

**Essential Skills for Potential School Administrators:
A Case Study of One Saskatchewan Urban School Division**

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ABSTRACT

Some school divisions find themselves with a limited number of qualified applicants for administration positions. Aspirants require suggestions of and guidance toward effective leadership training programs and supports. A clear understanding of essential leadership skills may create an incentive for classroom teachers to apply for administration positions and potentially decrease the strain on school divisions. Selection and suitability of qualified candidates applying for vacancies will diminish school boards' struggles to fill administrative vacancies.

The purpose of this case study was to describe what administrative personnel – superintendents, principals, and vice principals – in one Saskatchewan urban school division consider essential skills for classroom teachers to develop as a means to position themselves as future school administrators. Furthermore, the case study set out to identify appropriate leadership development programs and supports to assist aspiring administrators in leadership development. This study aspired to isolate programs that practicing administrators in the school division posited as most useful in their own skill acquisition and development.

A mixed-methods survey questionnaire was administered to 117 administrators of one Saskatchewan urban school division. The administrators' insights and expertise as to the essential skills required to be an effective administrator will assist classroom teachers prepare for the potential of becoming formal leaders. Forty percent of this group responded to the survey. Data from this

case study were compared to a similar case study conducted by John Daresh (1994) in the United States.

Participants believed aspiring administrators must develop self-awareness skills to be effective educational leaders and must be offered appropriate leadership programs and supports through which aspirants could develop essential leadership skills. Even though the majority of respondents suggested self-awareness skills were essential to develop for effective leadership, they posited the importance of also developing technical and social skills. This case study found that while a commonality of skills were identified by participants as essential, it was extremely important for aspiring administrators, with the assistance of their school board, to build on their own personal leadership strengths.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Papa and Baxter (2005), in an American study, reported a shortage of educational administrators was looming for three reasons: (a) school administrative roles have become more complex, (b) unrealistic and overwhelming job expectations and lack of remuneration force school administrators out of leadership positions, and, (c) large numbers of school administrators are near retirement age. Renihan (1999), in an earlier Canadian report, discussed many of these same issues in the context of Saskatchewan schools accompanied by possible solutions and interventions. Many school divisions, however, continually find themselves with scarce numbers of qualified applicants for administration positions.

Clear understanding of essential leadership skills may entice classroom teachers to apply for in-school administration positions, thus increasing the number of qualified candidates. Providing suggestions and guidance for effective leadership training programs and supports will enhance aspirants' quest of becoming an in-school administrator. As interest increases, the selection and suitability of qualified candidates applying for vacancies will diminish school boards' struggles to fill vacancies.

Inspiration for Study

I have aspirations to become an in-school administrator. It seems, however, there is not an easily definable set of skills I need to develop to better prepare myself for the opportunity to assume an in-school administration role. For this reason I sought to identify what practicing administrators believed to be essential skills to

acquire and to develop in order to become a potential in-school administrator.

Providing a list of essential skills to classroom teachers might offer valuable insight to aspirants to engage in leadership opportunities and develop leadership skills through personal professional growth.

Research Questions and Purpose of Study

My study was guided by the following three research questions. In the context of one Saskatchewan school division:

1. What do school board personnel and school leaders identify as essential skills for school-based administrators?
2. How can classroom teachers prepare themselves for potential administrator roles?
3. What programs or supports are necessary to develop classroom teachers into potential administrators?

My survey questionnaire was designed to solicit the insight of experienced administrators from three different careers stages: superintendents, principals, and vice principals. The survey instrument contained 11 closed form questions and four open form questions. Participants were asked to share valuable information with regard to their interpretation of required essential leadership skills, useful preparation opportunities that were critical in their leadership development, supports offered by the school division, and programs the participants felt should be offered by the school board. One hundred-seventeen survey questionnaires were distributed to participants consisting of nine superintendents, 54 principals, and 54 vice principals. I received 40% of the completed survey questionnaires from the participants.

Data, from the closed form questions, were aggregated and later disaggregated to explore significant trends between male and female respondents and between superintendents, principals and vice principals. Data from the open form questions were collated for and presented in themes relating to research questions using typological analysis (Hatch, 2002).

Results from this study were compared to a similar study conducted by Daresh (1994) in the United States. With insight from practicing administrators, many classroom teachers have the potential and aspirations to become administrators. Practicing administrators may better assist aspirants to understand the critical skills required to be an effective administration candidate, as well as to provide appropriate leadership skill development opportunities. Creating transparent expectations of essential leadership skills required for and sought by a school board in prospective administrators may increase the potential pool of candidates and reduce the strains of the looming administrative shortages, which gives this study significance, particularly in the Saskatchewan context.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are offered as operational definitions for this study. Daresh and Playko (1994) identified *aspiring administrators* as “individuals who were...leading to...building level administrators...[and] had expressed a clear desire to find a position as a school [administrator]” (p. 37). A *beginning administrator* is an individual who has successfully assumed an administrative position. Daresh and Playko also offered an explanation of *practicing administrator* to mean this individual “had experiences levels...in the field of school

administration” (p. 37). Other interchangeable terms for *practicing administrator* include *current administrators* and *veteran administrators*. The final term used regularly is *critical skills*, which are “skills perceived to be needed by beginning and aspiring [administrators]” (Daresh & Playko, 1994, p. 37) to be an effective educational administrator.

Assumptions

I assumed that an essential set of skills necessary to be an effective in-school administrator existed. I also assumed Canadian in-school administrators’ job requirements were similar to those of United States in-school administrators and United Kingdom head teachers for literature review purposes. Throughout the course of my case study, I believed a change had occurred over 14 years – the time of the original Daresh (1994) study - in essential skills necessary to cope with the changing complexities of the role of in-school administration.

