachers for years to come. Most have few long-term ties to the community in which they teach. Believers are teachers who hold the basic tenant that all students can learn and achieve proficiency. Believers hold the academic, social and emotional success of all students as their goal, and they tend to embrace change. Survivors are teachers who have become ineffective due to chronic, poorly managed stress. Outside factors negatively affect their job performance. Finally, the Fundamentalists are those “old-school” teachers who are resistant to all change, and who hold the belief that some students can achieve academic success and some cannot. They feel they are not “wrong,” just more realistic than the Believers (Muhammad, 2009). Based on Muhammad’s descriptions, mediocre teachers can be Survivors or Fundamentalists.

In the book *Six Types of Teachers* (2005), Whitaker and Fiore sort teachers into six different categories: Wows, Impacters, Stabilizers, Dow Jonesers, Harmless, and Negative Forces. The Wows who lead the staff in a positive manner, are respected by peers, have a knack for teaching teachers and helping others become more effective. Wows are positive, make the entire school a better place, and impact student learning in a grand way. The Impacters are just as talented as Wow teachers, but the impact is limited to just the students. Impacters are sometimes the best teachers in the school, willing to do extracurricular activities beyond the classroom, and are highly respected by parents and the community. Stabilizers are the “what you see is what you get” type of teacher. You always know what to expect of them, they are consistent in whatever they do and overall pretty good in the classroom. Dow Jonesers whose talent varies depending upon the task, can be good in the classroom but their success depends on their attitude. They need close supervision. The Harmless are not very good at all, but they stop just short of being

negative. Seldom do parents complain or do the Harmless write office referrals but they do very little to encourage learning. They contribute very little but because they do not get in the way, they may go unnoticed. Negative Forces complain, grip to other faculty members, and their negativity surfaces in working with kids. Of these six types of teacher, the Harmless and Down Jonesers have characteristics of mediocre teachers.

Using the analogy of a shipwreck, Kaye (2004) used three terms to describe mediocre teaching. She identified three discernable types of mediocre teachers that exist in schools: “Flotsam”, “Jetsam”, and “Club Med”. These teachers range from being considered consciously unskilled, to veteran teachers who are aware of their ineffectiveness but could certainly improve with assistance, to teachers who have little connection to students. Principals viewed mediocre teaching as a problem without solutions in Kaye’s (2004) report, but the finding showed no explicit set of criteria had been developed to move these teachers beyond their current level of ineffectiveness in the classroom.

Being able to recognize and identify talent and weaknesses is crucial in moving a campus forward (Whitaker, 2010). Every campus has mediocre teachers who do just enough to get by. They are often well liked by parents, students, and colleagues because of their pleasant personality. They mask their inadequacies with repositories of transient enthusiasm and organization, but there is shallowness for student learning outcomes (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Mediocre teaching can have a negative impact on student learning which impacts the overall achievement of the school (Kaye, 2004). The lack of effective instruction can be the difference between a school achieving and not achieving academic goals which pose accountability problems. Principals often focus on

highly incompetent teachers, who require an overwhelming amount of attention, yet fail to address teachers who are mediocre (Zirkel, 2004).

School principals must use the necessary tools to identify, address, and move mediocre teaching beyond its current state of ineffectiveness to a state of improvement that positively influences student outcomes. By addressing this type of teaching, campuses will build norms that support and sustain excellence. This research will bring attention to mediocre teacher performance and reveal the effective ways principals respond to the need to change this mindset with the ultimate goal of improving student learning and school accountability.

Significance of the Study

In the age of accountability, mediocre teachers pose an insurmountable risk to the accountability of not only the campus, but also to the entire school district. Demands by legislation to have highly qualified teachers in all classrooms has brought teacher accountability for student learning to the forefront of principal's concerns (Trimble, Davis, & Clanton, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), requires administrators to take responsibility for addressing and effectively managing mediocre teachers (Trimble et al., 2003). Mediocre teachers negatively affect student learning and often times go unidentified and/or unaddressed because they are well liked by students, parents, colleagues and administration. The mediocre teachers do not draw attention to themselves because they are agreeable; however, their contribution to instructions is limited even though they likely possess the ability to impact learning positively. Being the instructional leader, the principal is charged with the responsibility of using their abilities through various modalities to first recognize these teachers, secondly address their

incompetency, and lastly, move them beyond their current state to a state of effectiveness which will lead to better student outcomes.

The research of this study will provide insight on the characteristics of mediocre teachers, offer techniques for principals to use to help these teachers improve their level of instruction, and the impact mediocrity has on student performance and school accountability. McKernan (1996) stated that one outcome of research was "helping practitioners to act more effectively, skillfully and intelligently" (page 4). It was a goal of this study to strive to reach McKernan's challenging possibility.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if school principals, after identifying mediocre teaching, have the capability to effectively address the areas of academic concern of mediocre teachers, and strategically help move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. This study also examined from the principals' perspective the impact of mediocre teaching on student achievement and the campus' accountability rating.

Research Questions

This study investigated the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the characteristics of a mediocre teacher?
2. How do principals identify mediocre teaching?
3. What is the perceived effect a mediocre teacher has on student outcomes?
4. What is the perceived impact mediocre teaching has on a school campus' accountability rating?
5. In what ways can principals address the needs of mediocre teachers?

6. How can principals move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness?
7. What perceived barriers do principals face when moving mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness?

Definition of Terms

1. *Accountability ratings* are based on a framework of four indexes that are used to evaluate the performance of each public campus and district in the state. The framework includes a range of indicators to calculate a score for each index and enables a thorough assessment of campus and district effectiveness. Accountability ratings are based on achieving a target established for each performance index.

- Index 1: Student Achievement provides a snapshot of performance across subjects.
- Index 2: Student Progress measures year-to-year student progress by subject and student group.
- Index 3: Closing Performance Gaps tracks advanced academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students and the lowest performing racial/ethnic student groups.
- Index 4: Postsecondary Readiness emphasizes the importance of earning a high school diploma that provides students with the foundation necessary for success in college, the workforce, job training programs, or the military.

2. *Bloom's Taxonomy* is a classification system developed in 1956 by education psychologist Benjamin Bloom to categorize intellectual skills and behavior important to learning. Bloom identified six cognitive levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, with sophistication growing from basic knowledge-recall skills to the highest level, evaluation (Coffey, 2008).
3. *Coaching* is a professional development strategy known as school-based coaching "generally involves experts in a particular subject area or set of teaching strategies working closely with small groups of teachers to improve classroom practice and, ultimately, student achievement (Russo, 2004).
4. *Club Med Mediocre Teacher* is a teacher who has little connection to students, learning, or the profession of teaching (Kaye, 2004).
5. *Educational Accountability* occurs in many ways in educational systems. One type of educational accountability system is that in which the school is held responsible for the performance of its students. Another type of educational accountability is a system in which teachers or administrators are individually held responsible for the performance of their students. Accountability systems in which schools or individual school personnel are held responsible for aspects of the educational process are most often used as ways to adjust the processes of education. Whether the school or individual teachers or administrators are held responsible, the educational accountability approach is termed *system accountability*. Educational accountability may also hold individuals responsible for their own performance. For example, students may

be held responsible for their performance in school (such as through promotion tests or graduation exams). Teachers may be held responsible for their performance on content and pedagogy through entry examinations or periodic tests of knowledge and skills.

6. *Flotsam Mediocre Teacher* is a teacher who is consciously unskilled who will take ownership for change and improvement (Kaye, 2004).
7. *Jetsam Mediocre Teacher* is a teacher who is aware of ineffective practices, but does not have the resources to improve, if resources are defined as teacher time, energy, and ongoing training (Kaye, 2004).
8. “*Inefficient* in context of teacher performance means not producing the effect intended or desired within a reasonable period of time whether or not the teacher has knowledge or capability” (Lexington Public School, AAA Case #11-390-00571-94 Bruce Fraser).
9. *Intervention Plans* are improvement plans that are written when the primary goal of helping teachers be the best that he/she can be is not met. An improvement plan is not punitive or punishment. The reasons for writing an improvement plan include:
 - when job performance does not meet expectations and more extrinsic motivation may be needed;
 - when job expectations may not be clear; or
 - when the supervisor needs to begin laying groundwork for nonrenewal or termination of employment.

10. *Marginal* is another term frequently used to describe substandard performance that is not as bad as incompetent. Marginal is a term to describe performance that is just above or just below what is acceptable for an individual. Inefficiency is a first cousin of competence but may be the closest legal term to the term mediocrity” (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).
11. *Mediocre Teaching* is most often understood as a relative term. It is variously defined as “not quite good enough” or of “middling quality” or “second-rate” (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).
12. *No Child Left Behind* refers to an act of Congress that was signed into law January 8, 2002. The purpose of the Act is to promote standards-based education. In order to receive federal funding for schools, states were required to develop basic skills assessments at different grades throughout the school year. Importantly, No Child Left Behind did not propose the creation of national exams for students to pass. Instead, standards were and are to be created and assessed by each individual state.
13. *Non-Renewal* refers to a teacher’s contract for employment. School districts may not extend or offer a teacher a contract for employment for a variety of reasons that are supported by a violation of the school, district, or state code of ethics.
14. *Plateau of Ineffectiveness* refers to reaching a state or level of little or no growth, to stop increasing or progressing or remain at the same level of achievement and level off.

15. *Professional Development* is an opportunity for teachers to take classes or attend sessions that offer rich opportunities to enhance the teaching skills of teachers and improve their overall classroom achievement.

16. *School Climate* is the climate in a school that has been defined as the collective personality of a school based upon an atmosphere distinguished by the social and professional interactions of the individuals in the school (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005).

17. *Student Surveys* assess whether or not students agree with a variety of statements designed to measure seven teaching practices.

- Caring about students (Encouragement and Support)
 - Example: “The teacher in this class encourages me to do my best.”
- Captivating students (Learning Seems Interesting and Relevant)
 - Example: “This class keeps my attention – I don’t get bored.”
- Conferring with students (Students Sense Their Ideas are Respected)
 - Example: “My teacher gives us time to explain our ideas.”
- Controlling behavior (Culture of Cooperation and Peer Support)
 - Example: “Our class stays busy and doesn’t waste time.”
- Clarifying lessons (Success Seems Feasible)
 - Example: “When I am confused, my teacher knows how to help me understand.”
- Challenging students (Press for Effort, Perseverance and Rigor)
 - Example: “My teacher wants us to use our thinking skills, not just memorize things.”

- Consolidating knowledge (Ideas get Connected and Integrated)
 - Example: “My teacher takes the time to summarize what we learn each day.” (The MET Project, 2010).

Limitations

The limitation of this study included the focus group of principals who participated in the research findings. One school district and six campus principals participated in this study. The opinions and ideas were limited to only those who participated. The validity of the data solely depended on the respondents' desire to disclose information, as with any type of questionnaire or survey of information. While principals from six different campuses participated, working in the same school district limited the generalization of the information shared.

CHAPTER II

“The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.”

Michelangelo

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

More than any other element, the quality of the faculty defines the quality of the school and the education it provides to children (Dayton & Recesso, 2007). Principals are the key to maintaining high quality teaching because their influence, through effective supervision practices, can affect teacher quality, and thus accountability. The purpose of this study is to determine ways principals can identify, address, and move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness to becoming more masterful in their ability to deliver quality instruction that will help define the quality of the school. The demand for accountability in education has shifted from broad issues of finance and programming to specific concerns about the quality of classroom teaching (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983). Ultimately changing the behaviors of mediocre teachers will positively impact learning, student achievement, and school accountability.

The Need for School Reform

Because every child in America deserves a quality, world-class education which is a prerequisite for success, as stated by President Barack Obama, school reform was birthed (Volante, 2012). School reform requires sophisticated thinking and the best resources to support pioneering methodologies to teaching and learning; to bring permanent change to the lowest-performing schools; and to examine and evaluate what

works and what can work better in America's schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). School reform is needed to accelerate student achievement, close achievement gaps, motivate our children to excel, and turn around those schools that for too many young Americans are not providing them with the education necessary to succeed in college and a career (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The premise of school reform is centered around four key priorities: (1) improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader; (2) providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, and for educators to help them improve their students' learning; (3) implementing college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards; and (4) improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to President Barack Obama (Volante, 2012), America was once the best educated nation in the world, leading all nations in college completion. The countries that currently lead the nation in education have made better choices about how to educate their students. School reform is America's response to once again lead the world in education. This effort will guide us to raise the expectations for our students and for our schools. To fulfill America's promise of equal opportunity for all, school reform measures have made unprecedented efforts to try to better educate our neediest children (Jal Mehta, Hess, & Schwartz, 2011). According to Mehta (2012), to make more substantial progress toward closing the gaps in student achievement by race and class, reformers must question conventional assumptions and more aggressively reshape key aspects of the American school system.

Reforming our schools to deliver a world-class education is a shared responsibility. We must foster school environments where teachers have the time to collaborate, the opportunities to lead, and the respect that all professionals deserve (Volante, 2012). School reform requires the abilities and skills of many, but especially teachers, principals, and other school leaders.

Other countries, such as Finland, have worked systematically over the last 35 years to make school reform a top priority. The Finnish make sure that competent professionals who can craft the best learning conditions for all students are in all schools, rather than thinking that standardized instruction and testing can improve student learning and turn around failing schools (Sahlberg, 2011). Leaders in Finland attribute the gains in education to their intensive investments in teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2010). All teachers receive three years of high-quality graduate level preparation at the complete expense of the state (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

A Nation at Risk, the landmark report given by the late President Ronald Reagan 30 years ago warned that America's public schools "a rising tide of mediocrity," were headed for a crisis should the status quo persist (Morris, 2013). Virtually beyond debate is the contention that public schools need reforming. "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war," wrote The National Commissioner on Excellence in Education. "As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves...We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" (Elliott, 2013). Schools are plagued with difficulties, mostly born of the inequalities rampant in the larger society. Nevertheless, education reform must be in the

public interest, on behalf of public schools and the children who attend them. School reform is necessary because public education is the task that allows Americans to reclaim the promise of our nation's gateway to democracy and racial and economic justice (Editors, 2013). Ultimately, the goal of school reform is to have a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school. From the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is the teacher in the classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The Importance of School Principals

Several researchers, theorists, and authors both inside and outside the field of education have offered opinions on how important the school principal is to the success of the school. In studies of effective schools with high numbers of minority and low socioeconomic status students, characteristics commonly used to describe at-risk students, specific leadership behaviors have been found (Mendez-Morse, 1991). Successful principals in schools such as these become engrossed in their vision of high achievement for all students. Through their actions, the principal conveys their vision to teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders. Remaining mindful of the critical relationship that exists between teachers and students, these principals strategically influence this aspect of the educational process validating its importance. As an active participant in the instructional process, principals, through discussions with teachers about instructional issues, their observations of classroom instruction and their interactions with teachers when examining student data, solidify their role as instructional leader, a role that has a direct impact on the quality of instruction provided. To make a

difference in the academic progress of at-risk students, effective principals do for teachers what effective teachers do for students (Mendez-Morse, 1991).

Examining the role of the principal and its implications for at-risk students, with a focus on principal-teacher interaction, in schools where at-risk students are achieving success, principals: (a) support teachers' instructional methods, (b) allocate resources and materials, (c) make frequent visits to classrooms for instructional purposes, (d) solicit and provide feedback on instructional methods and techniques, and (e) use data to focus attention on improving the curriculum or instructional approach (Mendez-Morse, 1991).

(Lawrence, 2010) lists, from her experience and research, 10 key indicators school principals possess that contribute to the success of schools:

- Knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop, articulate and implement a shared vision that is supported by the students, parents, teachers and the school community.
- Instructional Leadership - High performing leaders promote a positive learning culture, provide an effective instructional program, and apply best practices to student learning.
- Managing the Learning Environment - High performing leaders manage the organization, operations, facilities and resources in ways that maximize the use of resources in an instructional organization and promote a safe, efficient, legal, and effective learning environment.
- Community and Stakeholder Partnerships - High-performing leaders collaborate with families, business, and community members, respond to diverse community

interests and needs, work effectively within the larger organization and mobilize community resources.

- Decision Making Strategies - High performing leaders plan effectively, use critical thinking and problem solving techniques, and collect and analyze data for continuous school improvement.
- Diversity - High performing leaders understand, respond to, and influence the personal, political, social, economic, legal, and cultural relationships in the classroom, the school and the local community.
- Technology - High performing leaders plan and implement the integration of technological and electronic tools in teaching, learning, management, research, and communication responsibilities.
- Learning, Accountability, and Assessment - High performing leaders monitor the success of all students in the learning environment, align the curriculum, instruction, and assessment processes to promote effective student performance, and use a variety of benchmarks, learning expectations, and feedback measures to ensure accountability for all participants engaged in the educational process.
- Human Resource Development - High performing leaders recruit, select, nurture and, retain effective personnel, develop mentor and partnership programs, and design and implement comprehensive professional growth plans for all staff.
- Ethical Leadership - High performing leaders act with integrity, fairness, and honesty in an ethical manner.

