Promotion of the Assistant Principal to the Principalship: Good Work is No Guarantee[*]

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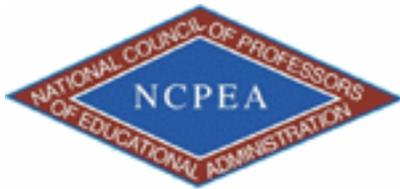
NOTE: This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of education administration. In addition to publication in the Connexions Content Commons, this manuscript is published in the International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, [1] Volume 5, Number 1 (January − March 2010). Formatted and edited in Connexions by Theodore Creighton, Virginia Tech.

1 Introduction

School leadership is a key factor in student achievement and in changing, improving, and maintaining successful schools (Barth, 2000; Fullan, 2000; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty 2005); consequently, selecting a principal is one of the most important decisions that superintendents and school boards undertake and make. Since many assistant principals (AP) become principals (Calabrese & Adams, 1987; Gaertner, 1979; Greenfield, 1985; Marshall, 1992; Norton & Kriekard, 1987; Petzko, 2002; Retelle, 2003), it is imperative that district leaders identify and promote APs who will be effective principals; that is, principals who facilitate student academic success within a caring school climate.

Various researchers have reported on the work and experiences of assistant principals. The studies encompass leadership preparation programs (Daresh, 2001; Ribbins, 1997; Wells, Rinehart, & Scollay, 1999; Volante, Cherubini, & Drake 2008; Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, McNamara 2002), the assistant principalship as training ground for the principalship (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Petzko, 2002; Ribbins, 1997; Wells, Rinehart, & Scollay, 1999), socialization into administration (Hart, 1993; Heck, 1995; Marshall & Mitchell, 1991; Retelle & Poole, 2006); loyalty to the administrative group (Marshall, 1992; Marshall,

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Mitchell, & Gross, 1990; Mertz, 2000; Retelle & Poole, 2006); aspirations to the principalship (Austin & Brown, 1970; Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Marshall, 1985; Marshall, 1992; Petzko, 2002); and career paths of assistant principals (Marshall, 1992; Marshall, Mitchell, & Gross, 1990). Also, studies have been conducted on job satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Chen, Blendinger, & McGrath, 2000; Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Greenfield, 1985; Malone, Sharp, & Thompson 2002).

Although a number of studies have examined various aspects of the roles and responsibilities of APs, there is a lack of research on APs' perspective of the interview and promotion process to the principalship. A notable study is the Blackmore, Thomson, and Barty (2006) investigation that focused on the selection of principals in Australia. Blackmore et al. reported the following five problems with the selection process: (a) dependence on written applications; (b) the problem of potential versus experience of candidates; (c) the hidden rule of appointing favored candidates; (d) quality of the interview committee; and e) evidence of discrepancy of appointment decisions. Other studies related to this study and to promotion to the principalship are positive relationships with principals (Marshall, 1992; Retelle, 2003); mentorship (Para & Daresh, 1997; Ortiz, 1982); sponsorship (Ortiz, 1982; Valverde, 1980); and the role of district gatekeepers (Marshall, 1992).

The research questions were: What are the facilitators for promotion to the principalship? What are the barriers to promotion to the principalship? In this paper, I report on 10 APs' experiences and perceptions of their preparation for the principalship; the interview process, and their promotion or non promotion to the principalship. The major themes that emerged from this study included district preparation for the principalship, influential relationships, networking and visibility across the district, experiences with the interview process, self advocacy and the politics of the interview and promotion process.

2 Methodology and Methods

A qualitative methodological approach was utilized in this study. Qualitative inquiry is field focused. Understanding the experiences, perspectives, and situations of the participants is fundamental in qualitative investigations (Bogdan, Biklen, & Knopp, 1998; Cresswell, 2009; Eisner, 1998; Filstead, 1970; Marshall & Rossman 2006). In this study, 10 APs from the Riverbend School District (RSD) were interviewed from March 2005 to September 2005. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the APs and the school district. The APs were assigned numbers based on the dates they were interviewed; AP1 was interviewed first, and AP 10 was interviewed last.