Delimitations

This study examined the perceptions of practicing administrators about essential skills classroom teachers should acquire and develop to be an effective in-school administrator. Teachers’ insights were not investigated as I felt practicing administrators would have more ability to concretely identify skills essential to carrying out their administrative duties. I am a teacher in Saskatchewan with aspirations of in-school administration. For this reason I felt it appropriate to conduct my case study in a Saskatchewan school division similar to my own. I hoped to gain relevant insight about in-school administration from practicing superintendents,

principals, and vice principals, all of whom were currently working in a leadership position.

Limitations

My instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) research was conducted in a school division from which I was released from regular teaching duties to complete my post-graduate degree. Because the study was limited to only one school division, data gathered may not be generalizable to other school divisions. Also, participation was voluntary, which resulted in a response rate of 40% from the possible 117 participants. The survey questionnaire was composed mostly of closed form questions, which resulted in minimal data and limited the participants' opportunity to explore the research questions and the topic in great depth. Only I interpreted participants' responses.

Presentation of Chapters

In Chapter One, a statement of the problem investigated was outlined. In addition, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the definitions of terms, delimitations, and assumptions were presented. Chapter Two reviews the literature pertinent to the problem that was investigated in this study. Chapter Three outlines research methods, validity of methodology, and reliability of instrument, ethical considerations, and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four presents an analysis of the data collected. Chapter Five concludes the project with a summary of the study, the findings, implications, and recommendations for further practices.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature relevant to my topic. I address two main strands of literature. The first strand will explore research about essential skills of effective administrators. It will clarify the role of the principal from a Saskatchewan perspective, states my conceptual frame on which my study was based, and discusses the transformation process that occurs and the responsibility of aspirants regarding leadership skill development in pursuit of becoming an administrator. The second strand, preparation programming for essential leadership skill development, will explore necessary adaptations preparation programs might undergo to develop well rounded school administrators. Also, the benefits of and need for preparation programs to include mentorship as part of acquiring essential leadership skills will be addressed.

Essential Skills of an Effective Principal

Practicing administrators' insights into essential skills required to be an effective in-school administrator may assist classroom teachers to prepare for becoming formal leaders. Transparent descriptions and ideas of what administrative personnel consider essential skills will assist aspiring administrators to position themselves as future in-school administrators. However, essential leadership skills required to become an effective in-school administrator must reflect changing complexities to the role of a principal.

Defining the Role of the Principal

Defining the role of the principal is difficult and different from one organization to the next. Many researchers (Ballek et al, 2005, Browne-Ferrigno, 2003, Crow, 2006; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Stevenson, 2006) argued that the job was becoming so complex that effective leadership would be accomplished only through shared leadership. Other researchers (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Stevenson, 2006) stated that complexities of the principal's role was significantly changing for many reasons including: increased accountability, increased daily duties, having to accomplish an increased number of educational tasks with fewer resources, and increased stress to meet required educational and organizational benchmarks, all while ensuring the education of all students. Notwithstanding, a common descriptor exists between organizations that the principal is a "pivotal player in improving the quality of life and learning in schools" (Restine, 1997, p. 253).

A Saskatchewan Perspective. While reading about many interpretations of the "actual" role or duties of a principal, I found the explanation of the role of the principal as prescribed in the popular literature document entitled *A Significant Journey: A Saskatchewan Resource for the Principalship* (2003). This document leads aspiring administrators and neophyte administrators in reflective thought as to *why* and *how to* become an effective administrator, which aligns itself with Daresh's (1994, 2002) three essential skills areas. The literature appeals to me and appears suitable for my research because it is Canadian, was created by four Saskatchewan educational organizations, and is a document I will use when I assume an administrative placement in the future.

Four provincial organizations, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education¹; Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (SSTA); League of Educational Administrators, Directors, and Superintendents (LEADS); and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) collaborated in 2003 to create a collective conceptualization of the role of the principal in accordance to the legal stipulations expressed in the *Education Act* (1995), and to broaden the perception that every school must have a “principal who carries out the broad range of duties outlined in general terms...of the Act” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2003, p. 5). As a result, the four organizations agreed that effective administrators must develop leadership skills to effectively carry out six key dimensions of administrators' work: (a) developing vision and direction, (b) creating a supportive school climate, (c) supporting teaching and learning, (d) embedding the school in community, (e) developing an effective school team, and (f) managing school resources.

Conceptual Framework

John Daresh (1994) administered a study entitled *Beginning Principals' Critical Skills Survey* in five states to 100 practicing principals and superintendents, as well as 420 aspiring principals. His intent was to gather information regarding the actuality of essential skills required to be a successful school administrator in the United States.

Daresh's (1994) survey grouped essential skills into three categories: technical skills, socialization skills, and self-awareness skills. In his findings, Daresh noted interesting results especially regarding differences as to what the aspiring

¹ On November 7, 2007, Saskatchewan Learning was renamed Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.

administrators and practicing principals identified as essential skills. He also identified interesting differences in essential skills as identified by superintendents in an earlier study (Daresh & Playko, 1992). Each group of administrators had its own interpretation of essential skills required to be an effective administrator.

Ironically, aspiring administrators perceived technical skills, practicing principals identified socialization skills, and superintendents conveyed self-awareness skills as being most critical in administrators. Daresh (1994) admitted that his findings were not new and he argued the differences in opinions between the three administrative groups came about because of “different expectations for the role of school principal” (p. 40). He believed that his study would assist individuals through personal career changes and offer insight into how to provide beginning administrators with more successful experiences based on the identification of essential skills. Daresh also argued refinements are required to preparation and induction programs of neophyte administrators and must be driven by ongoing in-service education.