In agreement with Lawrence (2010), key themes highlighted by other authors (Butler & Durian, 1987; Lee et al., 2008) for high performing principals working with staff, parents,

and students are long term vision, instructional leadership, support, regular communalization with all stakeholders, strategic student intervention programs, parent involvement, ongoing professional development, data driven decision making and a written and aligned curriculum. The researchers at the Wallace Foundation determined that principals make a difference by doing four key things. The first is having vision for the school and how it can serve all of the kids that are in it. Second, school principals have to create a culture that values education. Next, having a shared leadership with the other teachers in the school community. And most importantly, an effective principal concentrates their time on improving instruction in the classroom, because that is the one thing that makes the most difference for the kids (Woodruff & Arruza, n.d.). Shelly Habegger (2008) quantified that the answer lies within the school culture. The positive culture created by good principals enables continuous improvement to occur; they know school culture is the heart of improvement and growth. It is understood by effective principals that a positive culture empowers and instills confidence in teachers, creating a sense of belonging and providing a clear direction for all involved, students, teachers, parents, and community (Habegger, 2008).

The old adage, “perception is reality,” is true for principals (The MET Project, 2013). When teachers do not trust in the capabilities of their leaders, it diminishes the chances of the school realizing its full potential (The MET Project, 2013). This ties directly into the belief that teachers feel their principal can make a difference (The MET Project, 2013). Knowledgeable, competent supervisors who are capable of capturing what happens in the classroom, being able to analyze that information, and identify its effects on student learning are imperative for successful schools. Therefore, principals must be

sensible of the perceptions or beliefs of teachers regarding their effectiveness as instructional leaders (The MET Project, 2013). Collective efficacy is a belief or perception of teachers that they can employ, as a group, actions necessary to make a positive impact on student learning (Goddard, 2001). As Bandura (1993) found, school achievement is positively associated to collective efficacy. Andrews and Soder (1987) conducted a two-year study of the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement. Their findings suggest that the perceived effectiveness of principals by classroom teachers is critical for gains in student achievement. In fact, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) combined the research of 70 studies including 2,894 schools, 1.1 million students, and 14,000 teachers. Their findings suggest, "...a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement" (p.3). Additionally, they identified 21 leadership responsibilities that directly relate to student achievement. Several of these principal leadership responsibilities correspond with having systems in place to address mediocre teaching: change agent, situational awareness, flexibility, intellectual stimulation, monitors and evaluates, input, visibility, and curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) describe each as follows:

Change agent – the principal is in a position to challenge the status quo in a manner that approximates the desired outcome.

Situational awareness – the principal is insightful and aware of what is going on in the school and can address potential problems by being proactive.

Flexibility – the principal adapts leadership to situations with comfort.

Intellectual stimulation – the principal ensures that the staff is aware of current trends and best practices in teaching and learning and frequently engages staff in substantive discussions.

Monitors/evaluates – the principal is able to effectively monitor and supervise instructional practices and its impact on student achievement.

Visibility – the principal visits classroom on a regular basis. These interactions must be sincere and meaningful to teachers and students.

Input – the principal solicits and involves teachers in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies.

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment – the principal is an active participant in the design and implementation of programs.

In order for principals to be effective instructional leaders, they need to ensure quality instruction, model best practices, monitor the implementation of the curriculum, provide resources, and examine assessment data (Kowalski, 2010). Indeed, strong building leadership is the catalyst for improving student achievement (Kowalski, 2010).

Although the words used by each theorist are different, the descriptions share a common theme, the leadership of the school principal is paramount. Leadership is the key; the role of principals in fostering student learning is an important facet of education. Strong leadership is especially important for revitalization of failing schools, and a good principal is the key to a successful school (G. F. Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). The school principal is so important that foundations have invested millions of dollars over the past decade in programs such as New Leaders for New Schools, an organization that recruits nontraditional principal candidates and prepares them for the challenges of

school leadership, and have launched the George Bush Institute which focuses strictly on the principalship (G. F. Branch et al., 2013).

Leadership in Hiring Decisions

To make hiring decisions, building leaders must process a great deal of information. Discussing that very notion while testifying before the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness, the Committee on Education and Labor, and the House Representatives, George A. Scott (2007) Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues, noted, teachers are the single largest resource in our nation's elementary and secondary education system . Scott stated further under oath, while the hiring and training of teachers is primarily the responsibility of state and local governments and institutions of higher education, the federal investment in enhancing teacher quality is substantial and growing . To that end, Scott testified, in 1998, Congress amended the Higher Education Act (HEA) to enhance the quality of teaching in the classroom by improving training programs for prospective teachers and the qualifications of current teachers and in 2001, the Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act to establish federal requirements that all teachers of core academic subjects be highly qualified.

Certified, highly qualified, dedicated teachers are sought each year, and decisions that impact the hiring of such teachers must be made by knowledgeable leaders. Todd Whitaker (2007), understanding that administrators will benefit from the knowledge of their peers, enthusiastically addressed how administrators can contend successfully with the challenges of hiring by implementing the successful strategies of the most effective principals and assistant principals. Whitaker observed that while the world changes

around them, some educators fail to transition with it. Whitaker insisted that the key to this important administrative growth is self-reflection. How do administrators know which behaviors to seek in their hires? They must look not at similarities, but differences. For example, great teachers take attendance, but so do mediocre ones (Whitaker, 2007). Thus, the path to improvement lies in deducing that which sets the successful apart from the pack. Whitaker indicated that one of the ways that great principals distinguish themselves is through the people they allow to work for them. He said, people, not programs that make the ultimate difference (Whitaker, 2003). Great teachers make a great school, so what does a principal do to improve his or her school? According to Whitaker (2003), a principal has two options: hire better teachers or improve the ones he or she has. Whitaker (2010) also posited that when you hire a new teacher, your goal should always be for the old people to become more like the new people. If not, you are hiring the wrong people because good hiring is all about prevention not reaction.

Recruiting and Selecting Good Teachers

According to the report *A Blueprint for Reform* to ensure the success of our children, we must do better to recruit, develop, support, retain, and reward outstanding teachers in America's classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). While there is no single, definitive way to ensure successful hiring, creating a high performing learning community through teacher recruitment and selection remains one of the most important tasks of school principals. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley spoke on this very topic stating that we must follow a new set of *three R's* as we go forward: "recruitment, retention, and respect" (A. Branch, 2000). The first of these R's is a prominent challenge that school principals' face: hiring the right people for the right

positions. The only ways to improve schools is to; first improve the teachers you have, and second, hire better ones (Whitaker, 2002). The challenge is not simply to place enough adults in front of classrooms, but to recruit and retain teachers who have a strong positive impact on students' learning (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Recruitment and retention are vital to the continuing success of education improvement in any school system, and they are challenges for educational systems and individual schools alike (McCray, 1999). Respect is a problem, however, that we as a society can and must address if we are to achieve success in retaining and recruiting the best quality candidates to teaching. We place an extraordinary responsibility with our teachers every day, and their skills and duties deserve our respect and admiration (McCray, 1999). Goodlad (1990) stated that "few matters are more important than the quality of the teachers in our nation's schools" (p. xi). Sorting through applications, resumes, cover letters, and portfolios can be overwhelming; however, it is from these crucial hiring decisions that most other success or failure may be attributed (Pacheco, 2000). Student achievement, school climate, and staff morale rest largely upon the recruiting of the right teachers for the job (Goodlad, 1990). Arturo Pacheco (2000), in his address to the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, echoed Goodlad's conclusions and reminded teacher educators that better teachers lead to better schools.

Looking for Prospects – Recruitment

The first hiring challenge for educational leaders is to find qualified applicants. According to (Shulman, 1986), schools need people with pedagogical content knowledge who know what to teach, how to teach it, with what kinds of students, and the milieu. Effective principals recruit aggressively and then streamline the hiring process so that

novices are quickly brought on board and have a chance to settle in before the school year begins (Scherer, 2003). In April, 2000, American Federation of Teachers (AFT) issued a report that called for an urgent national commitment to bring higher quality, greater resources and more coherence to the way higher education screens and prepares teacher education candidates. What makes hiring in education such a complex task is its dependence upon fit in three areas: person-job (P-J), person-organization (P-O), and person-group (P-G) (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001).

Person-job fit is conceptualized as the correspondence between employee needs and the job demands (Edwards, 1991). When individuals have the abilities required to complete the tasks of a given job, P-J fit is said to be high (Edwards, 1991; Kristof-Brown, Jansen, & Colbert, 2002). (Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001), determined that job fit and organizational fit are distinct concepts to employees, and are often uncorrelated when assessed simultaneously. According to Liu and Johnson, good matches between teachers and their jobs are important for two reasons. First, a good match can be an important contributor to teacher effectiveness. Second, the fit between a new teacher and his position can have implications for his job satisfaction and retention. According to (Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001), the schools of today can be well staffed and effective only if today's policy makers and school officials recognize and respond to the challenge. Research has discovered that high levels of P-J fit have been found to be positively associated with organizational commitment and job-focused satisfaction, and negatively associated with intent to quit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001).

Person-organization fit, as hypothesized by various researchers has a degree of similarity between profiles of individuals and employing organizations with important implications for employee selection, job satisfaction, job performance, and retention. (Chatman, 1989), widely cited with developing the seminal theory of P-O fit (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), conceptualized fit as congruence between the values of a person and an organization. Chapman (1989) explained, when people choose situations that are most compatible to themselves, they perform best. P-O fit operationalizes three additional manifestations: shared goals, common preferences for systems and structures, and similar preferences for work climate (Kristof, 1996). P-O fit focuses on attracting employees, motivating them to perform, increasing their satisfaction, and encouraging them to stay on the job. A meta-analysis by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), which included 110 studies with P-O fit measures, evidence was provided that high levels of P-O fit had a positive relationship with a candidate's attraction to the organization, the organization's desire to make a job offer, the organization's intent to hire, and the candidate's acceptance of the job. P-O fit was also found to reduce turnover (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

At the most basic level, person-group fit is defined as compatibility between coworkers (Adkins, Ravlin, & Meglino, 1996). P-G fit focuses on the psychological or attitudinal compatibility of team members in work groups (Ferris, Youngblood, & Yates, 1985; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). An early experimental study found that perceived group attractiveness and cohesiveness were higher when group members had high degrees of attitude similarity (Good & Nelson, 1971). There is evidence that P-G fit has a moderate, positive correlation with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while it is negatively correlated with intent to quit. Furthermore, prior research on P-G fit

suggests that the degree of similarity between individuals and work team members may be especially important in assimilation and retention for new organization members (Ferris et al., 1985).

The final step in the recruiting process is the personal interview by the campus principal. Researchers (Liu & Johnson, 2006) found that teacher hiring decisions have far-reaching consequences for a school and its students and faculty. Therefore job fit, organizational fit, and group fit are important to the success of students. Fit and retention warrant continued attention in educational policy and research, particularly when the aim is to increase retention of highly effective teachers while minimizing costly efforts to retain lower performers who are unlikely to improve. Even the most talented teachers will be unable to reach their full potential if their teaching positions are not a good fit. Using recruitment and selection policies to match teachers with the environment in which they are most likely to be successful is a promising strategy for improving both retention and student achievement. Matching early career teachers with a group of high performing colleagues may be a promising strategy for building an effective teaching force that will have long-term positive effects on student achievement (Liu & Johnson, 2006).

Retention - Growing Good Teachers

After they are hired and placed, new teachers need to become acquainted with the way their new school does things (Scherer, 2003). Many new teachers claim that teacher certification programs did not prepare them for the challenges of a classroom (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). Principals can help meet this need by sponsoring a building-level orientation at the opening of the school year to review key policies and procedures (Scherer, 2003). Teacher retention efforts should focus on various factors, including the

quality of the teacher preparation program. This will determine if teachers were produced with persistence and commitment to confront the challenges of being a new teacher. Retention efforts that include personal and emotional support for new teachers appear to help them better adjust and handle the ever changing challenges of today's diverse classrooms. A teacher's personal life history often influences a decision to enter and stay in the profession (Dixson & Dingus, 2008). Often, these life histories include divergent academic and cultural traditions as well as social and personal engagement with emotional, family, health, psychosocial, religious and ethnic identity issues. Moreover, prior personal experiences and their own schooling may have an impact on their professional motivation and commitment to teach (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Eick, 2002; Smulyan, 2004); therefore, in order to explain what motivates individuals to teach, we must consider the broader sociocultural environment of the novice teachers. Effective principals make sure to place new teachers in their areas of expertise and licensure, provide them with adequate resources to meet their needs, and assign them only limited extra duties and responsibilities to optimize their chance of success, monitoring closely as the year unfolds, in order to tailor their actions to meet the individual needs of these teachers (Scherer, 2003).

Respecting Teachers

President Barack Obama in his 2011 State of the Union Address emphasized the importance of teachers' roles in our nation by stating, "...teachers are known as 'nation builders'" (Obama, 2011). Although principals are busy people, it is important that they take time to get to know the new teachers in their school and establish working relationships with them (Scherer, 2003). By welcoming new teachers to the school,

maintaining an open-door policy, being available for individual conferences, and attending to new teachers' real and perceived needs, new teachers will feel respected for the value they bring (Scherer, 2003). Respect, according to (Hanushek, 2001), also comes with teachers' salaries. In a competitive marketplace, a firm must compensate employees according to their productivity or risk bankruptcy (Hanushek, 2001). When teachers are productive, they should be respected through compensation. Following the guidelines set forth by numerous researchers, such as recruiting prospective teachers broadly, providing high-quality induction and professional development, improving working conditions, and respecting the value-added of teachers by paying well, students will be the beneficiaries of good instruction from highly qualified teachers (Peske et al., 2001).

Identifying the Profile of Mediocre Teachers

In the United States, the wish for highly qualified teachers for our students is not just desired, it is legislated. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requires that schools employ only “high qualified teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Unfortunately, regardless of legislation, mediocre teachers continue to be a serious problem in schools (Zepeda S. J., 2006). Within the teaching profession, instructional practices are measured based on various variables as either exemplary or considered to constitute ineptness, such as a teacher lacking the ability to deliver high quality instruction, or the inability to manage discipline. In professional discourse, a teacher's minimum application of instruction is considered by educators to constitute mediocre teaching (Kaye, 2004).

The cause of mediocre teaching can be attributed to various factors. Being a novice or tenured teacher does not have any prerequisite on whether or not teaching becomes mediocre (Pascopella, 2006; Zepeda S. J., 2007). Mediocre teaching is not

contained within a set of boundaries nor is it stagnant (Kaye, 2004). In fact, several profiles of mediocre teachers resemble those of master teachers', having excellent classroom management, very organized classroom environments, building lasting relationships with students and being well received by peers (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). These are physiognomies that both mediocre and master teachers can share (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Deviance from mediocre teaching in one direction can render incompetent teaching while deviance in the other direction can move a teacher towards excellence (Kaye, 2004). In some cases this makes mediocre teachers more difficult to identify and requires a more in depth look, beyond the surface, to find the clear distinguishing discrepancies between ineffectiveness and the exemplified skills of an effective master teacher.

Categorizing mediocre teachers puts them in three classifications; those who have inadequate teaching skills, those who allow their personal lives and other external factors to have a negative effect on their ability in the classroom, and those who allow their attitude to impact the competency of sound instructional delivery (Zepeda S. J., 2007). Kaye (2004) give titles to the three categories that, according to her, mediocre teachers can fall into.

The first category is Flotsam, those who are consciously unskilled due to a new work environment, instructional level, or sometimes new to the profession. These teachers are just at the word flotsam suggests, lost by shipwreck and floating at sea (Kaye, 2004). The state of mediocrity of this type is temporary due to the self-motivation of these teachers to improve (Kaye, 2004). In Kaye's study, teachers believed that flotsam mediocre teachers are a natural reoccurring cycle in schools due to the new hiring

taking place yearly (Kaye, 2004). Although, new teachers begin their careers with enthusiasm, idealism and optimism, these feelings often disappear as the reality of the responsibilities in the classroom become more prevalent (Veenman, 1984). New teachers frequently feel overwhelmed and as though they are floating adrift at sea (Brock & Grady, 1998). Flotsam mediocre teachers care about their students' well-being just as much as master teachers and take ownership of making improvements to change (Kaye, 2004).

The Jetsam mediocre teacher is the second type identified by (Kaye, 2004). In nautical terms, jetsam happens in times of danger; certain objects are thrown overboard to help keep the vessel afloat. A jetsam mediocre teacher becomes increasingly discouraged when change begins to happen. Overwhelmed, and unmotivated, these teachers refer back to their comfort zone and choose to do just enough to stay afloat (Kaye, 2004). They are aware of ineffective practices but do not possess the personal resources to improve: energy, professional development and time (Kaye, 2004). The jetsam mediocre teacher's attitude is one of resistant to change (Kaye, 2004). Kennedy & Kennedy (1996) determined that a teacher's attitudes are their individual affective and evaluative response to things which when linked to change, has a bearing on accepting new policies and procedures (Duke, 2004; Zimmerman, 2006). Jetsam mediocre teachers are identifiable by the lack of hope that is buried beneath frustration (Kaye, 2004).