During the 2001-01 school year, I conducted a yearlong embedded case study with three elementary APs in three schools in RSD, located in the Pacific Northwest. I observed and shadowed each AP for about 120 hours for a total of 360 hours. Also, I spent approximately 61 hours interviewing the APs (four times each), the principals, one-third of the teachers in each school; the district leadership coordinator, and two associate superintendents. I reviewed and analyzed school, district, and government documents. Consequently, my knowledge of the district and schools was substantial. I had established credibility in RSD with various administrators and teachers. Because of my past research and my connections in RSD, the triangulation, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) has been addressed. For triangulation, I drew on my data from my case study research; interviewed several of the APs twice, and several APs reviewed a previous version of this paper.

2.1 Background Information

The Riverbend School District is large, urban, multicultural, and multilingual. There are approximately 90 elementary schools and 18 high schools serving 60,000 students. Riverbend employs approximately 6,000 faculty and staff. Sixty percent of the students speak another language other than English; twenty-five percent of the students are English Language Learners. Four percent are Aboriginal students, and sixteen percent of students participate in the free/reduced lunch program. At the time of the study, the district leadership team consisted of the superintendent, a leadership coordinator, and four associate superintendents. The associate superintendents were responsible for the supervision of schools within their administrative area.

The associate superintendent alternated chairing the interview committee for promoting individuals to the principalship. The leadership coordinator organized and developed leadership workshops.

2.2 Participants

Seven women and three men employed in RSD engaged in one and half to two hour semi-structured interviews in 2005. Several APs participated in two interviews. All of the APs were Caucasian. The tenure of the APs ranged from three years to ten years. All ten of the APs had applied for principalships during as assistant principals, and nine of the ten APs expected to be promoted to the principalship. Although none of the participants wanted to be career APs, AP10 was a career AP. He had applied for the principalship numerous times, but had never been promoted. He retired in 2005. Seven of the ten APs applied for a RSD principalship in January 2005. AP1, AP2, AP4, and AP6 were short listed and interviewed for RSD principalships. Three of the four APs, who were shortlisted, were appointed to RSD principalships in September 2005. Assistant Principal 8 applied to RSD and to another district for a principalship; RSD did not shortlist AP8. However, the other district hired AP8 for a principalship. See Table 1 below for more details on the assistant principals. All RSD candidates, who were not interviewed or promoted to a principalship could request and receive feedback about their applications from the associate superintendent who chaired the interview committee.

Two of the three assistant principals that participated in the year long (2000-01) case study participated in this research. Also, three APs, who had participated in interviews as teachers during the 2000-01 study; participated in this study. One assistant principal helped recruit the other participants by using the APs electronic distribution list.

Assistant Principals in the Study

Assistant principals	Gender	Age Range	Years as APs	Applied for RSD princi- palship2005	Shortlisted and Inter- viewed in 2005	Hired for RSD princi- palship Fall 2005
AP1	M	40s	4 years	Yes	Yes	Yes
AP2	M	40s	4 years	Yes	Yes	Yes
AP 3	F	30s	5 years	Yes	No	N/A
AP 4	F	40s	6 years	Yes	Yes	No
AP5	F	50s	3 years	No	N/A	N/A
AP6	F	50s	5 years	Yes	Yes	Yes
AP7	F	50s	6 years	Yes	No	N/A
AP 8	F	50s	6 years	Yes	No	N/A2005 Hired in another district
continued on next page						

| AP9 | F | 50s | 3 years | No | N/A | N/A |
| AP 10 | M | 60s | 10 years | No | N/A | N/ARetired |

Table 1

2.3 Data Collection

The assistant principals participated in one and a half to two hour interviews. Several of the APs were interviewed twice. The research questions focused facilitators for promotion to the principalship, and barriers hindering promotion to the principalship. All of the APs spoke about their preparation to the principalship. The district preparation encompassed the district workshops on leadership knowledge, skills, and attitudes; the principals' mentoring, guidance, and support; the assistant principals sharing knowledge and skills among themselves; the assistant principals' leadership experiences in different schools, and the assistant principals' engagement in district wide administrator meetings.