Daresh later published his 1994 survey in a resource for beginning principals entitled *What It Means to Be A Principal: Your Guide to Leadership* (2002). It now acts as a self-evaluation or personal inventory for newly appointed principals. Although his survey has not been replicated in any other study, researchers (Kerrins & Cushing, 2000; Orr, 2006; Schulte & Kowal, 2005; Walker & Qian, 2006) continue to cite Daresh’s 1994 survey and the original Daresh and Playko (1992) study, as well as the 2002 principal resource for beginning principals in their work. Fourteen years have lapsed since its second application, but the information provided by the survey

continues to voice the need for aspiring administrators, with the guidance and wisdom of preparation programs, to develop all three necessary skills areas. Daresh's three categories of essential skills is a distinguishing feature I find helpful for my own thinking because it seems to escape the problem of the diversity of opinions found in current research.

Three Areas of Essential Skills

Daresh (1994) identified three specific areas of skills namely *Technical*, *Socialization*, and *Self-awareness*. Clarification of each type of specific skill – technical, socialization, and self-awareness – were suggested in his study and later reiterated in his book entitled *What it Means to be A Principal: Your Guide to Leadership* (2002). He offered the following explanation, in the form of questions, of the three areas of critical skills:

Technical skills. *What* do I need to know how to do, now that I am an administrator?

Socialization skills. *How* am I supposed to look and act? How will my behavior affect staff, parents, students, and others?

Self-awareness skills. *Who* am I? *What* do I think? *What* do I believe? *What* do others see and hear when they see and listen to me? (2002, p. 4, emphasis in original)

Table 2.1 displays the 24 critical skills from the survey in each of the three categories. In his original study, Daresh reported that aspiring administrators believed technical skills that would demonstrate their ability to effectively lead were of more importance to develop than social and self-awareness skill. He later suggested, in his implications for pre-service programs that his intent was not to say

that “it is no longer necessary to teach aspiring administrators about law and budgeting” (p. 41) but rather he had concerns as to the “extent to which technical

Table 2.1

Three Key Areas and Examples of Essential Leadership Skills

Technical Skills	Socialization Skills	Self-awareness Skills
staff evaluation	establishing relationships with other administrators	understanding the power and authority possessed by administration
staff meeting agendas	establishing staff job assignments	knowing why one was selected to be an administrator
goal setting	working with school board personnel and central office staff	demonstrating self-confidence
building management including budgeting and school law	knowing one’s professional values	having a vision and understanding how vision directs schools to accomplish goals;
organizing and conducting parent-teacher-student conferences	principal as a change agent	thriving to make a difference in students lives
working with and monitoring secretarial staff	interpersonal skills with members of the school and community	being aware of one’s biases, strengths, and weaknesses
	ability to encourage involvement of all stakeholders in a school	continually adapting the vision to keep progress ongoing
	developing positive relationships with other organizations in the surrounding community	ability to assess job responsibilities assigned to administration

Adapted from Daresh’s (1994) original survey

content knowledge needs to serve as the sole focus of preparation programmes” (p. 41). Researchers (Grogan & Andrews, 2002) supported Daresh statement that preparation programs were limiting participants’ balanced development of essential leadership skills training.

Researchers are not questioning the effectiveness of preparation programs but rather the content that aspiring administrators acquire through participation in a leadership preparation program. Grogan and Andrews (2002) believed aspiring administrators do learn valuable skills through university preparation programs; however, the tendency is for universities to place primary importance on students learning “technical skills rather than social skills” (p. 238). Other researchers (Blase & Blase, 1999; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Zenger et al., 2004) inadvertently agree with Daresh’s (1994) list of critical skills but do not delineate specific skills categories.

I have attempted to use Daresh’s model of three key areas to categorize and validate his suggestions. There is potential for some overlap in classification of essential skills required to be an effective administrator. Table 2.2 summarizes common essential skills suggested by researchers (Brown, 2006; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Blase & Blase, 1999; Briggs et al., 2006; Ballek et al., 2005; Crawford, 2007; Crow, 2006; Daresh & Playko, 1995; Day, 2004; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Walker & Dimmock, 2006; Walker & Qian, 2006; Zenger et al., 2004). The choice of where to put the items was based on Daresh’s (2002) clarifying questions discussed previously in this section.

Table 2.2

Essential Leadership Skills from Other Research Within Daresh's (1994) Key Areas

Researcher	Technical Skills	Social Skills	Self-awareness skills
Brown (2006)	Formal education training Theoretical knowledge	Experience through field work Group discussions Becoming familiar with settings other than educational	
Browne-Ferrigno (2003)	Role Conception Active learning skills Professional reading	Facilitator Communicator Sharing responsibility	Experience Desire Cerebral challenge
Blase & Blase (1999)	Listening skills Theories of teaching and learning Action research methods	Shared responsibility Giving feedback Motivational Group development Change initiation Inclusiveness Lead by example	Being an effective and positive example Reflection
Briggs et al. (2006)	Budgeting General leadership skills Management skills	Coping skills to deal with change Motivational skills Job coaching Networking Accountability Multitasking skills	
Ballek et al. (2005)		Facilitation skills Shared responsibility	Confidence Competence
Crawford (2007)		Relationship building Sense of community	