The third type of mediocre teacher described by (Kaye, 2004) is the Club Med mediocre teacher. Characteristics of this type of teacher include having a limited connection to students, learning, or the profession of teaching altogether (Kaye, 2004). Work ethics are unacceptable and the ownership for improvement is non-existent. Club

Med mediocre teachers are unaware that they are not skilled teachers and often view themselves as hard workers (Kaye, 2004). However, there is a lack of general interest in trying new strategies that work to improve instruction (Kaye, 2004). Unperturbed by social pressure from peers, their motives for being in the profession are skewed (Kaye, 2004). This group of mediocre teachers appear to resemble the description from Zepeda (2007) as putting more focus on personal interest and not those related to the profession of teaching. Club Med mediocre teachers are also known for being masterful at delegation or manipulation to enlist others to take on their responsibilities (Kaye, 2004). As with most mediocre teachers, Club Med teachers are frequently liked by colleagues and administrators, which provides them with the opportunity to use these friendships to maintain their continuous mediocrity (Kaye, 2004; Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

Irrespective of the researcher's categories for mediocre teaching, if left unidentified, this type of behavior will pose a dramatic negative effect in prompting students' academic achievement (Nye, Danstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). The variations of mediocrity can appear distinct and at other times subtle; however, a common theme always emerges (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). From the variations of the inherent complexity of this issue, mediocrity is multifaceted and can reveal itself in an assortment of ways, happens for a varied number of reasons, and persists because of resistance to change (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

Observation Sources

Commonly, information about the quality of teaching comes from observations (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Whether it is a formal or informal observation, these visits are especially important to lay the ground-work for gathering data to confront

mediocre teaching. Teacher observation is, first, about documenting the quality of teacher performance; then, its focus shifts to helping teachers improve their performance as well as holding them accountable for their work (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). The focus of the observation should not just center around deficit identification, but also the identification of strengths to build on. Caution should be taken; however, when seeking out strengths not to invent them (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Ehrgott et al (1993) identified that many administrators have received limited training in how to identify the cause of a teacher's poor performance and prescribing appropriate intervention strategies. Evaluated by administrators lacking in adequate training, most mediocre teachers receive and have become accustomed to receiving satisfactory evaluations. Frequent visits to a classroom focused on specific "look-fors" can give principals valuable information on what is and is not working instructionally with teachers (Protheroe, 2009).

To be effective, principals must conduct walkthroughs on a consistent basis in order for the process to become a part of the culture of the school (Graf 2004). Informal walkthroughs are frequent, focused, brief visits that allow the principal to observe firsthand the teaching and learning that is occurring in the classroom. Walkthroughs provide principals with observational data that displays how classroom instruction and teacher performance affects what is happening in the classroom. Frequent visits to the classrooms provide principals with valuable data that shows norms and trends that can be shared with teachers in order to improve instruction. Mediocre teachers often times seem to have no sense of what they are doing wrong or how to remedy the problems contends Jackson (1997). Defensiveness that comes from the not knowing can make it hard for

principals to provide a foundation needed for changes or improvements (Jackson, 1997). Hence, classroom walkthroughs allow principals to gather the data to serve as an instructional leader and to actively participate with teachers as they collaboratively look for ways to improve instruction. According to Elmore (2000) principals need to become more directly involved with instruction if schools are going to make a significant improvement with student achievement. Spending a third of the principal's time in classrooms will engage teachers and improve the learning process (Eisner, 2002).

Strategically planning the desired observation before conducting walkthroughs allows principals to target specific areas of instruction (Gingsberg & Murphy, 2002). One week a principal may look to determine if objectives are written in student friendly language, another week the focus may be on the type of instructional strategies the teacher is using and whether or not the strategy effectively enhances the lesson being taught (Hopkins, 2010). Focusing on the effects of instruction, and consistently using an instrument to measure continuous improvement will allow principals to identify mediocre teaching (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007).

Conventional wisdom surrounding formal teacher observations is that two central purposes are served, quality assurance and improvement of practice (Daneilson, 2002; Patterson, 2004). Teacher evaluation matters because teaching matters. "Without capable, high quality teachers in America's classrooms, no educational reform effort can possibly succeed" (Stronge & Tucker, 2003). At the core of education is teaching and learning, the connection between teaching and learning works best with effective teachers teaching every student effectively every day (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001). Just as the most at-risk students need the best, highest quality teachers, mediocre teachers, the most at-risk

staff, need the best, most supportive, formative supervision in order to succeed (Zepeda S. J., 2006). Without the implementation of a high quality evaluation system, high quality teaching cannot be identified (Stronge & Tucker, 2003). Formal teacher observations, just as walkthroughs, are about documenting the quality of a teacher's performance first; then, the focus changes to improving teacher performance and holding them accountable for their work. Scheduling a formal evaluation allows for the collection of very important data, seeing the teachers' best shot (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Good or bad, a benchmark of performance is acquired. Longitudinal data collection during formal evaluations is an effective way to determine consistency throughout the instructional day with multiple classes (Marshall, 2005; Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

Time and time again the classroom teachers in recent years, as the field of education has moved toward a stronger focus on accountability and analyzing the variables affecting educational outcome, have been proven to be the single most influential school-related force in student achievement (Stronge, 2002). Therefore, teacher evaluation matters given the emphasis on teacher quality by legislation, public policy, and high stakes testing. A premium has to then be placed on the tools used to measure high quality teaching considering that regardless of how well a program is designed, it is only as effective as the people who implement it (Stronge, 1993). Theoretically, a sound, well designed, and properly implemented evaluation tool is an undeniably essential component of an effective school (Stronge, 2008).

Another observation source for data collection is during professional meetings. Participation in professional learning communities is an important aspect of a teacher's role (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). The quality of contributions can be observed

during team meetings, lesson planning meetings, vertical team meetings, and staff meetings. Although, meetings like these are rare sources of data collection, the findings can become especially useful in situations where mediocre teachers are negatively affecting the school culture with complaints or non-participation (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

Collecting and Assessing Data

Data driven decision making is the approach most schools take to measure success. The same approach should be taken when measuring the performance of mediocre teachers. Multiple data sources allow a range of information to be gathered on the classroom progress of a teacher (Peterson, 2000). Structured student surveys, parent surveys, and teacher self-reflection are all data sources for collecting vital information (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

As reported by Stronge (2008), student and parent surveys are an important source of information that is used too sparingly. Student ratings are used less than 3% of the time and parent surveys less than 1% (Stronge J., 2008). However, many practitioners have recently come to recognize that when the right questions are asked in the right way, student input is a valuable source of excellent information regarding the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom (The MET Project, 2013). Parents are in the ideal situation to know about teachers' performance in relation to their own children and in relation to the interaction they have with the teacher (Peterson, 1988). In a study conducted by two Utah school districts, teachers described parent input as pertinent, specific and ultimately credible (Peterson, 1988).

Becoming an effective teacher also involves a deliberate and systematic analysis of one's teaching practices in an effort to improve instructional practices and foster an environment in which students are highly engaged in learning (Jay, 2003; Lester, 1988). This is the premise of teacher self-reflection, an integral aspect of exemplary teaching (Ayers, 2003; Valli, 1997). Self-reflection is critical to teaching in that it helps the teacher understand what they need to know, where to find support to help, and how to go about solving inevitable teaching problems (Lieberman, 2003). Being self-critical, a natural component of self-reflection, as noted by Ayers (2003) is a must lest teachers lose capacity for professional growth. Additionally, instructional leaders must support, guide, and foster reflective teaching (Schon, 1989). When principals spend time in classrooms, coaching, and conferencing with teachers, teacher performance is enhanced (Frase, Downey, & Canciamilla, 1999).

In the words of a high school student, "Why don't they ask us for our opinions? We are the ones who observe teachers every day" (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000, p. 84). Students have the biggest stake in effective teaching which makes them the best experts on their experience in the classroom (The MET Project, 2012). Collecting data over an extended period of time from a large number of students will help establish patterns and makes the data more reliable (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). When using student surveys, measure what matters, the delivery of instructions and what the teacher does in the learning environment. Survey questions reflective of the theory of instruction will accomplish this goal (The MET Project, 2012). Accuracy and confidentiality are also a necessity. If honest student responses are expected, then an environment that establishes this expectation has to be set. The validity of the survey

depends on student responses which are connected to the student's ability to understand the survey items (The MET Project, 2012). Adequate sampling by an adequate number of students ensures teacher reliability in the survey results. This builds confidence that the survey results reflect what generally happens in the classroom (The MET Project, 2012). Receiving the results in a timely manner with a clear understanding of how to interpret the data, and having access to professional development that targets the areas of concern as noted by the data will help mediocre teachers work to improve those areas in a suitable manner (The MET Project, 2012). Student surveys are about both diagnosing the needs of mediocre teachers and evaluating systems of support for these teachers. The feedback received will point to strengths and areas of improvement. The "face validity" will reflect what teachers' value, the "predictive validity" gives insight into predicting student outcomes, with reliability to demonstrate relative consistency (The MET Project, 2012).

Both students and parents are integral stakeholders in public schools, therefore, their perspectives and concerns should be represented in teacher evaluation systems. Parent perception is a specialized role, and can be significant in the evaluation of mediocre teachers. As stakeholders in teachers' success, parents have unique personal information about student learning, and they can verify if the teacher fulfilled their duties to inform parents about the classroom and their child's progress (Peterson, Wahlquist, Bone, Thompson, & Chatterton, 2001). The measure of effectiveness of a teacher according to the study conducted by Peterson (2001) is based on three emergent factors: fair treatment of students, support for learning, and effective communication and collaboration with parents. In 2011, Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) held focus groups on the State's new teacher evaluation system with parents, teachers, and

students in communities throughout New York City. Parents of English Language Learners (ELLs), immigrant parents, and parents of students with disabilities were the vast majority of the participants. These parents strongly believed that both students and parents should have a voice in evaluating their teachers. One parent said, “If the principal doesn’t care what the parents say, it’s as if they don’t exist” (Part, 2012). In a policy brief by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2010), it was noted that combining different sources of data allows more diagnostic, targeted feedback to be given to teachers. This feedback can be crucial in identifying specific concerns of mediocre teachers.

Looking at what is done in the classroom, thinking about why it happened and if it worked, is the process of reflective teaching (Tice, 2011). In relation to a broader purpose, any activity or process in which an experience is evaluated is considered reflection (Richards, 1990). Although great benefits can be gained using this practice, reflection nevertheless is a process that can be challenging for teachers. Typically evaluators, principals, assistant principals, and directors of instruction, are the judges of how a teacher performs instructionally (Pappas, 2010). When properly done by teachers, this means of professional development that begins in the classroom can lead to improvement of classroom instruction and changes in the behavior of mediocre teachers (Tice, 2011). Many different approaches to self-reflection can be employed. Peer observations, written accounts of experiences which include self-reports, diaries or journal writing, and video recording lessons are all reflective approaches mediocre teachers can use to improve their instruction and classroom management (Richards, 1990).

Peer observation provides opportunities for mediocre teachers to get exposure to different teaching styles and provides options for individualized critical reflection (Richards, 1990). In this situation, the mediocre teacher will observe and be observed by a colleague who is stronger instructionally and who has better classroom management. Both partners should participate in a pre-observation meeting to discuss the logistics of their classes, typical patterns of interaction and participation, and any problems that might be expected (Richards, 1990). A great deal of insights about their own teaching can be gained by having a mediocre teacher observe their colleagues.

Written accounts of experiences is another way to engage mediocre teachers in the reflective process. Journal writing, teacher diaries, and self-reports, are written accounts of experiences teachers can use to reflect on their teaching practices (Richards, 1990). Self-reporting forces the teacher to reflect on specific teaching practices used within a lesson or specified time period (Pak, 1985). Teachers can make regular assessments of what they are doing in the classroom and verify their own assumptions about the teaching activities they use on a regular basis (Richards, 1990). This is an opportunity for a mediocre teacher to determine if goals for the class are being met, and determine the kind of activities that work well or not.

Journal writing, when used as a reflective tool, provides a record of significant learning experiences, tracks patterns of teaching practices, and allows for self-development (Richards, 1990). Diaries can be used in the same way and this type of reflection is purely personal. Diary reflections may include personal feelings and personal reactions to the lesson taught as well as those the teacher observed on the part of the students (Tice, 2011).

Rich and Hannafin (2009) found that specific, ubiquitous, and easy to use tools, such as video-recording and analysis used for reflection could encourage teachers to deliberately become reflective. The perpetuity and objectivity of video-recording can allow teachers to closely examine classroom practices and sustain professional development (Orlova, 2009). This tool for self-reflection allows teacher to review lessons from the observer's viewpoint and determine areas of improvement and which strategies are effective. Ideas for making teaching stronger and ways to facilitate effective learning in the classroom are also types of helpful feedback video recording provides (Jay, 2003).

Supervising Mediocre Performance

Under the best circumstances, good supervision is hard work. Supervising a teacher who is performing at a mediocre level is extremely demanding of a supervisor's time and energy and can be the most intellectually difficult challenge of a supervisor's most fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). According to Blacklock (2002), much of the literature on effective instructional leadership urges principals to confront teacher ineffectiveness but the process is far from easy. He contends that principals must weigh a number of factors – emotions, time, impact on staff morale, and various others. Confronting mediocre performance requires several systems to be in place: (a) a clear framework that addresses what is important in teaching, (b) supervisors who are competent in capturing what happens in the classroom and able to analyze that framework to identify the effects of teaching on student learning, and (c) a commitment to address teacher performance in writing and in conferences (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

A framework that addresses what is important in teaching will have at its main core, a means of identifying professional development to help mediocre teachers improve (The MET Project 2013). Both the Measures of Effective Teaching Project and The Learning Walk focus on using a framework that trains principals and instructional leaders on effectively collecting data to help improve instruction. Muji (2006) recommended steps to improve the quality of classroom observation ratings. First by improving inter-rater reliability and second, rater training to decrease the amount of bias in scores, eliminating the overly lenient or overly rigorous ratings. Standardizing observation protocols ensures that raters are systematic and helps to ensure the reliability and validity of scores (Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

A three-year program focusing on effective instructional leadership offered by The Institute for Learning has the goal of helping schools examine effective instructional practices. In year one, evaluators will focus on the components of organizing the effort, setting clear expectations, creating fair and credible evaluations, recognizing accomplishments of teachers and academic rigor in the curriculum, and how to have accountable talk with teachers (Institute for Learning, 2005). Upon completion of the professional development offered by the Institute for Learning administrators will be able to not just evaluate teacher's performance; instead, they will have the strategies to examine the teaching and learning process thus giving them an advantage for confronting mediocre teaching.

Another framework that administrators can use to evaluate teacher effectiveness comes from The Measures of Effective Teaching Project (MET). According to The MET Project (2013), until recently, the measure of good teaching varied based on the

observers; these practices drew on as many different conceptions as the number of observers. In contrast, a well-selected observation instrument will provide a united notion of what teacher effectiveness looks like and standardize the lens through which observers view teaching. This type of instrument can also provide teachers with significant data to develop their practice, and has the probability to ultimately improve student learning (The MET Project, 2013). When selecting the instrument to use, it is critical to look at validity and reliability (The MET Project, 2013). Consideration must be given to training observers to help ensure that everyone has the same understanding of teacher quality for observation purposes, everyone must understand the purpose to the instrument, certifying observer proficiency, to ensure that observers are calibrated to the instrument's scoring criteria, and expected teacher outcomes to ensure accuracy and reproducibility of the observation data (The MET Project, 2013).

The foundation of a reliable and valid observation system takes careful thought. Investing thought in the design or selection of an observation instrument and its implementation procedures can help ensure that the emphasis placed on the quality of teachers' practice is reliable and valid. The MET Project (2013) has a list of benchmarks to use as a guide to determine the validity and reliability of an observation instrument.

- Does the instrument measure the behaviors of classroom teaching practice that are observable? (If not, it should not be considered for use in classroom observation or it should be modified to include only behaviors that are observable.)
- Does this instrument measure the behaviors of classroom teaching practice that are important to student learning outcomes? (If not, it should not be considered for use in classroom observation.)

- Are the included behaviors of teaching practice observable within a typical classroom observation time period? (They must be to be considered for use in classroom observation.)
- Do the criteria for judgment require support materials (e.g., lesson plans, student work, and communication with parents) or prior knowledge of other teacher competencies and behaviors that might be obtained beyond the typical classroom observation period? (If yes, these criteria would be better assessed through an ongoing and more frequent evaluation framework.)
- Is there sufficient validity evidence to support the intended use and interpretation of the observation data?

After analyzing the observation tool against these measures and selecting or developing the observation instrument to meet the needs of the organization, setting a foundation of consistent and accurate observation scores is the next critical step (The MET Project, 2013).