2.4 Analysis

For the analysis, several of Miles and Huberman's (1994) processes were utilized. Data reduction of the interview transcript was conducted by using the research questions to reduce and code the data and by coding emerging themes from the data. Descriptive and interpretive coding was assigned to the interview data. Data display charts were utilized to check the preponderance of different themes and findings. Findings were verified by checking the data and by re-interviewing several of the assistant principals and by reviewing district documents and the district website. Conclusions were based on verifying the data. Based on the interview questions and the interviews, the major themes were district preparation for the principalship, importance of relationships for promotion; visibility, networking, and self advocacy; and politics of interview and promotion process. All of the assistant principals were asked to provide feedback on the interview transcript and a draft of a previous paper.

This study has several limitations. It focuses on elementary schools in one large, urban school district; consequently, the findings may not be applicable to all other elementary schools. Also, the number of APs who participated in the study limits the findings. Lastly, the members of the interview committee were not interviewed; they may have presented different experiences and perceptions of the interview process.

3 Findings

The study focused on the APs' preparation to become principals and their perspectives and experiences with the interview and promotion process. The findings include preparation for the principalship, facilitators to the principalship (relationships with influential individuals and groups, networking, visibility, and self advocacy) and barriers to the principalship (lack of self advocacy, influential sponsors, and relationships with influential individuals).

3.1 Preparation for the Principalship: Leadership Knowledge and Skills

The district preparation encompassed the district workshops on leadership knowledge, skills, and attitudes; the principals' mentoring, guidance, and support; the assistant principals sharing knowledge and skills among themselves; the assistant principals' leadership experiences in different schools, and the assistant principals' engagement in district wide administrator meetings. The assistant principals gained knowledge and developed skills to varying degrees from various experiences and from the guidance and expertise of different people. Five APs reported that their principals provided guidance, direction, and feedback about their daily administrative work. All of the APs were supportive of and were supported by their AP colleagues; that

is, APs regularly shared "what to do" information with each other. Also, the APs gained leadership experience through their appointments to different types of schools (e.g., poor, affluent, French immersion, and community) and through the RSD Leadership Program.

The RSD Leadership Program provided workshops for practicing principals, assistant principals, and aspiring administrators. The RSD Leadership Coordinator developed, facilitated, organized or led the leadership workshops. Additionally, the Leadership Coordinator compiled the RSD Leadership Profile, which elucidated the knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSA) of RSD school leaders. The KSAs included organization, interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, trustworthiness, dependability, consistency, industry, ability to multi-task; ability to get along, ability to work well with others, and ability to work in stressful conditions. All of the APs attended some district workshops. An AP represented the other APs' views regarding the RSD leadership workshops:

3.1.1

The leadership program I think is an excellent program so that's sort of at the outset. I think that it is exceptional and I really speak highly of it, I think that personally for me it was like a graduate program but it was lead by people from the district and so we did different things. (AP4)

In summary, the assistant principals gained leadership knowledge and experience via daily work, principals, colleagues, and district workshops. To a degree, the assistant principalship was a training ground for the principalship (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Petzko, 2002; Ribbins, 1997; Wells, Rinehart, & Scollay, 1999).

3.2 Facilitators to Promotion to the Principalship

The assistant principals reported that their positive relationships with the principals, district leaders, and the teachers' union were critical to their promotion to the principalship.

3.2.1 Principals.

All of the APs stated that the school principals were expected to train and mentor APs. However, the principals performed these roles in varying degrees. A long-term AP highlighted the variation among principals, "Some assistant principals get tremendous experience. Other assistant principals may get tremendous experience, but in a much narrow area because the principal chooses to be in charge of certain things" (AP10). Other APs reported that some principals were remiss in supporting APs. One AP commented:

3.2.1.1

I know assistant-principals who basically are not allowed to attend professional development by their principals. I think that's an issue; there needs to be district policy to make sure that assistant principals are trained and prepared to be principals. ...I think there are lots available to help prepare to become a principal, but I don't think everyone has the same opportunities to access the programs that are out there. (AP1)

A second group of principals supported the assistant principals' aspirations by ensuring that they took on various leadership responsibilities and engage in activities and events that provided them with leadership knowledge and experience. This level of support was typical of RSD principals.