Researcher	Technical Skills	Social Skills	Self-awareness skills
Crow (2006)	Law Finance Leadership skills Organizational theory Role conception Collaboration	Teamwork Collaboration Cultural sensitivity Socialization	Self-identity
Daresh & Playko (1995)	Communication skills Conflict resolution skills Listening skills Educational philosophy	Interpersonal skills	Sense of values and beliefs Willingness to admit lack of knowledge
Day (2004)			Passion
Grogan & Andrews (2002)	Curriculum knowledge	Provide support and resources Reflective Power with rather than over	Reflective Dedicated
Walker & Dimmock (2006)	Law Information collection skills	Networking Relationship building Supportive Risk taking Collaborative	Self-awareness Willingness to go outside comfort zone Humble self-reflection
Walker & Qian (2006)	Professional Reading	Relationship building Networking	Clear values Lifelong learner
Zenger et al. (2004)	Technical competence Problem solving skills	Purposeful Forward thinking Collaborative Innovation Taking initiative Honesty Integrity Motivational	Clear vision Prolific communicator

Skills Transformation from Teacher to Administrator

Ballek et al. (2005), in their implementation of a seven-stage research designed for district engagement and development of aspiring administrators, believed that a teacher aspiring to be an administrator enters into “a 200% equation” (p. 43). A teacher becomes responsible for 100% of the development of his or her own leadership skills by actively engaging in professional development conducive to producing leadership skills; the principal and school division creates teacher leader potential through school-based and through system-wide opportunities, which constitutes the remaining 100%. As a teacher discovers and begins leadership skill development, a transformation from teacher to administrator begins to take shape.

Assuming an administrative position becomes a transformation where skills acquired as a teacher create a platform on which newly acquired and developed skills form. Browne-Ferrigno (2003), in her exploratory study of 18 practitioners’ professional growth while participating in a principal preparation cohort program, believed that in order for a teacher to become an administrator he or she must, “relinquish comfort and confidence of a known role to experience the discomfort and uncertainty of a new unknown role” (p. 470). She went on to say successful transformation from teacher to administrator occurs when an individual’s attributes and capabilities successfully merge with the organization’s efforts. This transformational process begins early in an aspiring administrator’s career.

Individual Responsibility for Leadership Skills Development

Menter et al. (2005) believed that it was reasonable to expect aspiring administrators to seek development of skills and qualities that will enable them to

enter into the initiation phase successfully. Many of the skills identified in the *technical* skills column appear to be skills which aspiring administrators would acquire while attending university or other preparation courses. Daresh (2002) referred to these types of skills as “*what to do...*” (p. 4, emphasis in original) skills. Generally speaking, competencies including law, budgeting, organizational theory, role conception, and philosophy are obtainable in a classroom setting.

Although technical skills are necessary, aspiring administrators who possess only these skills may not evolve into an effective leader. I found that much of the research focuses on the *social* skills. Such skills included collaboration, networking, motivation, and leading by example (Blase & Blase, 1999; Briggs et al., 2006; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Crow, 2006; Walker & Dimmock, 2006; Zenger et al., 2004). Interestingly, the skills in that column appear to be skills which aspiring administrators would acquire through learning-by-doing while assuming a leadership role. In the acquisition of social skills through on-the-job experience, technical skills learned in the classroom setting will be refined and utilized (Daresh, 1994).

Self-awareness skills are essential to being an effective administrator. The most commonly listed attributes which fall into this category include the ideas of clarity of beliefs and values, ability to engage in humble self-reflection, desire to be an effective administrator, competence and confidence, and willingness to look “outside the box” resulting in lifelong learning. Day (2004), in a multi-perspective research paper that examined key essential leadership qualities of ten experienced and successful headteachers in the United Kingdom, stated that the most common attribute of the headteachers was their passion for effective leadership. He further

explored the idea of passion and established six areas: (a) “a passion for achievement,” (b) “a passion for care”, (c) “a passion for collaboration”, (d) “a passion for commitment”, (e) “a passion for trust”, and (f) “a passion for inclusivity” (p. 427). Passionate people “generate energy, determination, conviction, commitment and even obsession in people” (p. 427) leading to quality education being offered to students. Teachers model their leadership skills around positive examples from their own passionate leaders.

I believe Daresh’s (1994, 2002) examples of essential social skills transpired for three reasons. First, the articles I have reviewed focused on practicing administrators encouraging *learning-by-doing* experiences to aspiring administrators, which strengthens social skills. Second, I believe technical skills are less of a focus in research because aspiring administrators are expected to possess these types of skills prior to applying for a school administration position. The last reason, in my opinion, focuses on the fact that *self-awareness* skills evolve from effective socialization and from confidence in leadership

An aspiring administrator will begin to answer the questions of *who* they are as a leader, *what* they think and believe, and *what* others see and hear them saying (Daresh, 2002). A well-rounded leader must possess skills from the areas of *technical, social* and *self-awareness*. Acquisition of the essential skills will occur at different stages as aspiring administrators begin their pursuit of administration, in their neophyte years, and as they progress through to veteran status. Each stage becomes a landmark that, as educational leaders grow, requires new skills for an

administrator to continue to be effective, passionate, and up-to-date with the changing complexities of the role of administration.

This section explored the essential skills of an effective principal. Aspiring administrators must develop essential leadership skills to accommodate for the constant changes in administration complexities. Daresh's (1994) study acts as a conceptual frame for my study. In his study, Daresh explored three specific areas of leadership skills, which he identified as essential to being an effective school administrator. A transformation of essential skills occurs when teachers act on their aspirations of administration. Aspirants become primarily responsible for acquiring leadership skills, however, assistance must be provided from current administrators and school divisions.

The next section explores research on preparation programming for leadership skill development. I will present information in the following three subsections: learning phases of school leadership, necessary adaptation to school administration preparation programs, and outcome-based learning and mentorship programs.