Observer training is necessary to guide the observers' understanding of the varying dimensions of the observation instrument and its rubrics. Observers should also be given the opportunity to hone their skills before conducting independent teacher observations (The MET Project, 2013). Without this step, the promise of having a shared definition of teacher effectiveness cannot be realized by all observers. Hence, opening opportunities for mediocre performance to go unidentified and not addressed. To provide consistent and accurate observation scores, all observers must have the same understanding of what constitutes each level of teacher quality as described by the observation tool (The MET Project, 2013). Without training this goal is not possible.

Johnson, Penny, & Gordon (2009) stated it is impossible to establish the kind of consistent, reproducible, and accurate scoring necessary to identify good teaching without effective training.

Effective observer training is also critical for establishing the validity of the campus observation instrument. The validity of observation scores cannot be higher than the reliability, the extent to which scores generated through the system's use are consistent and accurate (The MET Project, 2013). In other words, a campus cannot make valid inferences about the effectiveness of its teachers based on the instrument scores unless multiple observers arrive at the same scores independently and consistently. However, training observers to use an observation instrument can be a challenging task, especially due to the fact that most administrators bring prior experiences of observing classroom teaching practices with them. Differential professional knowledge, experience, and preferences can influence their focus, interpretations, and judgments causing them to produce different ratings and value different aspects of teaching. For these reasons, the goal of observer training, to get all observers to consistently score teacher observations the same, can be as much about encouraging them to forget established models of practice and unlearn old habits as it is about learning new practices (The MET Project, 2013). To end mediocre teaching, leaders must adopt new institutional habits (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

Although observation is a very important source of data, little insight is gained into teacher planning and reflective decision making, both of which are major causes of mediocre instruction (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Evaluation systems that only rely on one observation source by an administrator have been criticized for

allowing that measure to serve as the primary data collection tool (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Peterson, 2000; Stronge & Tucker, 2003). However, feedback from administrators and supervisors in a professional conference will help serve both the accountability and professional growth purposes of an evaluation system by the development of the classroom teacher (McEwan, 2003).

Conferences allow the evaluator to clarify the context for the lesson and to give feedback. Conferences can also be used as sources of data to assess reflection and decision making (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). In addition to the traditional pre and post conferences, principals should use conferencing as an opportunity to interview teachers (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Many supervisors have participated in the hiring process where a set of questions have been used to collect information or data to help make hiring decisions. In the same way, principals can use the conference with a teacher to intentionally assess their reflection and decision making about instruction (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Skilled principals, to make conferences more meaningful, add requirements that teachers bring evidence of student learning, spend time collaboratively analyzing student performance, and jointly identify the next steps with teachers (Platt, Tripp, Fraser, Warnock, & Curtis, 2008). This process is imperative for mediocre teachers considering the fact that given appropriate interventions, feedback and opportunities to learn most mediocre teachers can grow (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

One of the challenges of having conferences is finding the time to dedicate to having professional conversations about teacher performance (C. Danielson, 2010). Nevertheless, principals in every school setting need to devote adequate time to this

process. There is not a better use of a school leader's time other than engaging in conversation with teachers about the practice of teaching and learning (Danielson, 2010). The conversation between the evaluator and the classroom teacher, when focused around a common understanding of good delivery of instruction, and evidence of that type of instruction, offers a rich opportunity for professional growth and dialogue (C. Danielson, 2010). Although we are unable to create more time in the day, carefully setting priorities and a judicious schedule will make the best use of the time principals actually have available (C. Danielson, 2010).

The days of using an evaluation system limited to a single rating assigned at the end of the school year during a summative conference are long gone according to the New Teacher Project (2010). Instead, instructional leaders must strive to cultivate a performance-focused culture by observing their teachers frequently and giving feedback through professional conferences. Regular conversations with teachers to discuss overall classroom performance and student progress, professional goals and professional development needs, and the support the principal and school leaders will provide to meet those needs has to become a part of the routine practice of schools (The New Teacher Project, 2010). Both teachers and principals should come away from these types of conversations with a mutual understanding of what is needed on behalf of the teacher to accomplish both short term and long term goals and what support is needed to ensure probable success. Feedback is useless if either the teacher or the principal views the conferences as chores instead of accepting it for what it is intended to be, an opportunity to talk openly and constructively about good instructional practices (The New Teacher Project, 2010). Conferencing with teachers is so imperative to student achievement that

school districts should hold principals accountable for the quality of the feedback and support teachers receive, not just the quantity (The New Teacher Project, 2010). Once all of these components are in place, at the summative evaluation conference there should not be any surprises (The New Teacher Project, 2010).

Another step in confronting mediocre performance requires a commitment to address teacher performance in writing. At the core of monitoring and evaluation is feedback, the simplest prescription for improving education. Feedback however, does not occur automatically, but rather is a function by design (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). Hattie (1992) concluded that “the most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is feedback” (p.9). Written comments to teachers typically include vague statements that neither detail strengths nor define problems. Evaluation recommendations that include terms like, “should consider” are not likely to change a teacher’s performance (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Structured systems that address substandard teaching directly, humanely, and decisively are needed (Saphier & Haley, 1993). Categories of performance with supporting evidence drawn from detailed note taking will reveal which specific parts of a lesson are substandard (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Based on that data collection, professional development recommendations for mediocre teachers are easily identifiable.

The New Teacher Project’s report, *The Widget Effect*, documented over 99% of the teachers in the districts studied, were rated as satisfactory or better on their appraisals; that appraisals were not used to systematically support the development of teacher competencies; and that the final ratings teachers received were not predictive of improvements in student learning on any standard measure (OECD, 2013).

Over the years, there has been a growing movement in the United States to advance teaching through the use of the appraisal tool. Leaders want evaluations that are more useful in supporting professional and career development for teachers; and, they want ratings to be aligned with growth in student learning. As expectations shift, five themes emerge for giving an accurate written assessment of what happens in the classroom: (a) Principals need to use an appraisal system with multiple measures of teacher performance to get the best perspective, including observed practice, evidence of student learning, and other measures such as student and parent engagement. (b) Principals need to use an observation instrument that focuses more closely on the instructional practice as a basis for instructional improvement. (c) Principals need to differentiate teacher performance across three or more levels, because a two-level system, such as satisfactory or unsatisfactory, focuses primarily on minimal competence and can be insufficient. (d) Principals need to use teacher performance ratings measured by multiple measures and supported by an effective classroom observation instrument, intended to improve instruction, as the basis for career decisions, professional development, compensation, tenure and advancement. (e) Principals should allow teachers and teacher organizations to abundantly contribute in developing teacher observation tools (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009). Once these measures are in place, documentation to support ongoing instruction that relies on multiple data sources and records sufficient information about the teacher's performance, will allow principals to give an accurate written summary of a teacher's performance (C. Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Wilkerson, Manatt, Rogers, & Maughan, 2000).

Written evaluations of a teacher's performance must also include periodic feedback through formative assessment. By providing feedback throughout the evaluation cycle, the teacher is supported in his/her ongoing efforts to fulfill performance expectations and is able to identify areas of performance that need attention while there is still time to improve. Additionally, an opportunity for adequate notice is provided through periodic formative feedback, leading to a fair summative evaluation in which there should be no surprises. Summative evaluations provide an opportunity to determine individual merit based on collective performance over the course of a school year. Additionally, regular evaluation feedback affords the opportunity for judging worth, first, by viewing consistent performance measured against the goals of the school over a period of time and, second, by maintaining compatibility between individual performance and school goals. In an ongoing, systematic evaluation process, identifying system needs and relating those needs to performance ensures that the evaluation is concerned with the merit, internal value, worth, external value, and performance (Castetter, 1996; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Frels & Horton, 1994; Medley, Coker, & Soar, 1984; Scriven, 1973, 1995; Valentine, 1992). With a formative evaluation process that places emphasis on both improvement and purposes, formative aspects of evaluation intended to provide recognition for noteworthy performance, along with immediate and intermediate feedback for performance improvement and correction where needed, should be ongoing throughout the evaluation process. Moreover, with this evaluation process, the importance of professional development with a balance between the interests of the teacher and the interests of the school in a continuous improvement cycle is evident (Little, 1993). After all, the most fundamental purpose of the teacher evaluation system is

to improve both the teacher's and institution's performance (Colby, Bradshaw, & Joyner, 2002).

Addressing Performance with Professional Development

“If supervision is a service designed to help teachers become more effective so that their students will benefit, then staff development is an important domain of supervision” (Oliva & Pawlas, 1997, p. 54). From the effective dialogue that happens between a teacher and the building principal and when time is allocated and protected to have meaningful conversations, one of the other purposes of teacher evaluation becomes prevalent—the promotion of professional learning. A key element of improvement for mediocre teachers is to get them to take ownership of their improved plan requirements for professional development (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). State policies traditionally leave professional development decisions to school districts, campus administrators, and teachers. Although states require teachers to complete a certain amount of professional development for license renewal, they do not regulate the quality or the relevance of the professional development completed. To enhance the quality of professional development and help ensure the investments made in professional development improves student learning, governors can lead efforts to develop new models of professional development (Grossman & Hirsch, 2009). To improve both the quality and impact of professional development, principals should specifically gather and use student achievement data to assess the effectiveness of professional development; use teacher evaluations and student learning data to create individualized professional development plans for teachers; and establish research-based state standards to create a

vision for high-quality professional development (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Teacher evaluation typically serves as the catalysis for identifying professional development needs, but this identification can also happen through professional conversations between teachers and supervisors (C. Danielson, 2010). When dealing with mediocre teachers, a commitment to professional learning is imperative, not only because of poor quality teaching that requires immediate attention, but also because there is always room for improvement. No matter how good a lesson is, we can always make it better should be the sentiment of teachers. Just as in other professions, every teacher has the responsibility to be involved in a career-long quest to improve practice (C. Danielson, 2010). Building supervisors must remain aware of the fact that when addressing mediocre teachers, recommending professional development may be met with resistance. Yearly, a considerable amount of resources are spent by school districts on professional development to build teacher knowledge and skills (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). If mediocre teachers are reluctant to attend the staff development, the chances of them using the new learning to impact student achievement in a positive way is limited. Research confirms that professional development can affect teacher practice; therefore, principals should continue to encourage professional development and monitor its implementation very closely through formal and informal walkthroughs, and by having ongoing professional conversations (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

In 2007, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance reviewed 1,300 studies examining the impact professional development has on student

achievement; only nine of the studies were methodologically rigorous enough to draw valid and reliable conclusions. The findings from the nine studies indicate that quality professional development can improve both teacher practice and student achievement. Some common elements were identified by these researchers that effect professional development. Professional development that lasts for a minimum of 14 hours shows a positive and significant impact on student achievement (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). High-quality professional development is ongoing and affords teachers time to practice what they have learned and receive feedback on how well they are implementing what they have learned. High-quality professional development that is connected to school and district goals for student learning is more likely to improve student achievement (Penuel, Fiishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007). Professional development that is focused on improving a teacher's content knowledge is more likely to improve student achievement (Mundry & Boethel, 2005). Professional development decisions should be driven by data to determine the needs of teachers and determine the effects of the training on student learning (Mitchem, Wells, & Wells, 2003). Effective professional development for mediocre teachers should be intensive, ongoing, connected to practice, focused on student learning, and tied to school improvement goals (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Addressing through Self-Reflection

One of the greatest forms of professional growth is self-reflection (Schön, 1983). Becoming an effective teacher involves reflection—a deliberate and consistent examination of teaching practices in an effort to improve instructional practice and foster an environment in which students become engaged learners (Jay, 2003; Lester, 1988).

Good teachers do not just teach; rather, they think about what they plan to teach, they teach, and then they think about it, again (Stronge J. , 2008). In essence, they self-reflect. Reflection as a tool for practitioners develops pedagogical skills, comes from general self-awareness, and in the case of deliberative reflection, the practice of self-reflection remains mindful of the myriad of influences on teacher behavior (Rich & Hannafin, 2009). Reflection is a powerful force for improvement, the hallmark of skilled teachers, their ability to learn from experience through observation (Tucker, Stronge, Gareis, & Beers, 2003). In fact, expert teachers engage in instructional self-assessment as a practice for continual improvement (Covino & Iwanicki, 1996). Hatton and Smith (1993) addressed reflective practice as an active and deliberative cognitive process, involving sequences of interconnected ideas which take account of underlying beliefs and knowledge of the teacher. Zeichner and Liston (1996) asserted that reflection must include components of examination of thoughts, actions, and understandings that we bring to our classrooms. Minott (2008) asserted that reflection involves thinking about a whole range of teaching concerns, including students, the curriculum, instructional strategies, and the rules and organization of the classroom. Essential questions upon which teacher's reflect are deciding what to teach and how to teach it (Parsons & Brown, 2002). While experience can be valuable in the teaching profession, without reflection, experience alone will not improve instruction or teacher effectiveness. A combination of both experience and thoughtful analysis makes teachers more effective (Tucker et al., 2003).

Teachers face a countless number of daily choices: how to organize classrooms and curriculums, how to understand students' behaviors, how to protect learning time, and

so forth. Many choices involve matters so routine that a teacher can make and implement decisions automatically. Teachers make other decisions in the midst of an evolving situation after quickly reviewing the situation and recalling what has worked in similar scenarios. But teaching also involves complex choices about difficult problems that, if left unaddressed, often escalate. A different type of thinking is needed to address such choices. Tough choices call for teachers to engage in refined reflection, including self-reflection (L. Danielson, 2009).

Expert teachers adjust their thinking to accommodate the level of reflection a situation calls for. Mediocre teachers are not as clever in their reflection and therefore require intentional guidance that will enable them to identify and replicate best practice, refine serendipitous practice, and avoid inferior practice. Because of their ability to reflect, great teachers know not only what to do, but also why, whereas a mediocre teacher struggles with using these reasons simultaneously. Research (Constantino & De Lorenzo, 2001; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Glickman, 2002; Lambert, 2003) substantiates the role of reflection in teachers' professional growth. A disposition toward reflection, and a good sense of when there is a need to step back and think deeply should be part of all teachers' repertoires (Constantino & De Lorenzo, 2001; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Glickman, 2002; Lambert, 2003).

Guiding mediocre teachers to becoming reflective requires the understanding of reflective thinking. Dewey (1938) suggested that reflection begins with a dilemma. However, before Dewey, other theorists, including Socrates in his *Apology*, bravely identified reflection as important to the progress of reason (Stewart & Blocker, 2006). Further, philosopher Descartes championed that self-awareness leads to virtue (Fendler,

2003). As Dewey (1933) declared, effective reflection of educational practice must come from within a paradigm of self-awareness. Without that characteristic, any examination of teaching is far less potent as reflective enterprise and more akin to teacher evaluation processes often void of context. While effective teachers suspend making conclusions about a dilemma in order to gather information, study the problem, gain new knowledge, and come to a sound decision, which brings about new learning, mediocre teachers blame others for the dilemma. Lortie (1975) described how failing to reflect on teaching decisions leads to teaching by imitation rather than intentionality. To better understand the complexities of reflection, consider the four modes of thinking: technological, situational, deliberate, and dialectical (Danielson, 1992; Grimmer, Erickson, Mackinnon, & Riecken, 1990). Each mode requires an increasing degree of extensive examination and data seeking. Expert teachers adapt their reflective thinking to the situation, recognizing when each level of thought is sufficient to address a concern and when they need to move to the next mode.

Technological or formulaic thinking is based on prepackaged knowledge from an external source. According to Valli (1997), technical reflection refers to an examination of precise actions often assessed in terms of prescribed criteria. It relies on practices that have proven efficient and effective. Teachers with this type of reflective thinking might adopt general policies and rules that are part of a school culture. In deciding how to teach a concept, curriculum teams might adopt standardized instructional procedures they believe will result in greater student learning. Formulaic thinking works for many routine decisions: how a classroom teacher takes attendance, transitions students from subject to subject, implements emergency drills, and so on. As long as routines function effectively,

there is no need to change them. Likewise, there may be instructional practices that demand that the teacher follows a prescribed set of steps. A mediocre teacher may rely on formulaic thinking to make decisions when a more reflective style would suit his/ her purpose better (Danielson, 1992; Grimmer, Erickson, Mackinnon, & Riecken, 1990).

Making decisions using situational thinking means the teacher focuses only on information embedded in a specific context at a specific time, such as student behavior, they are observing in the moment. Reflection and reaction happen immediately. Valli (1997) describes this as reflection in and on action, whereby teachers must consider actions during and after occurrences as a means for professional growth. A teacher's day is full of appropriate opportunities for situational thinking. When a student's behavior is off-task, the teacher might use a low level of intervention such as eye contact to remind the student to focus on work. Just using situational thinking does not allow a teacher to look beyond the surface to consider root causes of problems. If a teacher is unable to look beyond the realities of the immediate, frustrating situation, situational thinking can lead to repeatedly making the same mistakes rather than reflection that halts a problem before it escalates (Danielson, 1992; Grimmer, Erickson, Mackinnon, & Riecken, 1990).