The last group of principals was identified as "principal-makers". Assistant principals, who had worked with a principal maker, were more likely to be promoted to a principalship than APs who had not worked with a principal maker. A principal maker was influential and well-connected to district leaders. They trained, mentored, guided, and sponsored their APs for promotion to the principalship. An AP described a principal-maker:

3.2.1.2

Principal maker is an interesting idea because it has two connotations, one is the influence and the other is the training. In this case, she has both, I think. I don't know if it's just happenstance or not, but I guess there is the expectation in working with her that there is a certain kind of process that you will go through and the expectations that a principal so you take on those characteristics...the influence [for promotion] is there as well. (AP2)

An AP who was working with a principal maker shared her experience:

3.2.1.3

The other thing that the principal has done is shared a lot of the political going ons with me, which sort of gave me more information. The other thing which she's really done, which not all principals do, is she has really included me in things outside of the school - workshops, meetings, those kind of things. (AP6)

A different AP described the consequences of working with a principal who was neither a principal maker nor influential in the district:

3.2.1.4

I'm thinking of other people [APs] who haven't been successful and looking at them and thinking that part of the reason [is] perhaps the person they are working with is not someone who is well looked upon in the district. So if they [principals] are referring someone and somebody's reading the letter of reference. If they are your primary reference and they don't have a necessarily good reputation in the district then....I would think that that would have some effect on the quality of the reference. (AP9)

It was unclear if an AP was assigned specifically to work with a principal maker or not. In any case, it seemed that an AP's relationship with the principal and the principal's political capital in the district influenced the promotion or non promotion of APs to the principalship (Marshall, 1992; Retelle, 2003).

3.2.2 District Leaders.

Associate superintendents were influential because of their positions in the district hierarchy. Moreover one associate superintendent chaired the yearly principal interview committee. One AP discussed the importance of having the endorsement of an associate superintendent, "Being represented by people who are respected in the district is very helpful" (AP2). Another AP talked about her the lack of sponsorship:

3.2.2.1

I do think, where my problem in this situation was, that no one at that table [interview committee] really knew who I was because as I said, I go to my work, I do my work, and it's those people that take an interest in what I do know what I do; because I'm not out there showcasing. And the person that was a really strong advocate of mine was George Smith [former associate superintendent] and George retired so and then the first principal I worked with she retired. AP8

3.2.3 Teachers.

All ten APs concurred that the Riverbend Teachers' Union (RTU) was a potent force in the promotion process. For example, if an AP had a conflict with a teacher in the past, the conflict might decrease the AP's chances of promotion. One AP shared this viewpoint:

3.2.3.1

I would say definitely if you're perceived by the union as non-supportive of teachers then that will for sure block you because....I think, the union rep definitely has to give the seal of approval....What might help

you be promoted, being a total teacher supporter; you have to support teachers. That's huge, be supportive in every way. (AP4)

Another AP commented on the RTU representative on the hiring committee:

3.2.3.2

I believe the teachers' union rep knew exactly who they wanted to hire before the interview process ever began. I'm not saying every member of the panel was in that boat, but at least half of them. It's just a gut feeling that I have. The teacher union knew who they wanted. (AP1)

All of the APs stated that the RTU's endorsement was essential for promotion to the principalship. In addition, individuals (principal and associate superintendent) and a group (teachers) influenced (non)promotion to the principalship.

3.2.4 Networking, Visibility, and Self-Advocacy.

The APs reported that building relationships with and creating networks among various groups of people and influential individuals facilitated promotion to a principalship. Visibility was defined as becoming known across the district among other principals, associate superintendents, other district level administrators leaders, and the superintendent. Additionally, several APs commented that self-advocacy facilitated promotion to a principalship. The APs described self-advocacy as ensuring that district leaders were aware of their work by promoting and highlighting leadership skills and knowledge and elevating work performance. Several APs characterized it as self aggrandizement; while others described it as standard practice for APs who aspired to become principals.