Preparation Programming for Essential Leadership Skill Development

In the United States, an estimated 60% of all principals in the next five years will be replaced either because of retirement, promotion, termination, or burnout (Peterson, 2002). High turnover rates place an enormous pressure on training institutions to create a sufficient number of qualified applicants to fill the vacancies. In relation to training institutes, much debate exists at an international level regarding the effectiveness of administration preparation programs. Wong (2004) argued that inconsistencies in worldwide requirements for administration positions were affecting

the consistencies in preparation program requirements. Walker and Qian (2006) supported Wong's argument examining the career stages of administrators. They suggested a gap existed between the needs of beginning and aspiring administrators, especially in the most effective ways to obtain the necessary skills and training.

According to Browne-Ferrigno (2003), preparation for the principalship should begin before a teacher has aspirations of becoming a formal leader. Work is or should be offered at the school level that constructively harnesses potential leadership skills of teachers through school level tasks which support the overall school goal. Shared leadership relieves some pressures principals face during the work day while creating opportunities for teachers to begin to develop leadership skills (Ballek et al, 2005; Blase & Blase, 1999).

Blase and Blase (1999) conducted a study that explored teachers' perspectives of effective instructional leadership. The authors used the Blumer-Mead (1934; 1969 as cited in Blase & Blase, 1999) approach to symbolic interaction theory, which focused on "understanding the meanings human beings construct in their social settings" (p. 131). Eight-hundred and nine full-time public school teachers from both rural and urban school settings completed an open-ended questionnaire. The authors generalized participants' responses into two major themes: *talking with teachers to promote reflection* and *promoting professional growth*.

The first theme, *talking with teachers to promote reflection*, was further divided into five sub themes: *making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling, using inquiry and soliciting advice and opinions*, and *giving praise*. Principals, according to Blase and Blase (1999), "valued the dialog that encouraged teachers to critically

reflect on their learning and professional practice” (p. 133). An effective educational leader has the ability to enhance teachers emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally.

Principal and teacher effectiveness can also be enhanced through professional growth. Blase and Blase (1999) listed this as their second theme that, again, was further broken down to include sub categories, which included:

- (1) emphasizing the study of teaching and learning;
- (2) supporting collaboration efforts among educators;
- (3) developing coaching relationships among educators;
- (4) encouraging and supporting redesign of program developments;
- (5) applying the principles of adult learning, growth, and development to all phases of staff development; and
- (6) implementing action research to inform instructional decision making (p. 135).

These sub themes of promoting professional growth, together with the elements enveloped in theme one, deemphasized principal control, encouraged and instigated professional dialogue, and built collegiality among staff members. The idea is that teachers and administrators together may positively change schools and become more effective in educating students.

Learning Phases of School Leadership

In a study utilizing questionnaires and interviews to trace the development of new head teachers toward assuming a leadership role, Briggs’ et al. (2006) identified four phases of learning about the role of school leadership and its social contexts through which participants progressed. Phase one, *idealization* of the role of headship, focused on assisting an aspiring administrator understand the demands of

the role of headship. Phase two, the *immersion* phase, implied “learning the ropes” (p. 260) of the role of headship. Other researchers including Brown (2006), Browne-Ferrigno (2003), Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004), Crow (2006), Grogran and Andrews (2002), and Marshak and Klotz (2001), agreed that field experience is one of the most effective preparation methods for an aspiring administrator as it provides the opportunity to witness first hand the actuality of being an administrator. Many of the lessons necessary to be an effective principal can be learned only during the first year as an administrator.

Researchers are not suggesting, however, that all learning should occur while in an actual position of administration. Essential skills, in combination with practical experience must occur in the classroom (Marshak & Klotz, 2001). Preparation of skills including ability to be skeptical (not to make snap decisions), the ability to involve stakeholders in decision-making (securing additional information, increasing potential of support from staff and community), the ability to adapt current successful trends (not reinventing the wheel), and the ability to celebrate success with staff (acknowledging a job well done) can be explored in the classroom and eventually applied to the real situation. Through case studies, dramatizations, or role-playing, aspiring administrators can prepare skills essential to effective leadership in a safe and forgiving atmosphere.

Phase three of Briggs et al.’s (2006) study, the *establishment* phase, occurs when participants define their interpretation of the role of the principal. School structure and process can be securely put in place and skills can now be applied to a specific setting, situation or context. This is said to be the most relaxed of the four

phases because the aspiring administrators begin to see the big picture and begin to develop their niches. The final phase, *consolidation*, occurs when administrators feel accepted in the role and a growing manifestation of perceived wisdom is evident through the successful application of acquired leadership skills. Preparation courses must be designed to guide and to assist aspiring administrators through all four phases – *idealization, immersion, establishment, and consolidation* – of leadership development and into leadership positions.

Necessary Adaptations to School Administration Preparation Programs

Founders and instructors of preparation programs are forced to adapt methodologies to educate and prepare aspiring administrators for the constantly changing shifts to administrations' responsibilities, accountabilities, and complexities. One participant from the Briggs et al. (2006) study was quoted saying, "nothing really prepared me for this [position of headship]" (p. 263). Aspiring administrators must undergo a transformation as they relinquish skills from a position of established confidence and assume a role they do not yet understand (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

Crow (2006) argued preparation programs were inadequately preparing aspiring administrators with regard to new policies and social context, all of which he felt were a necessary facet of skill development. His argument supports Briggs' et al. (2006) learning phase three, which suggested an aspirant's understanding of policies and social contexts were grounded in their interpretation of the role of an administrator. This argument contradicted Grogan and Andrews' (2002) suggestions that changes were occurring to gear preparation programs to provide experience and

to focus aspiring administrators on becoming instructional leaders and less like building managers. Grogan and Andrews also believed that participants in preparation programs would benefit more if accomplishments were measured with acquisition of competencies rather than a collection of completed courses.