With deliberate thinking, an educator purposefully seeks more information than the immediate context provides by revisiting theory, talking with colleagues, interviewing students, or reviewing student records. The goal is to learn more to better understand the dilemma before prematurely reacting and making the wrong decision (Danielson, 1992; Grimmer, Erickson, Mackinnon, & Riecken, 1990). Using deliberative reflection, educators evaluated various viewpoints and research against pedagogical practices (Valli, 1997). The dialectical mode builds on deliberate thinking to gain understanding of a

situation and generate solutions. The greater a teacher's ability to suspend judgment and the broader the repertoire of pedagogical strategies, the more flexible dialectical thinking will be. Dialectical thinking is characterized by a change in how the thinker conceptualizes a particular episode that results in new teaching behaviors. When a teacher can think dialectically they are able to implement changes that bring about more productivity (Danielson, 1992; Grimmer, Erickson, Mackinnon, & Riecken, 1990).

Another way mediocre teachers can become better at reflection is through study groups or professional learning communities that introduce them to the various modes of thinking and guides the exploration of how teaching connects to each mode (Danielson, 1992). Discussions and role-plays will allow teachers to see which routine decisions can be made through technological or situational thinking and which may require the deliberate or dialectical modes. Identifying when different kinds of thinking are appropriate will help teachers make better use of instructional time. To foster higher levels of reflection, mediocre teachers need encouragement and guidance to ask themselves questions about their classroom practice (Danielson, 1992; Grimmer, Erickson, Mackinnon, & Riecken, 1990). Reflection can also become a way for a teacher to model teacher leadership behavior (Minott, 2008; Orlova, 2009; Rich & Hannafin, 2009). Additionally, a student who sees his or her teacher engaging in a reflective exercise may be more inclined to participate in such behavior themselves, especially if the reflection leads to more engaging lessons (Jay, 2003). Moreover, teachers who partake in the act of reflection may feel empowered about their teaching practices (Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Addressing with Videotaping

Video recording, as part of reflective teaching, has positively influenced the professional development efforts for teachers for many years (The MET Project, 2013). A mediocre teacher watching a video recording of their teaching can be an extremely valuable assessment tool. Among a variety of methods for teacher assessment, video recording is accepted as an innovative, effective and objectivity-driven tool. Video-recording makes evaluation self-oriented rather than a general evaluation done by students, colleagues or school administration. It also allows a teacher to view and listen to the class from a learner's perspective. Teachers evaluating their own teaching is a way to identify the strong aspects of their practice, as well as the weaknesses which may need to be changed and improved. By analyzing a videotape of the dynamics in their classroom, teachers will gain valuable insights into their teaching by identifying techniques that work and those that can be refined (The MET Project, 2013). Teachers should take initiatives and responsibility to evaluate their teaching and make improvements over time (Chan, 2010). Because videotaping can be more valuable than an observer's notes for allowing a teacher to literally see the strengths and weaknesses in their instruction, teachers are more likely to be able to make those improvements. Rich and Hannafin (2009) found that specific, ubiquitous, and easy to use, tools such as video-recording and analysis used for reflection could encourage such deliberative reflective behavior. What is unnoticed cannot be repaired.

Reforms in education have resulted in mandates that identify a need for educators to address accountability for all students, to use responsive and evidence-based instructional and assessment practices, to collaborate actively in tiered service delivery

models, to promote equity and social justice, and to use culturally sensitive and responsible practices (Etscheidt, Curran, & Sawyer, 2012). The permanence and objectivity potential of videotaping can allow educators to repeatedly and closely examine classroom practice (Orlova, 2009) and sustain professional development (Hennessey & Deaney, 2009). Reflection being the interaction of experiences with analysis of beliefs about those experiences (Newell, 1996), a developmental process resulting in more in-depth and sophisticated reflection over time (Pultorak, 1996 cited in Etscheidt, Curran, & Sawyer, 2012), from videotaping allows teachers to identify problems and generate solutions, thereby building a professional knowledge base constructed through experience and a consciousness of professional action (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993; Copeland, Birmingham, De La Cruz, & Lewin, 1993). Video reflection enables teachers to recognize the limitations of their personal assumptions, acknowledge other perspectives, consider the moral and ethical consequences of choices, and clarify the reasoning processes involved in making and evaluating decisions, in turn enhancing their growth (Harrington & Hathaway, 1994 cited in Lee & Wu, 2006). Reflection basically helps teachers to achieve self-evaluation and reflection skills which can be developed spontaneously through practice (Lee & Wu, 2006). Viewing teaching at a time without immediate demands of the classroom permits teachers to critically notice and examine the intricacies of the teaching process (Sherin & van Es, 2005), identifying important interactions and making connections between interactions and learning concepts (van Es & Sherin, 2002). Goodlad (1984) further asserted that with resources available for proper videotaping lessons for the purpose of self-evaluation, teachers can engage successfully in a considerable amount of self-improvement. The process of self-

evaluation for teachers requires them to reflect upon the effectiveness of their instructional delivery for the purpose of informing areas of improvement in their teaching skills (Keller, Brady, & Taylor, 2005).

Various approaches have been used in teacher education to support teacher self-evaluation. Haertel (1993) cited in Lee & Wu (2006), classified advances in educational research methods that have influenced teacher self-evaluation into three categories: (a) rating scales and self-reports; (b) electronic recordings; and (c) teacher reflection and teaching portfolios. In the study of Chan (2010), methods for self-evaluation of teachers are mentioned as: self-monitoring, audio and video recording, students' feedback on teaching, feedback from observation by other colleagues and experts (Chan, 2010, pp. 1-4). Self-monitoring, according to Chan (2010), refers to teachers documenting in portfolios or using video logs. It is the monitoring of a teacher's self-performance and a meaningful source of data collection. Teachers either ask themselves questions or complete a form in order to meet the goals and objectives of the lesson.

Videotaping helps teachers keep record of their performance and allows a replay of their actual performance in detail (Chan, 2010). Recordings show the real performance of teachers and helps teachers to track their own progress (Chan, 2010). Videotaping along with self-reflection is highly useful as to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher, and it does not take as much time as peer observation/feedback methods of evaluation, which aim to provide feedback, support and assistance from colleagues (Donnelly, 2007). However, in capturing permanent and exchangeable representations of practice, videotaping encourages a collaborative approach to reflection and is consistent with the original ideas of John Dewey (McCullagh, 2012). According to Gun (2011),

teachers should hold up a mirror to their practice, which will lead to making them more conscious of what is beneath the surface. He also asked a rhetorical question: “What better tool can we provide teachers for doing this than a camera in the classroom?” (Gun, 2011, p. 128).

Self-evaluation of teaching using videotaping has been used for quite some time. According to (Capizzi & et al., 2010), examination of videotaped lessons allowed intensive evaluation and self-reflection on lesson components with active involvement by teacher candidates. Ayers (2003) noted that teachers must be self-critical lest they lose capacity for professional growth. Video observations provide teachers the opportunity to further analyze their teaching from multiple unbiased perspectives (Brophy, 2004). Arther (1999) suggests teacher growth hinges on connecting feedback to actual examples. She says that unsubstantiated feedback rarely has lasting effects; whereas, when feedback is connected to actual samples, it becomes a powerful instructional tool.

According to Grossman (2005), microteaching grew out of the process-product line of research, which identified particular teaching skills that correlated with gains in student achievement and then tried to teach these discrete skills to teachers. Recently, video capture and analysis tools have been developed to optimize the benefits of these methods, providing potentially deeper and more precise insights into teachers' thought processes for practical inquiry (Rich & Hannafin, 2008). Video analysis offers potentially rich, complementary, and highly situated methods to elicit teachers' beliefs about specific teaching practices (Rich & Hannafin, 2008). It is necessary for teacher development and growth. Feedback in general plays a vital role in improving the skill of teaching. What makes the feedback in the videotaping unique is that it allows teachers to look at

themselves ‘from a distance’ and with space for reflection, thereby giving them a realistic picture of their own skills, or self-image (Fuller & Manning, 1973; Hargie et al., 1983; Hosford, 1980 cited in Fukkink, Trienekens, & Kramer, 2010).

Moving Beyond with Mentorship

Pairing a mediocre teacher with a colleague who demonstrates expertise in posing and solving problems may assist the mediocre teacher in becoming effective (Capizzi, Wehby, & Sandmel, 2010). Demonstrating unique problem solving ability usually reflects someone who has the skill set to listen analytically, focus on key information that helps clarify what needs to be explored, and one who has an expanded repertoire of options. Having a mentor who poses questions that lead their mentee to ask productive questions of themselves, to consider the big picture of information that might provide additional insight and details, and generate their own possible solutions will lead a mediocre teacher towards becoming more reflective (Capizzi, Wehby, & Sandmel, 2010). If the colleagues collaborate in drafting a plan for implementing change and formally schedule follow-up discussions, this will encourage the mediocre teacher to self-monitor and reflect further (Danielson, 1992; Grimmer, Erickson, Mackinnon, & Riecken, 1990). While the description of characteristics of a mentor is similar to peer coaching in that the collegial partnerships are formed to foster professional development, mentorship partnerships are based on an improvement plan in which the leadership of one teacher is utilized in a coaching process to “advise, support, observe, and confer” (Edwards, 1995, p. 73) with a protégé. In *Mentorship Program: A Model Project* (1999), the functions of mentoring are outlined as: (a) teaching, (b) sponsoring, (c) encouraging, (d) counselling, and (e) befriending. In a study by Freiberg, Zbikowski, and Ganser (1997), mentors

reported that observing other teachers, attending conferences, and consulting with peers all added to their positive growth.

Moving Beyond with Coaching

As was said so eloquently by Richard Henry Dunn, "He who dares to teach must never cease to learn" (Fiore & Whitaker, 2005, p. 148). Through coaching, all teachers can develop habits of mind conducive to effective decision making (Danielson 2009). Peer coaching or collegial partnerships are formed when two or more colleagues work together to better understand teaching and learning. (Showers & Joyce, 1996) described peer coaching programs as components of professional development models that focused on teacher partnerships and provide reflective, non-judgmental feedback. Voluntary partnerships are built on support, caring, and collaboration. Based on Cogan and Goldhmer's clinical supervision model, the peer coaching partnerships, were focused on making 'teacher talk' become an everyday occurrence in schools. Darling-Hammond and McLaughh (1995) supported the concept that an organizational culture that valued collegial interactions among teachers promoted the spread of ideas and shared professional learning.

Hall & Simeral, (2008) believe that individuals who seek to be effective coaches have to possess and cultivate a number of interpersonal and professional skills.

- An effective coach has to be highly self-reflective. In order to teach others an inquiry-approach to learning is necessary.
- An effective coach is able to build and maintain trustworthy relationships. Strong interpersonal and people skills are important for connecting, nurturing and developing relationships. Effective coaches understand that

teachers are more likely to take part in a learning venture with someone whom they trust.

- An effective coach is skilled in recognizing others' strengths, abilities, and beliefs. The prevalent notion that in order to improve we must identify our weaknesses and work through them to better ourselves is the opposite of what effective coaches believe. Knowing our strengths are what drive us, and propel us to work hard, coaches refine teacher's strengths and talents by seeing potential where others see deficiencies.
- An effective coach is a servant leader. They support teachers behind the scenes and will not take credit for the improvements made. Greenleaf, (1970) describes the servant leader coach as "one who seeks to draw out, inspire, and develop the best and highest within people from the inside out" (p. 3).
- An effective coach is patient. They understand that change does not happen immediately, it is a gradual and deliberate walk alongside teachers, celebrating the incremental successes.
- An effective coach considers "the bus question." Are they coaching teachers to become independent by helping them embrace meaningful change, building their capacity, increasing their instructional skills, and strengthening their self-reflective tendencies?

Once an individual is identified to have these attributes, following a three step coaching model can further the development of practitioners (Hall & Simeral, 2008). The first step is meeting with the teacher one on one to set collaborative professional growth

goals, keeping in mind the desired outcome for the students. Step two is creating an individualized coaching plan. Effective coaching is personal; therefore, determining the teachers' specific needs is imperative for the plan. The third step is implementing, documenting and reflecting. This step includes keeping anecdotal notes of progress made, meeting regularly, and measuring the impact of the coaching relationship.

Research by Gibson & Dembo (1984), concluded that the relationships between student achievement (knowledge and cognitive skill), teacher efficacy, and interactions with assigned coaches (self-report measures) in a sample of 18 grade seven and eight history teachers in 36 classes implementing a specific innovation with the help of six coaches, showed a positive outcome. Student achievement was higher in the classrooms of teachers who had more contact with their coaches and in classrooms of teachers with greater confidence in the effectiveness of education.

Final Options for Moving Beyond the Plateau

Mediocre performance is caused by many factors and takes on many forms. Classroom and school wide performance alike are affected by teachers' lack of expertise, attitudes, external influences and beliefs (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). In this age of accountability, it is an expectation of principals to demonstrate proficiency in providing instructional leadership in the form of mentoring, coaching, and collaboration. Blatant forms of teacher incompetence are easy to identify and clearly leave teachers in the hot seat, but just being mediocre is a more difficult issue to handle (Pascopella, 2006). Confronting the lack of expertise, the poor attitude, the poor performance, or the chronic personal problems of a mediocre teacher requires a distinct set of skills and knowledge on the part of the supervisor (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

Guaranteed to tie up district resources, cause emotional drain, and cause widespread paranoia, firing is an inappropriate and unrealistic first response to dealing with mediocre performance (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). This measure should only be considered once leaders have used data to provide teachers with a continuum of potential solutions. Most of the various types of mediocrity, while highly time consuming to handle appropriately, are often not related to incompetent teachers or a candidate for dismissal (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). However, without supervisory intervention, mediocre teachers are not likely to spontaneously improve (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). To achieve the real desired change in performance, three essential conditions are needed, competence, conviction and control (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

Supervisors need conviction to identify mediocre performance and not look the other way, stay the course and see the process of working with the mediocre teacher through to improvement, decide to invest the energy to dismissal if all else fails, or keep their focus on those most affected by mediocre performance—students (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Competence is needed to understand the unique values, skills, and history of the mediocre teacher, identify the cause of the poor performance in proper context, give credible, specific feedback in writing and in professional conferences, know the language of the teacher contract and the law, and accept the intuitional contributions and cultural shortcomings that contributed to this type of performance (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Lastly, supervisors will need control in having the human and financial resources necessary to support improvement efforts,

having a network of supportive peers, and if needed, support from the superintendent and school board (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000).

When multiple measures have been implemented and instructional practices continue to fail to meet the intended needs of students, improving and maintaining professional service may take the form of a variety of personnel decisions, including assisting the teacher in improving performance, personnel transfers, and when necessary, termination.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

One of the most pressing issues today in education is accountability. Student performance is rated across the nation and schools are deemed adequate or inadequate based on that performance. School leaders, when asked to describe the biggest problem they face in trying to raise student achievement responded – mediocre instruction – the inability to provide reliable, consistent high quality teaching in every classroom (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). This is the level of teaching that cannot be documented as incompetence but, rather borders on incompetence and prompts a supervisor to believe that teaching needs to change or improve (Kaye, 2004). When school leaders are pressed to elaborate, mediocre teaching is described as “just getting by” (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). These teachers’ performance is seldom seen as bad enough to lead to teacher dismissal but student learning is diminished (Platt, Tripp, Ogden, & Fraser, 2000). Mediocre teachers can best be described as resistant to hard work (Whitaker, Leading School Change, 2010). The ability is there, but the drive and desire to consistently do more, or to challenge students more is not.

As noted by Guskey (2005), the accountability movement continues to present challenges for principals. The quality of the teaching force is of great concern to principals (Bridges, 1990). Identifying mediocre teaching is only a minor portion of combating ineffectiveness in the classroom. The principal must also address the needs of these teachers, find ways to move their mediocre teaching beyond the plateau, and ultimately improve instruction. “The key to improved student learning is to ensure good teaching in more classrooms more of the time (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).” In order for

this to occur, intentionality is required every step of the way (Whitaker, Leading School Change, 2010). Through the use of meaningful evaluations to provide feedback, assessment data, active monitoring, walkthroughs, and student surveys, mediocre performance can be identified. Professional development opportunities, appropriate interventions, conferences, and video-taped lesson reviews are ways to address mediocrity. To move these teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness, coaching, mentors, self-reflection techniques, and as a last resort, removal and non-renewal are options. With intentionality, mediocre teaching can be transformed.

Description of the Research Design

The design of the research involved collecting qualitative data from a focus group of six principals sharing their leadership perspective and speaking from experience regarding the supervision of mediocre teachers. This qualitative study determined if school principals, after identifying mediocre teaching, have the capability to effectively address the areas of academic concern of mediocre teachers, and strategically move them beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. This study also examined from the principal's perspective, the impact of mediocre teaching on student achievement and the campus' accountability rating. Qualitative research provides depth and detail because it includes opinions, experiences, and is used to help develop concepts. Data are in the form of words, and are based on reasons that evaluate a general proposition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Research Questions

This purpose of this study was to investigate the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the characteristics of a mediocre teacher?