The Riverbend District Administrators' Association (RDAA) meetings, superintendent meetings, associate superintendent meetings; workshops for district leadership administrators, and AP cohort group meetings were opportunities for assistant principals to network and build relationships with other assistant principals, principals, and associate superintendents. The assistant principals had time to converse with principals and other assistant principals at the RDAA meetings. During the associate superintendent monthly meetings, the APs interacted with other principals and other assistant principals assigned to schools in their area. Each area consisted of about 30 schools. The APs needed to engage with individuals at different levels of the school system. Additionally, the APs had to build good relationships with the teachers in their schools. Teachers in individual schools would inform the RTU supported if an AP was supportive or unsupportive. The RTU considered this information when its representative sat on the interview committee. An AP who served on an RDAA committee discussed the importance of visibility in the district:

3.2.4.1

Visibility in the district is important. Meaning in my case the route that I followed was being on the executive for our association, getting to know [people], you know going to committee meetings as a representative for our association, getting to know the board members, district management that kind of thing. That's helpful because people get to know who you are. Not everyone follows that route and that's the thing about having such a large district that people do it differently. (AP2)

Another AP commented on how working with the president of the RDAA was beneficial to her promotion:

3.2.4.2

There is no question that being with, working with the association president, what she has done for me is given me many, many opportunities to be very visible. I've been on committees, high profile committees you know. I mean I do this thing at the monthly meetings where I [present information], there's not a person in that association who does not know who I am. (AP6)

Other APs argued that their work performance should be the basis of promotion, not networking, nor self-advocacy. An AP, who had applied to become a principal numerous times, but was never appointed to a principalship talked about his situation:

3.2.4.3

Why wasn't I appointed [to a principalship]? Lack of networking, lack of the contact. The politics for the district is something I didn't deal with because it's not really in my nature to do that. I'm not a gregarious kind of person, I'm not even particularly social, that's not my nature....I always thought that I would demonstrate my leadership ability and I would earn a principalship. (AP 10)

Another AP shared similar views:

3.2.4.4

I've said, if it's about being a cheerleader, if it's about sitting up and singing my own praises, don't count me in, I'm not even interested in the job. If that's what it takes to get there, then I'm in the wrong place. I don't think I'm in the wrong [place] but I think I'm trying to get to the next [place] in a different way. (AP5)

A career AP asserted that positive connections between a subordinate and superior would influence the subordinate's promotion in RSD:

3.2.4.5

It's amazing the connections and the perceived effect that has on one's career. I say perceived obviously, how would you say other than perception; that that factor is important. But there's quite a history of that in the district. (AP10)

According to the APs, networking, visibility, and self-advocacy facilitated promotion to the principalship. An AP's positive relationship with the principal was a major factor to an AP's advancement (Marshall, 1992; Retelle, 2003).

3.3 Barriers to Promotion to the Principalship

Based on the analysis and the assistant principals' comments, barriers to promotion focused on lack of: visibility across the district, self-advocacy; sponsorship by a superior; connection to a member of the hiring committee; and working with a principal who did not have influence in the district. Two APs suggested that gender was also a barrier to promotion. An AP, who had applied for a principalship, but was not short listed; that is selected to be interviewed, shared her views regarding the barriers to promotion:

3.3.1

Some things don't make sense and that's what really bothers me is when they articulate these are the things that are supposed to be [lead to a principalship], this is what you're supposed to do. You jump these hoops, you do this and everything; then you should get where you want to be. But I know of some people that have done all those things, are outstanding people that I wonder why are they not promoted. It just doesn't make sense. (AP8)

An AP, who applied to become a principal numerous times; maintained that the interview process appeared to be clear, but in reality it was ambiguous. He explained his views:

3.3.2

It could be argued that it [interview procedure] is transparent because we've listed the criteria, you've applied, we judge you based on that criterion or on those criteria rather. So is that transparent? ...I think

the answer is that no and I think it's important that when you take a look at how quickly some people are appointed; these are the other, you know by what magic does that happen? (AP10)

Two APs reported that the Riverbend School District was hiring an equal number of men and women to elementary principalships. Because more female than male candidates applied for principalships, a woman's chances of appointment decreased, while a man's chances increased. For instance, if there are 10 principalships and 25 women and 10 men applied five women and five men would be appointed. In this scenario, men have a 50% chance of being hired while women have a 20% chance of being hired. The two APs suggested that women had to work harder than men do to be promoted to an RSD principalship. An assistant principal maintained that women were also competing with other women for the principal positions. One AP commented,

3.3.3

"There are people, men who never show up for one association meeting at all none and, who of course are promoted. So...so they're not playing...it's interesting, I think as a woman you do have to work a little bit harder in that sense" (AP6).