Other researchers support the arguments put forth by Grogan and Andrews (2002), including research published by Brown (2006). In a conceptual piece that focused on the struggles experienced by practicing principals in keeping with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) initiative, Brown stressed the need for preparation programs to implement four changes to ensure the quality of graduates completing the programs and receiving licensure. She recommended that entrance requirements be raised and be based on applicants past leadership experiences, insist on a minimum number of years of successful teaching, and provide letters of support from staff, students, and parents as to why entrance to the program should be granted.

Brown (2006) made three other suggestions for necessary changes to preparation programs. The first suggestion was a need to rethink the course work. A necessary change from theoretical knowledge to actual daily realities faced by administrators in schools should be accomplished through field experience, observations, personal reflection, group discussions, and applying practical experience back to theory. Her opinion is supported and shared by other researchers (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Peterson, 2002; Smith, 2001; Walker & Dimmock, 2006; Wong, 2004) but challenged Daresh (1994) who argue that preparation programs need to extend past technical skills. Brown's second suggestion was that preparation programs must

establish appropriate standards through clear understanding of demands and accountabilities faced by school leaders. Marshak and Klotz (2001) went a step further and suggested that preparation programs should mandate the areas of proficiency mandated by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), standards to which they believed preparation programs should agree to utilize in preparing aspiring administrators. Lastly, Brown insisted that participants broaden their learning experiences by being immersed into the role of principal outside of the university classroom setting.

It is important that program participants recognize their own personal strengths and acknowledge areas requiring development (Daresh & Playko, 1995; Menter, Holligan, & Mthenjwa, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2006) as, “one must be a learner to be a leader” (Restine, 1997, p. 266). Individuals forcibly gain insight about their capabilities as they enter into a situation that causes discomfort because discomfort “drive[s] individuals toward [being] an effective leader” (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003, p. 487). Hix et al. (2003) avowed that aspiring principals possessed common knowledge of the possibility of becoming an administrator, contributed to the success of a school by demonstrating leadership, and made personal sacrifices for the well being of a school. It is for these reasons, and so many more, that preparation programs present a positive and effective program conducive to developing essential leadership skills.

Preparation programs require thoughtful planning by organizers. Grogan and Andrews (2006) suggested three areas needing improvement in current preparation programs to increase the number of effective educational leaders completing

leadership training. Preparation programs must: (a) attend to beliefs, attitudes, and philosophy; (b) deal with problems in practice; and (c) foster institutional arrangements to allow for coordination of efforts with school boards. Walker and Dimmock (2006) further explored the third suggestion and reported that relationships and networks established with practicing administrators provided an opportunity for participants to ask questions that directly affected their own situation.

Outcome-based Learning and Mentorship Programs

In support of Walker and Dimmock's (2006) suggestions, Wong (2004) proposed that preparation programs be changed to apply a problem-based learning experience for participants. He argued that this approach forced participants to actively apply their knowledge, skills and attitudes in the changing context of administration. Together fellow participants would work together to team-build and problem solve. Problem-based learning is student centered, personalized, employs a balance of instructional approaches, is built on developmental-based learning, and eventually morphs into a final ending of outcome-based learning.

Wong's (2004) arguments around the element and need for learning to be outcome-based is supported by researchers in the inclusion of some form of field experience, on-the-job experience, internship, learning-by-doing, or mentorship (Briggs et al., 2006; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Hix et al., 2003; Marshak & Klotz, 2001; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). Participants require a chance to apply their knowledge to the actual setting of administration, with the opportunity to adapt or relearn skills, before they assume a position of leadership. In my understanding of the literature on the issue, formal mentorship programs are one

of the most effective and desired methods of learning. Through mentorship, participants learn many essential skills that prepare them to be effective in their chosen career path.

Critical skills are best learned and exercised in an “on-the-job” training opportunity. Daresh (1994) stated that “mentoring for beginning principals is a most desirable practice” (p. 43) to acquire and to strengthen technical, social, and self-awareness skills. Other researchers (Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Krajewski et al., 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2006) agreed that “on-the-job” experience provided an opportunity for aspiring administrators to begin to establish a resource for survival while being an administrator. The best way to learn is by doing.

Walker and Qian (2006) stated “there is no playbook for rookies” (p. 303). They believed that a majority of learning for the position of administration occurs by doing. Mentoring forces both mentors and protégés to engage in codependent and independent reflection of both strengths and weaknesses. Walker and Dimmock (2006) agreed that mentorship programs provided more effective preparation than administration training programs or Master of Education courses. Protégés are exposed to new ideas, experience role modeling, receive practical advice, and witness concrete examples of what administration actually does during the course of the school day.

Advantages of Learning-by-doing. The learning-by-doing approach is accomplished most effectively when pursued outside the conventional classroom setting (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). Mentorship

provides an experience that has the potential to create an adequately prepared administrative candidate. Daresh and Playko (1995) clearly stated not all aspiring administrators will succeed in a mentorship program, nor will every administrator be a strong mentor. Both protégé and mentor must bring specific skills to the learning opportunity; ultimately the protégé must have a clear and consistent responsibility for his or her own learning.

Preparing both mentor and protégé for a formal mentorship program is a necessity. Hobson and Sharp (2005), in a literature review of mentorship experiences, reported the majority of participants, both mentors and protégés, recollected positive mentorship experiences. Many participants did, however, suggest that formal training must be provided for mentors. Formal training provisions for mentors could increase interest and the number of practicing administrators in formal mentorship programs. Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) supported Hopson and Sharps' opinion when they stated mentors and protégés must both receive adequate training to prepare them for the mentorship program.