2. How do principals identify mediocre teaching?
3. What is the perceived effect a mediocre teacher has on student outcomes?
4. What is the perceived impact mediocre teaching has on a school campus' accountability rating?
5. In what ways can principals address the needs of mediocre teachers?
6. How can principals move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness?
7. What perceived barriers do principals face when moving mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness?

Setting

The setting for this study was a large, suburban school district in the state of Texas that encompasses 186 miles. The district houses a number of large industrial businesses within its borders, including international corporations and a number of small factories and plants.

More than 6,000 classroom teachers, with an average of 11.83 years of teaching experience are employed by this school district. An excess of 300 campus administrators, principals and assistant principals, supervise the nearly 100 school campuses that educate over 113,000 students in this Texas school district.

Table 3.1 illustrates the educational degrees held by the teaching staff of the sample school district. A bachelor's degrees has been earned by 75% of the teaching staff; 24.9 % of the teaching staff earned a master's degree; and 0.1% earned a doctorate degree.

Table 3.1

Range of Degrees Held by Teaching Staff of Sample School District

Level of Degree	#	%
Bachelor's	4,794	75.0
Master's	1,591	24.9
Doctorate	7	0.1

Table 3.2 illustrates the demographic variance in the sample school district. A majority, or 73.5%, of the teachers of the district were White, 12.8 % were Hispanic, and 10.5 % were African American, 1.8% Asian, and 1.1% were 2 or more races. Combined, Americans Indians and Pacific Islanders comprised less than 0.2% of the sample staff.

Table 3.2

Teaching Staff Demographics of the Sample School District

Staff Ethnicity	#	%
White	4,698	73.5
Hispanic	819	12.8
African American	671	10.5
Asian	115	1.8
Two or More Races	70	1.1
American Indian/Pacific Islander	19	0.3

Depicted in Table 3.3, the percentages of male and female staff of the sample district are shown. Of the staff members, 17% are male and 83% are female.

Table 3.3

Gender of Sample School District

Staff Gender	#	%
Male	1,319	17.0
Female	6,440	83.0

Participants

The data for this research were collected from a focus group of six principals giving their perspective and speaking from their experiences supervising mediocre teachers. These six elementary school principals were all employed by the sample school district. Experience ranged from 4 years to 13 years as a building principal. Each principal supervised an elementary school campus with 850 or more students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, and 40 or more teachers. Principals shared perspectives regarding general education classroom teachers, special education teachers, intervention teachers and instructional specialists.

Procedures

The processes followed to conduct this qualitative research study are listed below.

- Permission was obtained from the sample school district superintendent to proceed with the intended research topic.
- Permission was received from the University of Houston CPHS committee to conduct human research.

- Defining the focus group, informants whose characteristics represent those of the target research population, elementary school principals with at least three years of experience, were invited to participate in the discussion.
 - A group of six principals were led through an open discussion by a moderator. Every attendee participated.
 - The focus group moderator gave disclosures in an open format with the goal of generating the maximum number ideas and opinions from each participant in the time allotted.
- Designing focus group questions
 - Focus group participants were given an opportunity to view the questions in advance.
 - Questions were open-ended, straight forward and to the point without unambiguous words.
- Recruiting and preparing for participants
 - Recruited participants had the commonality of the profession, but not necessarily relationships with each other.
 - Participant inclusion/exclusion criteria were established at the beginning of the study.
- Conducting the focus group
 - Norms were set before the start of the discussion.
 - The focus group discussion lasted no longer than 90 minutes.

- Focus group discussion was structured around a set of predetermined questions to lead each participant to contributing responses that answered the research questions.
- Discussion was free-flowing with the intention of allowing comments to stimulate the thinking and sharing of all participants.
- Analyzing the data
 - All data collected from the focus group were transcribed into a written document by the researcher.
 - Using an Excel spreadsheet, all comments were imputed to find common themes across the entries for the questions.
 - Categories for organizing the data, were established and a number and was assigned to each category.
 - By using the sort function, group entries were put into categories.

Instrument

A focus group, a type of in-depth interview, was used during the data collection stage of this research project. Participants, a group of elementary school principals, were engaged in conversation using predetermined questions. Data, the interaction inside the group, were video recorded, and transcribed into a written document. Participants were moderated through the questions listed below.

Focus Group Questions

1. What are the perceptions of the characteristics of a mediocre teacher?
2. How do principals identify mediocre teaching?
3. What is the perceived effect a mediocre teacher has on student outcomes?

4. What is the perceived impact mediocre teaching has on a school campus' accountability rating?
5. What affect does mediocre teaching have on the overall culture of your campus?
6. In what ways can principals address the needs of mediocre teachers?
7. What type of support would aide with working with mediocre teachers?
8. How can principals move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness?
9. At what point do you deem it appropriate to move to the final option of nonrenewal for a teacher?
10. What perceived barriers do principals face when moving mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness?
11. When making hiring decisions, what measures are taken to avoid selecting mediocre teachers?

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Data

The purpose of this study was to determine if school principals, after identifying mediocre teaching, have the capability to effectively address the areas of academic concern of mediocre teachers, and strategically help move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. This study also examined from the principals' perspective the impact of mediocre teaching on student achievement and the campus' accountability rating. Seven research questions were used to investigate this study. Data were gathered in the form of a focus group discussion. The focus group was formed from a sample (N = 6) of elementary school principals drawn from a population of 53 administrators who serve as elementary school principals in the sample school district.

For the focus group, participants were provided a copy of the discussion questions in advance to allow an opportunity for reflection on their experiences. Results reported in chapter four are in both a narrative and tabular form. The findings section includes a narrative presenting the results from the focus group interview, followed by a report by question according to common themes. Lastly, the conclusion section summarizes the report of findings.

Findings

The focus group was comprised of six elementary school principals from one school district with years of total experience in education that ranged from 13 to 38 years. Participants' years of experience as administrators ranged from 12 to 24 years, with a range of 4 to 13 years' experience as building principals.

The results for each question are reported in a narrative format.

1. What are the characteristics of a mediocre teacher?

All six participants noted that currently they supervise multiple mediocre teachers. Similar characteristics of mediocre teachers were described by all the participants. Participant 2 noted, “I get so frustrated, I see such great potential, they can be amazing with more initiative and drive, but there is no desire to do better.” In addition, all six participants were able to describe this particular character trait, giving multiple details.

Comments included, “They don’t do any more or less, but they will follow a plan if someone else created it. So if it fails, it’s not their fault.” “They are masterful at covering up and looking like they are doing the job well.” “Their attitude and ability do not match.”

Four of the six noted there was some form of complacency and a lack of effort with mediocre teachers. Participant 3 stated, “The mediocre teacher does not want to see what they can do differently, no self-reflection.” Participant 6 added, “They make it to a certain point and stop.” Participant 4 noted, “These teachers can take it further but will not and do not want to.” Participant 1 stated, “They rely on someone else to help with their kids.” Concurred by all six participants was the concern that, as campus principals, they aided in the teachers mediocrity because the responsibility for student success overrides the lack of effort by a mediocre teacher. Participant 1 asked, “Does the culture of the [school] district contribute to complacency because they [mediocre teachers] are given everything?” Participants 2, 3, and 4 responded, “Yes,” in agreement.

The participants also described mediocre teachers as not taking ownership, not wanting to be accountable, and therefore, teaching a grade level that has a state accountability test is not desirable for these teachers. Staff development was available and attended by all the mediocre teachers described in this focus group discussion. Participant 4 held, “The teachers will go to staff development, they can say all the buzz words, but you do not see evidence of implementation in the classroom.” Participant 6 added, “Some components of instructional practice are evident, but not the best.” Interventions and other types of academic support were provided for the students in each mediocre teacher’s class at the campuses of all participants. Participant 1 responded, “We allow their kids to go to intervention because we want what’s best for the students.” All five of the other participants agreed with the students being the priority.

Although the work habits of the mediocre teacher were not favorably described by the participants, their social personality was. Participant 5 stated, “The mediocre teachers I supervise are some of the nicest people you will ever meet.” Participant 6 agreed with that depiction and added, “They come to work, and they have good attendance.” Participant 1 remarked, “Their colleagues like them and they get the sympathy vote often.”

2. How do principals identify mediocre teaching?

Various methods for identifying mediocre teachers were discussed by the participants. Each of them disclosed combinations of approaches were used to identify mediocre teaching, with the strong theme of walkthroughs and courageous conversations being the common practice used by the principals. Participant 1 used walkthroughs, data, and conversations. Participant 2 used comparative data from team walkthroughs and

conversations. Participant 3 used observations of the physical environment, conversations, frequent walkthroughs, and the determination of whether or not the level of instruction delivered in the classroom would be deemed sufficient for the participant's personal children. Participant 4 used data, planned questioning strategies, and classroom observations. Participant 5 used extended classroom walkthroughs and comparative data. Participant 6 used classroom walkthroughs, informal and formal observation data, and a measure of whether the instructional delivery method would be considered adequate for the participant's personal children. Personally attending professional development related to performing quality classroom observations was also mentioned by Participant 6. "To know what to truly look for when I visit a classroom, I have attended specific training and worked with a consultant," remarked Participant 6. Training the administrative team to ensure that everyone knows what to look for when walking into the classroom was mentioned by Participant 3, and two of the other participants agreed that this approach had been used by them. "Specialized training for the coaches, assistant principal and [me] is how we ensure that we all are able to walk into a classroom and have an eye for what is and is not [a] good practice."

During the classroom walkthroughs discussion, participants remarked, "I look at what the kids are doing, and listen for the type of feedback the teacher is giving." "I plan my walks at different times of the day in order to see what instruction looks like throughout the day." "The typical walkthrough does not always show what is really happening in the classroom because it is a small moment; therefore, I spend a substantial amount of time in all my walkthroughs to get a better understanding of what is happening in the classroom."

When speaking about having conversations with mediocre teachers, there were some commonalities mentioned by the participants. Discussed first, participants mentioned the lack of depth and complexity when describing instructions. Participant 4 stated, “Everything is just surface conversation, [the mediocre teacher] can’t talk in depth about instruction.” Participant 1 indicated, “When I have those courageous conversations with a mediocre teacher, I noticed they do not have any answers.”

Next, they discussed the lack of background knowledge about their students. Participant 2 mentioned, “Because mediocre teachers choose not to connect with their students, they are unable to have meaningful conversations about them.” Participant 4 responded, “You have to know the right questions to ask because once you do, you will find out that the mediocre teacher does not know her kids.” Participant 1 qualified, “Because of the amount of [outside of the classroom] support given to the students of a mediocre teacher, they do not know their students’ academic needs. They do not spend enough time with their students to get to know their needs.”

All six participants used some form of classroom visits, walkthroughs and/or classroom observations, as a way to identify mediocre teachers. Five of the six used data, and four of the six used one on one conversations. All six of the participants agreed that student surveys were a valuable aide in identifying mediocre teaching. Participant 3 shared, “When I conducted a student survey, the kids were brutally honest. They don’t have a filter.” Participant 2 added, “The students talked about instructional practices in the classroom. Using student surveys was very eye opening.” Participant 1 stated, “I agree with using student surveys. The students know what should happen in the classroom.” Participant 6 concurred, “Listening to students’ opinions can spark

conversation with mediocre teachers.” “I can tell so much [about a teacher] by what the students tell me,” added Participant 5.

Environmental observations were an additional source for identifying mediocre teachers by four of the six participants. Participant 4 remarked, “I look at how they have their room set up. Is the space purposeful or is it set up that way because you like it?” Participant 1 said, “I look for what the teacher is expecting based on the set up of the classroom. Is there a clear pathway to move around the room?” Participant 3 stated, “I look for spaces to work with students in small groups and large groups.”

Observations from district support staff and peer to peer observations were used by three of the six participants. Participant 6 stated, “The district coordinators coming out and bringing a different set of eyes is a good observation source to help identify mediocre teaching.” Participants 2 and 5 agreed. Participant 6 also stated, “Peer to peer observations with structured feedback also provides the principal and the mediocre teacher good information.” Participant 1 agreed adding, “Collegial conversation, when it is honest, is powerful.” Participant 4 agreed with both statements.

3. What effect does a mediocre teacher have on student outcomes?

The lack of quality, higher level instruction was the common theme shared by the six participants when answering this question.

Remarks included, “...depends on the type of students, if the kids do okay [academically] then evidence is hard to find, but the kids are not pushed to achieve more,” “They only reach the minimal amount with students, even though the students are capable of doing so much better,” “Student growth is impeded because the mediocre teacher just does enough to get by and the students take on that attitude.” “They do just

enough and do not push further, even if the kids can get there. That affects the students because they have not been given the best.”

Discussion of the difficulty in finding evidence to support the negative effects mediocre teaching has on student outcomes posed a challenge as determined by the participants. This was due largely in part to the amount of instructional support given to struggling students by campus support personnel in the form of math, reading, and science interventions. Participant 5 noted, “Sometimes you cannot know, because of the support given to these teachers. You have to drill down and look at the specifics.” Participants 1, 4, and 6 confirmed this belief.

Participant 6 remarked, “It becomes a question of which kids you should put in the [mediocre teacher’s] class. You do not want them to have a mediocre teacher two years in a row.” The determination of this statement was supported by Participant 4 giving input stating, “If a student has a mediocre teacher for consecutive years, it really hurts them.” Participant 5 added, “You really have to look at where students start and end when they have a mediocre teacher because they will pad grades to cover up their lack of good instruction.” It was stated that parents of the students in a mediocre teacher’s class often do not complain because their child’s grades are very good. Participant 1 remarked, “They give passing grades although the instruction is not quality.”

4. What impact does mediocre teaching have on a school campus’ accountability rating?

All six participants agreed that mediocre teaching can have a negative impact on the accountability rating of a school district and school campus. Providing intervention support for the students of mediocre teachers can sometimes result in the data of these

teachers becoming skewed was also a general consensus of all six participants. In addition, five of the six participants discussed that they strategically place mediocre teachers in teaching assignments where they can cause the least amount of harm.

Comments included, “We put a few [mediocre teachers] in each grade level to avoid having an overwhelming effect of one team,” “If there are enough strong teachers to cover the deficit that school year, then mediocre teacher performance may not hurt the accountability rating,” “They [mediocre teachers] can affect scores depending on the number of students they teach and if you cannot provide enough interventions for the students they teach,” “Overall scores may not reflect such because in this district we provide so many interventions for struggling students and most of them come from mediocre teachers’ classrooms. But, without the support their individual averages are very low.” “We have so many rescue plans in place: we provide support, support, support. As soon as a student shows deficits we address them through interventions, which allows a mediocre teacher’s data to deceive you.”

5. What affect does mediocre teaching have on the overall culture of your campus?

Participant 5 shared, “You [principals] have to be careful, because they appear to always be looking out for the best interest of others; so they get the sympathy vote [from their colleagues].” This same participant also added, “Having that type of influence, mediocre teachers will persuade others to do just as little as they are to keep themselves from looking worse.” This type of influence that comes from being well liked by their colleagues was concurred by a total of four participants. Participant 6 commented, “The teams love each other and they don’t want to see anyone upset.” Participant 1 remarked,

“They are very well liked and can turn your staff against you. When this happens you just have to stand on your reputation.” Participant 3 stated, “If you get a team that supports a mediocre teacher they will cover up any inadequacies.”

Five of the six participants stated that other staff members have spoken with them in private about the inadequate performance of a mediocre teacher, but they do not want the teacher to receive any type of disciplinary consequences. Participant 4 stated, “Their colleagues will say, ‘It’s not their fault,’ when they come to share specifics about a mediocre teacher.” Participant 6 stated, “Teachers come to complain but they don’t want me to address [the mediocre teacher].” Participant 1 stated, “Colleagues don’t want to be partners with them, and they will tell on them in private but teachers will not support the principal against a colleague publically and if they do, they taper it down not to hurt feelings.” Participant 2 stated, “The colleagues know and are happy that it’s [mediocre performance] being addressed, but they will only voice the concern privately.” Participant 5 stated, “Teachers will share plans, ideas, suggestions, teaching strategies and everything else with them because they like them, but will complain about them in private.”

6. In what ways can principals address the needs of mediocre teachers?

Five of the six, participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, identified coaching as a method for addressing the needs of mediocre teachers. Coaching was described by the participants as objective colleagues who could help the mediocre teacher get better. Five of the six, participants 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6, agreed that peer observation could be used to support mediocre teachers. One-half, three of the participants used videotaping lessons for self-reflection as a means for assisting mediocre teachers. Participant 1 and Participant 6

determined that targeted, specific staff development would aid in addressing the needs of mediocre teachers. A description of the type of staff development was quoted as, “Outside of the district, targeted staff development based on the specific need of the teacher.”

7. What type of support would aide with working with mediocre teachers?

All six participants wanted additional funds to hire support staff to work with mediocre teachers. Participant 5 stated, “Too often we have to choose between the Band-Aid fix, pull kids to [improve] the scores, and long-term fix, coaching/teaching alongside a teacher in need of support. More funding to hire people to pull kids and people to coach teachers, would be great.” Participant 1 remarked, I would like to have additional staff – specifically more specialists. They would do a combination of pull outs and push ins. We are finding that push ins have moved some of our mediocre teachers to push themselves a bit more.” Participant 6 added, “Having additional support personnel will allow a multitude of interventions and coaching opportunities to become available for mediocre teachers.” Participants 2 and 3 concurred.