4 The Interview Process

An associate superintendent chairs the interview committee. Typically, other committee members are the president of the RDAA, president of the RTU, a parent, and a trustee. The interview committee, lead by an associate superintendent, engages in the following processes and procedures: short listing, interviewing, and selecting assistant principals to promotion to the principalship. First, the interview committee reviews all applications submitted for principalship. Next, the interview committee chooses a number of applicants to interview; the number of interviewees depends on the number of projected principalship openings. There were approximately 10 principalships open in fall 2005. The committee notifies the interviewees, provides the interviewees with the one of the six interview questions; and schedules the interviews. Each interview is 30 minutes. The interviews occur over a two day period. After the interviews, the associate superintendent contacts the successful candidates. Unsuccessful candidates may schedule a meeting with the associate superintendent to discuss why they were unsuccessful. According to one assistant principal, approximately 50 candidates submitted applications to the interview committee in 2005. Four APs were shortlisted for interviews in 2005; AP1, AP2, and AP6 were promoted to RSD principalships; AP4 was not promoted to a principalship. Assistant principal 8, who had applied for a principalship in RSD and another district, was hired by the other school district.

4.1 Short Listing Candidates

The committee short lists candidates by selecting a specific number of candidates to interview. Several APs stated that it was important to have a connection with a member on the hiring committee because it increased the chances of being short listed. An assistant principal stated, "I think it's really important to have one person from the committee whoever happens to sit on it say, oh yes. Because there are forty, fifty applications and somebody has to advocate for you otherwise it ain't happening" (AP4). Another AP offered this observation:

4.1.1

When there's all these applications on the table and you know only 'x' amount of them come off the table, and you have to get yours just raised up a little bit. So you either have somebody that's promoting you which I think was done a lot last year. (AP5)

One AP commented on the principal's influence or lack thereof:

4.1.2

I think a lot of it has to do with your principal really promoting you and pushing for you, to be on that short list, or someone on that committee to be speaking for you. So it may not be a principal it could be somebody else, the area superintendent, or it could be our association president. (AP9)

An AP, who had previously served on the hiring committee as a parent stated that,

4.1.3

"When I was on the other side, if someone was raving about a person [candidate], then they got short listed" (AP7).

4.2

Another AP spoke about the Riverbend Teachers Union,

4.2.1

"The teacher rep is very important, and if you get a union veto, I think your chances of being a principal are pretty slim, pretty slim" (AP6).

4.3 The Interview

The actual interview for those APs who were shortlisted was 30 minutes. The interviewees responded to questions about educational philosophy, school growth plans, instructional practices, student assessment, professional employee relationships, and community relationships. One assistant principal described her interview experience:

4.3.1

The interview itself was quite different....There is no discussion or response, it's just a thank you and you're moving on to the next question. It's so different than the usual way that people relate that in some way I mean you get an idea about how a person works under pressure and you get an idea about how a person has prepared the thoughts that they have. But as to the whole leadership profile [that] talks about characteristics you know and the way a person is. So you don't have a chance to really explore much about a person in that process. So I don't know, it's an interesting process but I don't think it's particularly valuable. I mean it has its good points to it. (AP2)

Another AP suggested that the interview committee wanted candidates to possess particular characteristics and skills:

4.3.2

They were looking for people who related well and I think that's probably the number one thing they're looking [for]....Relate well to other people and can hold a lot of balls up in the air at the same. Has somewhat of a sense of humor, can handle the simultaneity of the job, can handle the stress of the job and still be a person that acts like a person and not a frazzle. (AP5)

Another assistant principal shared that the interviewee had to be cautious about what was said during the interview:

4.3.3

You're tiptoeing around because you have to answer these questions without offending the parent rep, the union rep, the senior management person, the principal association rep. I'm a real cynic. I don't think the interview was there for you to get hired. I think it was there for you to blow it. (AP1)