As stated earlier in this section, a mentor plays a large part in the preparation of an aspiring administrator. The description of a successful mentorship experience or relationship for a mentor and/or protégé occurs when (a) participants report new insight about the principalship gained through the professional training experience, (b) new professional behavior of an aspiring administrator aligns to behaviors modeled by the mentor, and (c) protégé and mentor discover new perceptions about themselves as educational leaders. Both protégé and mentor create strong networks and become more engaged and involved in professional discussions and reflections

(Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). In relation to Daresh's (1994) three key areas of critical skills, both the mentor and protégé gain experience and confidence in the application of technical, socialization, and self-awareness skills associated with being an effective educational administrator.

Advantages of Mentorship in Developing Essential Skills Areas. The three essential skills areas established by Daresh (1994) are strengthened when aspiring administrators become immersed in the field and are provided with authentic field experience in a mentorship program. There, protégés have the ability and opportunities to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in preparation courses and, at the same time, to develop socialization and self-awareness skills before assuming a leadership position. Protégés feel an increase in confidence and capabilities, are more authoritative in problem solving and decision making, are able to more soundly create and project their organizational vision, and communication skills become more refined and effective. Mentorship relieves the stress and the fear of relinquishing the comfort of being a teacher to become an administrator (Hobson & Sharp, 2005).

School districts who implement a formal mentorship program increase the number of potential qualified candidates for administration vacancies. Mentoring aspiring administrators provides an effectively led school division capable of creating sound educational leaders. Many of the protégés trained in a particular school division may be more likely to remain and to apply for a position in educational administration.

This section examined the issues of current administration preparation programs. Topics discussed include: promoting the benefits of reflection and of

professional growth, phases of leadership development, and preparation programs directed toward outcome-based learning and formal mentorship programs.

Summary

The role of the principal continues to evolve as a result of complexities associated with the operations and expectations of an educational institution. Daresh's (1994) *Beginning Principals' Critical Skills Survey* explored what he identified as three key areas of skills essential for effective leadership. Well-developed preparation programs are necessary to assist aspiring administrators identify and acquire technical, social, and self-awareness skills essential to being an effective administrator. It is imperative that preparation programs include outcome-based learning opportunities including mentorship programs. This chapter reviewed literature on essential skills required to be an effective school administrator, examined the changing complexities of the role of a principal within a Saskatchewan context, discussed the conceptual frame for my research, analyzed and categorized additional research using Daresh's (1994) three essential skill areas. In this chapter, I also explored the issues pertaining to current preparation programs in preparing aspiring administrators in all three of Daresh's areas of essential skills and I discussed the importance of including mentorship programs as part of leadership preparation.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I describe data collection procedures, data analysis and interpretation, and ethical considerations. Methodology is further broken down to include: site selection, participant selection, conceptual frame, methodology, and validity of survey questionnaire.

Data Collection

This section describes the data collection procedures used for this study. Areas discussed include site selection, participant selection, survey questionnaire adaptations, methodology, and validity of survey questionnaire.

Site Selection

The Saskatchewan urban school division selected for my study serves over 20,000 students in 44 elementary and 10 secondary school through its 2,400 professional and support staff. Of these professional staff, the school board employs 54 principals (44 elementary and 10 secondary), 54 vice/assistant principals (42 elementary and 12 secondary) and 9 superintendents. I chose this site because the school division has been recognized by many universities for its effective school leadership. This school system employs many effective male and female administrators, which was important to enable me to explore differences in opinions between male and female interpretations of essential leadership skills.

Participant Selection

This study used purposeful sampling (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003) to gather “information-rich” (p. 165) insight about essential leadership skills from current educational administrators. Participants involved in the research were the superintendents, principals, and vice principals in one Saskatchewan urban school division. Nine of the vice/assistant principals were in acting positions, three of the superintendents were outside the teaching scope, specifically finance, facilities and human resources, and an additional ten administrators were on leave from their administration assignments due to a combination of other assignments, sick leave, educational leaves, and election to political office. These ten administrators were not part of the initial group solicited for my study.

Following approval from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board and Director of Education of the school division I dispersed the surveys through school mail to all superintendents, principals, and vice principals. Participation in my study was completely voluntary and 40% of possible participants completed and returned the survey questionnaire. I felt current administrators from all three levels were best suited to identify essential leadership skills required to be an effective administrator.

Conceptual Frame

I adapted Daresh’s (1994) study to compare his findings with my findings from one Saskatchewan urban school division. I hoped to recreate and support the results of his *Beginning Principals’ Critical Skills Survey* completed by aspiring and practicing administrators in the United States. My samples included only practicing

superintendents, principals, and vice principals, which was slightly different from Daresh's study sample.

According to Daresh (1994), aspiring principals, practicing principals and superintendents all have different opinions of what is the set of critical skills essential to be an effective in-school administrator. Daresh established three different sets of skills that included *technical*, *socialization*, and *self-awareness* and each dealt with a different facet of effective in-school leadership. Aspiring principals deemed the technical skills as the highest priority, practicing principals believed that socialization skills were the most important, and in an early application of the same survey, superintendents stressed the importance of self-awareness when looking to hire new administrators. Although this study was conducted in the United States, I was testing whether superintendents, principals, and vice principals in Saskatchewan shared similar opinions with American administrators.

A desired outcome from my study was to create an understanding of critical skills required for potential in-school administrators and offer suggestions for professional development through which the critical skills identified might be developed. I believed more classroom teachers might undertake the challenge of developing leadership skills if more precise guidelines of essential skills desired by school division personnel were exposed. Although Daresh's (1994) study was not obtainable, the second section of my survey (see Appendix C) was a replica of information regarding his study as published in his final document.