Two of the six participants wanted district support personnel to assist the mediocre teachers on their campus. Participant 3 said, “District support, external visitors, to model and observe lessons will help with my mediocre teachers.” Participant 4 remarked, “I would like district coaches to work with my mediocre teachers consistently to allow the teachers to have a neutral opinion about their teaching.”

8. How can principals move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau?

“Depending on what stage you are in with the mediocre teacher, moving them beyond the plateau can look similar to the addressing stage, or it can look more formal

with documentation,” remarked Participant 6. Participant 2 concurred, stating “If you have repeatedly addressed their needs through a variety of measures, coaching, peer observations, staff development, and conversations, and you see change, there is hope to continue with that support because it will help them move beyond. But without any change in behavior, the next step is to move to a teacher in need of assistance plan.” Participant 1 agreed, “You’ve tried a list of things from the least invasive to the most invasive in hopes of seeing a change. At that point it’s time to move into the administrator role. You have to raise their level of concern.” Participant 5 added, “When the steps I have put in place to address a mediocre teacher do not move them beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness, I will sometimes have to find a spot where they can do the least amount of [instructional] damage until I can coach them out [of the profession].” Participants 3 and 4 corresponded it was important for the mediocre teachers to take ownership of their lack of ability in order to move beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness and they helped these teachers get to this point by using the methods of self-reflection, coaching, and other non-administrator led approaches. When these methods were no longer effective, the next step was formal documentation.

9. At what point do you deem it appropriate to move to the final option of nonrenewal for a teacher?

Participant 1 stated, “...whose the one [mediocre teacher] who is hurting the kids, the team, and the school the most? Because, they are the ones you will have to target first.” Participant 2 stated, “...depends on the individual teacher and what’s going on with them. A number of decisions could be made: conversations [with the mediocre teacher] about moving to a teacher in need of assistance plan, actually writing a plan, or

requesting the nonrenewal of a contract.” Participant 4 stated, “There are different degrees of mediocre. The worst degree is targeted for the time and effort it will take.” Participant 5 stated, “I need concrete evidence, not just simply being mediocre. Those who never show any improvement after repeated help.” Participant 6 stated, “When I have exhausted all possibilities, I feel it’s time to go to that level. At that point I’ve run out of options.” “When you know that you know that you have done everything and the teacher’s disposition doesn’t change,” remarked Participant 3.

10. What barriers do principals face when moving mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness?

Barriers mentioned by all six participants were related to the relationship the mediocre teacher has with their peers and the negative effects the participants faced as a result of taking measures to move them beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. “Peers can be very ‘blue’ and sympathetic towards their colleagues. I have been bad-mouthed to the staff for addressing a mediocre teacher,” commented Participant 1. “Rejection, because the documentation I created was not sufficient or severe enough to take the steps to the next level. Mediocre teachers’ performance is not always bad enough to document.” “Their colleagues love them and they will cover for them. When they are mad, they tell everyone and you become the bad guy,” according to Participant 5. Participant 4 stated, “Mediocre teachers are very well liked and addressing them or trying to move them can have a reverse affect because they get the sympathy vote.”

The six participants all agreed that moving to the final option of nonrenewal was challenging, time consuming, and in order to get the desired results, needed to be focused on one or two mediocre teachers at the most per school year. Participant 1 stated, “It’s

very draining emotionally, stress wise and time wise, so you really have to prioritize.”

Participant 3 stated, “You can only address one or two [mediocre teachers] a year for the final option because of the amount of time it will take to go through the nonrenewal process.” Participant 6 remarked, “It’s not ever a win-win situation.” Participant 5 stated, “You can have years of bad evaluations on a mediocre teacher and sometimes it’s still not enough.”

Dealing with a teacher who is in denial about their performance is also a barrier faced by principals when moving teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. All six participants acknowledged having experienced working with a mediocre teacher who did not accept the fact that their performance was inept. Principal 5 stated, “There’s no sense in spending so much time with someone who is absolutely resistant to everything you are trying to do to help them.”

11. When making hiring decisions, what measures do you take to avoid selecting mediocre teachers?

The six participants all agreed that finding a good fit is a top priority when attempting to avoid selecting a mediocre teacher when making hiring decisions. Participant 5 stated, “Find the fit for your school!” Participant 4 remarked, “I will leave a vacancy if I don’t find a quality applicant that is the best fit for my campus.” Participant 6 commented, “I describe my campus demographics and real life situations that happen daily during the interview. If [the applicant] is alarmed by this, I know they are not a good fit.”

Participant 3 added, “I look at the culture of my school and what is the best fit before making a hiring decision.” Participant 2 mentioned, “When contacting references, I question them carefully to listen for ways the applicant can fit into my overall school

culture.” Participant 1 said, “I will leave a vacancy rather than settle for a candidate. I consider the make-up of the potential team and look at what the team needs.”

Four of the six participants use a tiered approach when making hiring decisions. Remarks included, “I use a three tiered process, applicants interview first with the principal, then assistant principals, and lastly with the teachers.” “The first round of the interview is with the principal because I look at what is best for the school. The next round is with the teachers and they look at the personality of the applicant,” “I never interview alone. Having someone else help with the hiring decisions eliminates biasness.”

Conducting quality reference and background checks was another way four of the six participants avoided selecting mediocre teachers. Participant 1 qualified, “I ask for PDAS [teacher appraisal] scores for the past two years. I also call each reference and ask very specific questions.” Participant 2 concurred with asking applicants to bring evaluation documents and added, “When I call references I ask them to rate the applicant on a Likert scale.” Participant 3 also asked applicants to bring the previous year’s summative evaluation results. Comments shared by this participant included, “You have to get multiple years’ evaluations to make sure the performance is consistent.” Participant 6 stated, “Doing a good background check helps you see past the practiced interview answers.”

All six participants agreed the type of interview questions aide in choosing candidates who are not mediocre. “Give scenarios so they [the applicant] will fully understand what they are walking into,” remarked Participant 5. Participant 2 stated, “The types of questions matter.” “Asking the right questions helps you get to that gut feeling of knowing if this is the right candidate or not,” said Participant 4.

Common Themes

Table 4.1 presents common themes that emerged from the focus group responses to the interview questions. Two or more responses to an interview question identified a common theme. The table contains two columns. Column one presents the question, which is further identified by question number (i.e. 4.1 identifies question one). Further, the themes include the number of times (n) each response was listed.

Table 4.1

Common Themes by Question

Question	Focus Group Response (N=6)
4.1 What are the characteristics of a mediocre teacher?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. rely on others to help their students (n=6) 2. can do more, no desire (n=6) 3. complacent (n =4) 4. well-liked by peers (n=3) 5. attend staff development, but no evidence of implementation (n=2) 6. no ownership (n=2)
4.2 How do principals identify mediocre teaching?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. data (n=5) 2. walkthroughs (n=5) 3. conversations (n=4) 4. student surveys (n=4) 5. training for administrative team (n=4) 6. classroom observations (n=3) 7. environmental observations (n=2) 8. would I want this teacher for my child (n=2)
4.3 What effect does a mediocre teacher have on student outcomes?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. negative - only do the minimum (n=6) 2. evidence skewed because of support (n=6)
4.4 What impact does mediocre teaching have on a school campus' accountability rating?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. negative impact (n=6) 2. providing intervention support lessens the negative impact (n=6) 3. strategically placing teachers to lessen the impact (n=5)
4.5 What affect does mediocre teaching have on the overall culture of your campus?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. colleagues will privately report mediocre teaching, but no negative consequences are desired (n=5) 2. well like by colleagues (n=4) 3. can turn staff against principal (n=2)
4.6 In what ways can principals address the needs of mediocre teachers?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. coaching (n=5) 2. peer observations (n=5) 3. targeted staff development (n=4) 4. videotaping for self-reflection (n=3) 5. peer-to-peer observations (n=3)

Table 4

Common Themes by Question

Question	Focus Group Response (N=6)
4.7 What type of support would aide with working with mediocre teachers?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding for additional support staff (n=6) 2. District support (n=2)
4.8 How can principals move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. consistently addressing their needs (n=6) 2. documentation (n=6) 3. support from district personnel (n=2) 4. courageous conversations (n=4)
4.9 At what point do you deem it appropriate to move to the final option of non-renewal for a teacher?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. when all possibilities have been exhausted (n=6) 2. last resort due to time constraints and challenges (n=6)
4.10 What barriers do principals face when moving mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. teacher's attitude (n=6) 2. challenging (n=6) 3. time restraints (n=6) 4. stressful (n=6) 5. adverse effect from other teachers (n=3) 6. inadequate documentation (n=3)
4.11 When making hiring decisions, what measures do you take to avoid selecting mediocre teachers?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. finding a good fit (n=6) 2. carefully selected interview questions (n=6) 3. tiered interview process (n=4) 4. quality reference and background checks (n=4) 5. leave position vacant (n=2)

Conclusion

The researcher used open-ended questions to petition the sentiments of the focus group participants. Patton (1990) noted “the purpose of open-ended questions is not to put things in someone’s mind, but to access the perspectives of the person being interviewed” (p. 278). Research questions were linked with the focus group interview questions to ensure that data from the focus group discussion would generate outcomes that paralleled with the research questions. Chapter 4 presented the results of a focus group interview in a narrative format for each question. This was followed by the presentation of common themes in tabular form by question

. CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study followed by the findings and the recommendations drawn from an analysis of the data detailed in Chapter 4. The summary, discussion, and recommendations are followed by the researcher's recommendations for future study.

Discussion of the Results

Ehrgott, Henderson-Sparks, and Sparks in 1993 in California conducted quantitative research on the study of mediocre teaching, where they reported, "For whatever reason, site administrators seem to have difficulty identifying [mediocre] teachers." In 1997, using a quantitative study, Tucker researched the relationship of evaluation system components and the principal's overall effectiveness in responding to teacher incompetence in Virginia. Then in 2004, Kaye used a mixed method study looking at teacher's perspective of working with mediocre colleagues in Canada. Adding to this existing literature are the findings of this qualitative research looking at the perspective of six elementary school principals.

Findings 1

Mediocre teachers have the ability to perform at a rate that most often times is beyond what they do daily in the classroom. The characteristics of a mediocre teacher as described by the six principals in this research study indicated some level of complacency, relying on others to help support their students in the classroom, and the ability to do more but not the desire to do more. These teachers were well liked by their peers and used that as a means of manipulation to avoid tasks. Regularly attending staff

development was a characteristic of the mediocre teachers, but evidence of implementation was limited. These characteristics were frustrating to the principals because the potential to do amazing things in the classroom with kids was treated very cavalier by the mediocre teachers. All six participants described common traits of mediocre teachers that were similar to those found in the literature review regarding the characteristics of mediocre teachers. Based on both research results and the focus group discussion, deviance from mediocre teaching in one direction can render incompetent teaching while deviance in the other direction can move a teacher towards excellence. The commonality between the research and focus group lead the researcher to conclude these are accurate depictions of the character of mediocre teachers.

Findings 2

Principals have to be aware of the manipulative strategies of teachers who exhibit mediocrity; because these teachers know what to do, they are able to make it appear that good instructional practices are being implemented in their classroom when administrators conduct walkthroughs or observations. The data collected showed principals use a variety of measures to identify mediocre teaching, deterring the possibility of manipulation. Walkthroughs were conducted at various times of the day with specific look-fors as the guide. Extended informal observations were conducted to ensure consistent implementation of best practices—high visibility, as described by one of the participants. The principal participants used in depth conversations regarding students and instructional practices to determine if teachers could go beyond the surface when discussing their students regarding classroom instructional practices. Training for

the administrative team to know what to look for when conducting classroom observations was done by some of the participants, as well.

Avoiding hiring mediocre teachers by identifying them during the interview process was discussed during the focus group interview. Principals shared strategies of using a tiered process, interviewing first with the principal, second with the assistant principals and instructional specialist, and third with the teachers. This process was exercised to have multiple layers of individuals rate the fit of the potential candidate into the school's culture and avoid hiring mediocrity. Good questioning strategies were employed by the principal participants along with conducting teaching background checks by requesting copies of previous years' evaluations and speaking to references asking a series of pre-planned questions.

Findings indicate the principals in this study were aware of the manipulation strategies mediocre teachers sometimes exercise and were able to use identification methods that allowed insight into what instructional practices were taking place in the classroom.

The research showed the need to use various sources when identifying mediocre teachers. One single identifier was not sufficient enough to properly recognize deficits. Parent surveys and contributions during meetings were identifiers revealed during the research literature as a way of determining mediocre teaching that the principal participants had not used as a documentation source. The focus group offered contrasting perspectives regarding using environmental checks, the classroom set-up, and the determination if the teacher's instructional ability was deemed adequate enough for the principal's personal children.

Findings 3

The impact of mediocre teaching on students' performance was examined. Principals were asked to share their perceptions of the degree by which students were affected by mediocre teaching. All data collected reported mediocre teachers having a negative impact on student outcomes. Principals reported academic development of students as being greatly at risk unless intervention support is provided for the students throughout the school year. It was determined that having a mediocre teacher for consecutive years was the most detrimental. Students can experience great deficits from years of mediocre teaching, resulting in falling far behind their peers. This can lead to retention, disruptive behavior, and sometimes testing for specialized instruction. During the years a student has a mediocre teacher, the above mentioned affects are not usually applicable because as determined by the data, mediocre teachers will inflate grades.

Research on the topic of the effects of mediocre teaching on student outcomes indicated adverse results just as the focus group concluded. Depending on the academic strength of the individual student, the consequences may not always appear in the current year a student has a mediocre teacher. Most often, the magnitudes of mediocre teaching surfaced in a student's performance within the next school year. Providing intervention support for students which skewed the negative effects of mediocre teaching, students potentially needing specialized instruction, and padding grades were topics discussed by the focus group that were not determined in the research literature.

Findings 4

A schools' accountability rating is certainly affected by the quality of the instruction delivered in the classroom. All six principals answered, "Negative," when

asked what impact does mediocre teaching have on a school campus' accountability rating. However, the finding of this research study indicated the principals were able to manipulate the placement of mediocre teachers over the course of a few years to avoid a continuous detrimental impact. This process was described as a big puzzle. Eventually, as qualified by a few of the principals, they were unable to juggle staff around and the impact was damaging to their campus' accountability. Despite the extreme amount of intervention support provided to students in mediocre teacher's classroom, sometimes the impact is too great to address in a single school year. Most of the principal participants in the study spoke of the rescue plans, as described by one principal, they have in place to counteract the effects on the accountability rating. Part of which includes not putting any mediocre teachers in the state accountability grades.

The findings and the literature for this topic are aligned regarding the negative impact mediocre teaching has on a school's accountability rating. While the principals discussed support limited the negative impact, the literature indicated the negative impacts are delayed, not limited.

Findings 5

Another primary purpose of this study was to determine if principals have the expertise to effectively address the needs of mediocre teachers to improve instruction in the classroom. This area of the study surveyed principals' current responses to mediocre teaching, and looked at the practices used on their campus to change mediocrity.

Findings indicated that principals strongly supported coaching, peer observations, peer-to-peer observation, videotaping for self-reflection, training the administrative team, and targeted staff development. These approaches were used by at least 50 percent of the

focus group participants. While conducting environmental observations was a common theme, only two of the participants used this as a way of responding to mediocre teaching.

The principals' response to mediocre teaching can be categorized into five themes: Compensatory, Formative, Normative, Summative, and Disciplinary Responses. A brief discussion of findings of this study corresponding to each of these follows.

Compensatory Responses

Compensatory responses are executed to decrease the impact of mediocre teaching. In the qualitative data gathering, focus group discussion, principals reported that compensatory strategies were a common occurrence in their schools. The dynamics of the district structure seemed to perpetuate this type of response. Principal participants remarked of the support given to the students of mediocre teachers with others pitching in to do the job of educating students to compensate for mediocrity. Principals indicated that they believed the use of compensatory actions were widespread throughout the school district because of support is given from the district level as well as the campus level. Compensatory responses were reported as not so favorable by the principals.

Formative Responses

Formative responses to mediocre teaching performance are implemented to achieve growth or change. Principals reported that responses to mediocre teaching should contain a strong component of assistance. Principals were willing to provide assistance to teachers who exhibited mediocre teaching but perceived the time, energy, and effort needed were barriers. Formative responses used by the principals in this study included peer observations, targeted staff development, videotaping lessons, and coaching.

Normative Responses

Normative responses are responses to mediocre teaching performance implemented collectively with the goal of achieving growth or change based on internally developed and communicated standards. Information collected from the principal participants showed that normative responses should frequently occur. When looking at the environmental arrangement of the mediocre teacher's classroom or attempting to have in depth conversations with mediocre teachers about their students' needs, principals reported the ability to determine if a mediocre teacher was aware of the assistance needed to bring change.