As described in a previous quote, questions were asked and answered; then, the interview ended. The APs remarked on the 30 minute interview. The view of one assistant principal represented the views of the others:

4.3.4

I'm not convinced that they look at all the things. I just think there needs to be a better way of promoting people...An hour or half hour interview with six questions, five minutes per question is more of a performance than anything else. I think that might be an area that Riverbend doesn't walk the walk. (AP1)

One AP suggested an alternative approach to the RSD principal interview,

4.3.5

"I would love to have the actual interview process something like this, where we're sitting at a table with an informal conversations with one or two other people and the committee is, the committees" (AP9).

There were several factors and barriers for non/promotion during the short listing and the interview process. First, non/sponsorship by a member of the interview committee was a factor. Sponsorship was based on relationships with influential individuals and/or committee members (Ortiz, 1982; Valverde, 1980). Second, dis/approval of the teachers' union appeared to be pivotal. Furthermore, there seemed to be three problem areas with the short listing and interview process.

First, the integrity of the short listing and interview process appeared to be an issue. All of the APs reported that they needed an advocate on the interview committee. Also, a few of the APs believed that the committee knew who they were going to hire prior to the interview. Second, the interviewers did not appear to examine or query the APs' knowledge of leadership skills and ability to lead a school. The APs were expected to possess the requisite leadership skills and knowledge. Third, the interviews were restrictive; that is, the committee could not "get to know" the candidates during a 30 minute interview.

5 Discussion and Implications

Promotion from the AP position to the principalship in RSD was a complex, multifaceted, political endeavor. Micropolitics, and social and political capital illuminate the promotion process. Micropolitics highlights how individuals and groups in schools exercise formal and informal power and influence in different arenas and in different ways (Blase, 1991). Social capital is defined as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986). To facilitate their promotion to the principalship, RSD APs were proactive and responsive to the informal and formal power and influence of various individuals, specifically, the principals and associate superintendents and the teachers' union. The successful APs engaged in self-advocacy to influence others. They networked and built relationships with principals, associate superintendents and the teachers' union. Relationships were important. Ball (1987) explained, "It's about relationships, not structures; knowledge rather than information, and talk rather than paper" (p. 5). In addition, the successful assistant principals developed social capital and political capital with influential individuals and groups. Working with a principal maker, having a good relationship with an associate superintendent and the teachers union, and promoting oneself facilitated promotion to the principalship. The barriers to promotion to the principalship for assistant principals were reluctance to engage in self advocacy, lack of relationships with influential people, working with a powerless principal, and lack of visibility across the district. The assistant principals who did not self advocate, like AP10, were not promoted to the principalship. These APs did not use power or influence to facilitate their promotion to the principalship.

Two problem areas arise from this study. First, the APs, who do not possess the knowledge, experience, skills or attitudes to be effective principals; may be promoted to a principalship because they had been self advocates; they may have sponsors and supporters in the higher levels of the system, and they may have developed important relationships with influential superiors and with the teachers' union. Second, the APs who are qualified to be effective principals, may not be promoted to the principalship. These APs must recognize that work alone, that is, possessing the knowledge, experience, skills, and dispositions to become a principal; is no guarantee of promotion to a principalship.

6 Conclusion

Assistant principals are political actors in their own careers. The key factors for promotion are being self advocates; APs need to highlight their work. Assistant principals who have worked with a principal-maker were more likely to be promoted to the principalship. Developing and maintaining relationships with influential individuals occurred in various settings. One strategy of self-advocacy was increasing one's visibility across the district; membership on a district wide committee was one way of becoming known in the district. Lastly, if a member of the interview committee advocated for an assistant principal, the AP was most likely short listed and interviewed. The barriers are the mirror opposite. Consequently, an examination of the interview processes and procedures need to focus on how APs can communicate the quality, depth, and breadth of their work to superiors without becoming "cheerleaders" and self-promoters. Also, the district needs to examine how it identifies potential successful principals while accounting for the politics, power, and influence inherent in a hierarchical system. This is a topic for future investigation.

7 References

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