Summative Responses

Summative responses are implemented to judge merit. In the area of summative responses, data from classroom observations, walkthroughs, student surveys, and student performance was used in addressing mediocre teaching. Principals described the need to identify mediocre teaching through summative responses and to clearly communicate the need for change based on the data results.

Disciplinary Responses

Disciplinary responses occur when other more assistive and directive practices have failed to result in sustainable improvement in mediocre teaching. Principals admitted wanting to circumnavigate the final options related to disciplinary responses, despite the fact the culpability lies with the mediocre teachers. Moving to the final options of non-renewal of the teaching contract, creating a teaching growth plan, or coaching mediocre teachers out of the profession was deemed challenging and time consuming to get the desired results.

With the exception of two methods, the ways to address mediocre teaching were parallel between the focus group and the research literature. The research identified coaching, one of the ways the focus group of principals addressed mediocrity, as a way of moving teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. Self-reflection, in various forms, according to the literature is a way to address mediocre teaching that was not discussed in the focus group. When considering methods of addressing mediocre teachers, the research literature provided options teachers could perform independently without the need for additional supervision.

Findings 6

In the area of moving mediocre teachers beyond the plateau, all six principals routinely spoke of punitive measures. Documentation, courageous conversations, growth plans, and coaching them out of the profession, were the first reactions. Upon probing for non-punitive measures used, the principals shared consistently that addressing their needs with various supportive methods was used as indicated in Findings 5.

The researcher approached the difference between addressing the needs of mediocre teachers and moving mediocre teachers in an alternative manner. Addressing needs was based on things the teacher could personally take responsibility for doing such as:

- attending targeted professional development,
- videotaping lessons and self-reflecting, and
- observing a peer and reflecting on identified best practices.

Moving a teacher beyond the plateau was based on things that required support from a colleague or supervisor to accomplish such as:

- coaching,
- mentoring,
- peer to peer observations, and
- teacher in need of assistance plan.

The findings reveal the principals, once probed for more detailed ways of moving mediocre teachers, declared four responses.

Negotiate: Helping teachers realize they are having an adverse effect on students and counselling them out of teaching.

Assist: Investing time, energy, and resources into helping improve their teaching.

Direct: Directing teachers to correct specific difficulties, with a follow up to ensure this has occurred.

Discipline: Penalizing teachers through the use of sanctions such as written documentation, letters of reprimand, or nonrenewal.

Moving teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness comes after providing a continuum of potential solutions. Contrasting perspectives between the focus group and the research included two topics mentioned by the focus group, support from district personnel, and consistently addressing the needs of teachers using repetition of the same practices. The research literature discussed direct involvement from other professionals to assist with moving a mediocre teacher beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. This involvement was in the form of a coach, which was discussed by the focus group, and mentors, which was not mentioned by the focus group.

Findings 7

The greatest frustration faced by principals working with mediocre teachers is the teachers' inability or refusal to accept they are mediocre. Couple that with negative repercussions toward the school culture, and you have one of the foremost barriers faced by principals when moving mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. Findings indicate that due to the personal relationships mediocre teachers establish with their colleagues, the principals can receive non-favorable results from the teaching staff when moving to the final option, warranted or not. Although some teachers will privately report to the building principal concerns with the performance of a mediocre teacher; publically, colleagues will not hold a mediocre teacher accountable. Friendship and being liked by their colleague superseded justified consequences. Teachers were reported as wanting to tell, but not wanting negative disciplinary actions taken.

Inadequate documentation was another barrier discussed. Findings indicated that often most of the mediocre teachers do not do enough damage to merit documentation. Their inadequacies can require years of documentation before consequences are rendered. Stress, challenges, and the time restraints of dealing with mediocre teachers were the barriers concluded from this study.

The research literature indicated that most of the various types of mediocrity, while highly time consuming to handle appropriately, are often not related to incompetent teaching. However, without supervisory intervention, these teachers are not likely to improve. The research literature also indicated having an evaluation framework that relies on multiple observation sources is an optimal way of facing the barriers of moving a mediocre teacher beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. This approach was not discussed

in the focus group. Both the focus group and the literature identified supervision of mediocre teachers as one of the most demanding tasks for school administrators.

Summary

Principals bear the ultimate responsibility for the instruction that takes place in each of the classrooms in their schools; therefore, they also bear the responsibility for the quality of the teachers in each classroom. The purpose of this study was to determine the role of the school principal in identifying mediocre teaching, addressing the areas of academic concern of mediocre teachers, and strategically helping move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. This study took place in a large, suburban school district in Texas, with more than 6,000 classroom teachers, averaging 11.83 years of teaching experience, in excess of 300 campus administrators, principals and assistant principals, and nearly 100 total school campuses educating over 113,000 students.

A qualitative case study design was selected to gather data through a videotaped focus group interview of six elementary school principals. The researcher encouraged the participants to share and to explicate their perspectives about working with mediocre teachers. The data were then analyzed, transcribed and presented thematically around the seven research questions. The research questions that guided this study include: (1) What are the characteristics of a mediocre teacher? (2) What effect does a mediocre teacher have on student outcomes? (3) How do principals identify mediocre teaching? (4) In what ways can principals address the needs of mediocre teachers? (5) How can principals move mediocre teachers beyond the plateau? (6) What impact does mediocre teaching have on a school district and school campus' accountability rating? (7) What barriers do principals face when moving to the final options with mediocre teachers?

Implications for School Leaders

According to (Hanushek, 2009), identification of mediocre teachers is critically important for principals because “students with ineffective teachers are harmed. Students can probably recover from a single year of having a bottom 5 percent teacher, but a few years might lead to lasting problems” (p. 172). Tucker (1997) conveyed that there is an estimated ineffective rate of from 5 to 15 percent in schools, yet school principals attempt to improve pedagogy of a very small proportion of this group.

School principals view the supervision of a mediocre teacher to be one of the most difficult tasks they must perform. They also feel it requires a disproportionate amount of time with little guarantee of improvement (Fuhr, 1996). Principals have scarce available time to deal with the mediocre teacher (Tucker, 1997). Many principals evaluate a number of teachers, meet with parents, address student discipline concerns, implement new programs, and meet the demands from their district office. With all of these demands, little time is left to adequately address the needs of mediocre teachers. Tucker (1997) concluded that the education community must respond to the needs and challenges of mediocre teachers. The data indicated that the principals interviewed in this focus group study use a variety of measures to address mediocre teaching but no established process is followed when working through the various needs of mediocre teachers. Their answers illustrated that they do use effective processes; but, the approach is not systematic. The researcher recommends that principals collaboratively plan an approach to address the needs of each mediocre teacher individually. Just as a team of educators plan a response to intervention for students who need specific academic help, the same approach is recommended for mediocre teachers.

A determination made from the data was that principals often face negative repercussions when moving a mediocre teacher beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness. Because mediocre teachers are generally well liked by their colleagues, the culture of the school may suffer negative consequences. According to (Freiberg, 1998) school culture is like the air we breathe, no one notices it unless it becomes foul. Employees in any working environment prefer to be in a situation that is calm, inviting, and positive. A place where staff share a common sense of purpose, where teaching is heart inspiring and the love for the profession pours out onto the students, where the fundamental standards are of collegiality, improvement, and hard work, where celebrating student success and teacher accomplishments is the norm (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Schools that exhibit a culture with these positive qualities have teachers who are willing to take risks and sanction improvements. The researcher recommends focusing on creating such a culture with positive opportunities for teacher recognition, acknowledgement, and validation, with the goal of strengthening the school culture as a preventative approach rather than a reactive or remedial approach.

The final recommendation for school leaders based on this research is in regards to moving to the final option of nonrenewal for a mediocre teacher. The principals concurred that the process for nonrenewal was challenging and time consuming. It was stated, a principal can only focus on one or two mediocre teachers effectively in this stage a year. The amount of work a dismissal might take should not impede judgment if a teacher is not performing or is detrimental to the operation of the school. School leaders must know the basic constitutional rights, statutes, and local contract issues that are relevant to dismissing contracted teachers or not renewing teachers' contracts. Avoid

waiting until a crisis to meet with district counsel and central administrators to discuss legal matters and protocol. Reviewing the policies and procedures concerning the documentation that is required for successfully dismissing teachers and talking to other principals who have gone through a dismissal process to hear their suggestions and ideas is beneficial when taking steps towards dismissal, those who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to dismiss teachers as well as those who succeeded. Review professional publications for legal background and advice. The researcher is recommending that school principals become well versed, seek assistance early in the school year, and work closely with central office personnel to proficiently follow the steps necessary to execute this option when needed.

Implications for Further Research

Principals rely on the use of spontaneous data to identify mediocre teaching, specifically classroom walkthroughs and informal observations. School districts and policy makers interested in revamping the teacher evaluation procedures should examine policies to ensure the inclusion of and emphasis on the importance of numerous, unannounced, classroom walkthroughs, and informal observations as a primary piece of the comprehensive teacher evaluation. According to (Marshall, 2012), teacher evaluation systems that continue to rely on data gleaned from lengthy, formal observations in which the teachers knows they will be observed are “bogus” and provide inaccurate summative evaluations (p. 23). Principals feel they have the skills to address mediocre teaching, but the need is for a highly saturated teacher evaluation system that will provide the leverage necessary to motivate mediocre teachers to move beyond the plateau.

All six principal participants in this study were frustrated by the attitude of the mediocre teacher due to the teacher's refusal to change their negative impact on students or denying they have a problem. Frustration was also caused by the colleagues of mediocre teachers who enabled mediocrity by compensating the areas of weakness these teachers displayed. Principals' efforts to change behavior can be viewed as a personal vendetta against the mediocre teacher by other staff members, depending on the types of relationships established between the mediocre teacher and their peers. Therefore, principals may not need to be the only supervisor or evaluator of a mediocre teacher.

The time demands of working with mediocre teachers can be excessive; therefore, principals need the support of the superintendent and school board when due diligence has been rendered without receiving the desired outcome of change from the mediocre teacher. If school districts sincerely want to reverse the negative pedagogical experience students face with mediocre teaching, work can be done with legislators to streamline educational laws surrounding non-renewal of teacher contracts.

Conclusion

All six principal participants easily identified the characteristics of mediocre teachers. When the discussion changed to how these teachers are addressed and moved beyond their level of ineffectiveness, the conversation was not as fluid. At the start of this research, the researcher believed identification was the simplest of the tasks when dealing with mediocre teachers. At the conclusion of this research study, the researcher continues to believe this to be true. Addressing the behaviors of mediocre teachers and the effects on students' pedagogical experiences has evolved with the use of instructional coaches, interventions for students, and support from district level instructional personnel.

However, with the progression of these provisions, mediocre teachers have become (a) more unaware of their negative effects, (b) more challenging to move beyond the plateau, and (c) less likely to take ownership of their actions based on the results of their students' performance.

The researcher concludes from this research study that all six principal participants readily provided support for the mediocre teachers they supervise because the students were the priority. Despite the time, energy, effort, or negative criticism, the students were the motivation to continue working to get the desired outcomes needed. Identifying, addressing, and moving mediocre teachers beyond the plateau of ineffectiveness, based on results from the data, was carried out in the schools of each of the six principal participants.

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APPENDIX A

APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Independent School District

Department of School Improvement and Accountability

Dr. [REDACTED]
Research Specialist

To: Tonya Goree

From: [REDACTED] Ed.D.

Date: August 20, 2014

Re: Approval of Application to Conduct Research in [REDACTED] ISD

Your request to conduct the following research project in [REDACTED] ISD has been approved: The Principal's Role in Identifying, Addressing, and Moving Mediocre Teachers Beyond the Plateau of Ineffectiveness.

As you pursue this project, please refer to the conditions listed below:

- ⊙ Focus Group questions should adhere strictly to the 11 questions listed in your research application.
- ⊙ Information obtained from the recorded focus group discussion must only be used to answer the research questions listed in your research application.
- ⊙ You are approved to conduct your research with the elementary principals' in clusters 4-6.
- ⊙ As your research sponsor, Dr. [REDACTED] will assist you in the following manner:
 - Sending consent forms to principals only at the campuses in clusters 4-6.
 - Consent forms will be returned to Dr. [REDACTED]. She will provide you with the forms and/or a list of the individuals who consent to participate in your study. At that point, you may contact the participants to establish a time for the focus group.
 - You may not contact the principals directly until consent to participate has been received by [REDACTED].
- ⊙ No additional data or information may be collected beyond the focus group responses.
- ⊙ Practice confidentiality while conducting the various steps necessary to complete the project.
- ⊙ Use a random code system to record data collected. Never use names, ID, or social security numbers.
- ⊙ Use a pseudonym instead of the district or campus name in your research.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX B:

APPROVAL BY THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION
OF HUMAN SUBJECTS TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

November 18, 2014

Ms. Tonya Goree
c/o Dr. Angus MacNeil
Dean, Education

Dear Ms. Tonya Goree,

The University of Houston's Institutional Review Board, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "The Principal's Role in Identifying, Addressing, and Moving Mediocre Teachers Beyond the Plateau of Ineffectiveness" on October 17, 2014, according to federal regulations and institutional policies and procedures.

At that time, your project was granted approval contingent upon your agreement to modify your protocol as stipulated by the Committee. The changes you have made adequately fulfill the requested contingencies, and your project is now **APPROVED**.

- **Approval Date: November 18, 2014**
- **Expiration Date: November 17, 2015**

As required by federal regulations governing research in human subjects, research procedures (including recruitment, informed consent, intervention, data collection or data analysis) may not be conducted after the expiration date.

To ensure that no lapse in approval or ongoing research occurs, please ensure that your protocol is resubmitted in RAMP for renewal by the **deadline for the October, 2015 (month prior to expiration date, following year)** CPHS meeting. Deadlines for submission are located on the CPHS website.

During the course of the research, the following must also be submitted to the CPHS:

- Any proposed changes to the approved protocol, prior to initiation; AND
- Any unanticipated events (including adverse events, injuries, or outcomes) involving possible risk to subjects or others, within 10 working days.

If you have any questions, please contact Samiya Copeland at (713) 743-9534.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. Daniel O'Connor, Chair
Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

PLEASE NOTE: All subjects must receive a copy of the informed consent document, if one is approved for use. All research data, including signed consent documents, must be retained according to the University of Houston Data Retention Policy (found on the CPHS website) as well as requirements of the FDA and external sponsor(s), if applicable. Faculty sponsors are responsible for retaining data for student projects on the UH campus for the required period of record retention.

Protocol Number: 15069-01

Full Review: ____

Expedited Review: ☒ X

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.

APPENDIX C:

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: The Principals Role in Identifying, Addressing, and Moving Mediocre Teachers Beyond the Plateau of Ineffectiveness

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Tonya Goree for partial fulfillment of the Executive Ed.D. in Professional Leadership at the University of Houston. The project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Angus MacNeil.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Taking part in the research project is voluntary and you may refuse to take part or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any research-related questions that make you uncomfortable.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to determine principals' perspective of mediocre teachers. Specifically, I want to understand how principals identify and address mediocre teachers. This information will be used as research for my doctoral thesis.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately 8 subjects invited to take part in this project.

A total of 6 -8 participants in one or two different groups will participate in this study. Subjects are elementary principals in Cypress Fairbanks School District. There will be a facilitator who will ask questions and facilitate the discussion within the groups. If you volunteer to participate in this focus group, you will be asked some questions relating to your experience as a principal supervising teachers. The total time commitment is expected to be 1.5 hours. The focus group discussion will take place in the conference room at a school in the district or on the campus of the University of Houston.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number by the principal investigator. This code

number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits. The names of the schools/school district will not be used in publication.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

Your participation may benefit you and other school principals or school leaders in the field of education to better understand the behaviors associated with mediocre teachers in public and private schools. No risk greater than those experienced in ordinary conversation are anticipated. Everyone is asked to respect the privacy of the other group members. All participants are asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion, but it is important to understand that other people in the group with you may not keep all information private and confidential.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations; however, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF VIDEO TAPES

If you consent to take part in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be videotaped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the videotapes can be used for publication/presentations.

- ☐ I agree to be videotaped during the focus group.
 - ☐ I agree that the videotape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
 - ☐ I do not agree that the videotape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ I do not agree to be videotaped during the focus group.

If a subject does not agree to videotaping, participation in the focus group is declined.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me, as have any potential benefits.

4. I understand the protections in place to safeguard any personally identifiable information related to my participation.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Tonya Goree at trdorsey@uh.edu or [REDACTED]. I may also contact Angus MacNeil, faculty sponsor, at amacneil@central.uh.edu or [REDACTED].
6. **Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713-743-9204).** All research projects that are carried out by Investigators at the University of Houston are governed by requirements of the University and the federal government.

SIGNATURES

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions to my satisfaction. I give my consent to participate in this study, and have been provided with a copy of this form for my records and in case I have questions as the research progresses.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. An explanation of the research was provided and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject's satisfaction. In my judgment, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____