The Survey Questionnaire

Upon ethical approval from both the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Ethics Board and the school division, 117 surveys were sent to all superintendents, principals, and vice principals through school mail. In December 2007, each participant received a survey package that consisted of an *Invitation to Participate* (see Appendix B), a survey (see Appendix C), and an addressed return envelope in which the completed survey could be sealed and returned through school mail. I requested completed survey questionnaires be returned within three weeks. As a courtesy to the participants, I sent out an email reminding them of the voluntary opportunity to complete and return the survey up to two weeks after distribution. I received 36 surveys prior to, and an additional 10 after, the two-week reminder email. Table 3.1 provides a breakdown of the 47 survey questionnaires returned.

Table 3.1

Respondents' Position, Gender, and Educational Background

	Number of Surveys Distributed	Number of Surveys Returned	Percentage	Gender and Percent of Surveys Returned				Completed Degree Prior to Current Placement	
				M	%	F	%	N	%
Superintendents	9	3	33.33%	3	100	0	0	3	100%
Principals	54	24	44.44%	14	58	10	42	20	83%
Vice Principals	54	20	37.04%	11	55	9	45	16	80%

% = percentage

My survey questionnaire was an adaptation of Daresh's (1994) study and was presented in three sections. The first section was developed to acquire background information, through closed form questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003), to gather information about respondents' gender, current placement, status of position, educational background, percentage of administration release time, areas in which they were trained, future plans for the next three years, and inspiration to apply for current position. The second section that used closed form questions invited respondents to rate, using a 4-point Likert scale, Daresh's (1994) critical skills from his original study. The final section employed four open form questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003) that invited the respondents to comment on the following ideas: (a) leadership development programs and supports offered by the school board, (b) leaderships programs and supports that assisted them personally in preparing for administration, (c) recommendations of leadership programs and supports in which aspirants should partake to develop essential leadership skills, and (d) leadership programs and supports that should be offered by the school board.

Validity of Survey Questionnaire

Validity is concerned with whether or not the instrument draws out the information for which it was intended to explore. Gall et al. (2003) define validity as the "appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of specific inferences made from test scores" (p. 640). Throughout the construction of the instrument I was concerned with two types of validity: content and construct.

Content validity refers to whether or not the instrument reflected its purpose (Gall et al., 2003). In designing the instrument, I created and adapted questions to be

relevant and specific to skills considered essential for classroom teachers to develop for effective leadership. Skills essentials as outlined for this study were previously described in this chapter. Only these specific skills were examined.

Construct validity refers to the extent to which the measurement tool, used correctly, operationalized the concepts being studied (Gall et al., 2003, p. 460). It refers to the degree to which inferences can be made from the study. For a researcher it poses the question, “Did the instrument measure what I thought it would measure?” Gall et al. (2003), suggested the importance of a test pilot of the instrument to establish some value of validity.

Once the survey questionnaire was developed, following the suggestions of Gall et al. (2003) the survey questionnaire was examined by three professional colleagues and then administered to two other professional colleagues consisting of professors other than my project supervisor and retired in-school administrators. The participants of the pilot were asked to review and/or complete the questionnaire and provide written feedback. Some colleagues commented on the time it took to complete the survey, discrepancies of wording from one question to the next, and other general suggestions as to how the survey could be improved. Based on these suggestions, slight modifications and clarifications were made to the questionnaire.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

All data from my survey questionnaires were entered into a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel where each column in the spreadsheet represented the questions on the survey questionnaire. I used standard computations in Microsoft Excel to generate percentages and totals for questions in section one of the survey

questionnaire. Section two of the survey questionnaire, Daresh's (1994) skill sets questions, was copied from Microsoft Excel and entered into SPSS software, a quantitative data program, where means, standard deviation, and frequencies of responses were calculated.

Responses from the open form questions were pasted into Microsoft Word and were typologically analyzed (Hatch, 2002) according to commonalities found in the responses. My three research questions acted as a guide to establish suitable themes. Using the highlighting option found in Microsoft Word, I color coded the commonly expressed programs and supports allowing me visual representation of common answers. Data were later disaggregated to examine similarities and differences between male and female, and superintendent, principal, and vice principal.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are necessary in this research project to ensure the rights of the participants are adhered to throughout the course of my study. Upon receiving approval from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board I requested permission to conduct my study in the selected school board from the Director of Education (see Appendix A). After receiving written permission to conduct my study, I sent to all superintendents, principals, and vice principals a copy of the *Invitation to Participate* letter (see Appendix B), the survey questionnaire (see Appendix C), and return envelope. The *Invitation to Participate* explained the study outline as well as the instructions and implications of completing and returning the study through school mail.

In order to ensure anonymity, participants were directed not to make identifying marks on the survey or return envelope. In any event, identifying information was removed. The participants were informed that there was no risk to participating in this survey, as it would remain anonymous, responses would be treated as confidential information and participating in this study was entirely voluntary. Participants were free to omit any question with which they were uncomfortable answering. To maintain confidentiality of the participants, data collected were presented in aggregate form and no direct quotes were used so that it would not be possible to identify individuals. Adherence to these criteria assured this study conformed to the ethical guidelines of the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board and the school division in which I conducted my study.

Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter outlined my study's data collection procedures, data analysis and interpretation, and ethical considerations. In December 2007, 117 surveys, using both open form and closed form questions, were distributed to the superintendents, principals, and vice principals in one Saskatchewan urban school division. Volunteer participants were asked to complete, seal, and return the survey through school mail within three weeks of receiving it. The response rate from my study was 40%. Chapter four presents the data gathered from the research.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF DATA

The purpose of the study was to identify essential leadership skills for classroom teachers to develop in order for them to act upon their aspirations to become in-school administrators. This chapter presents the findings from my survey questionnaire completed by 47 participants comprised of superintendents, principals, and vice principals in one Saskatchewan urban school division. The participants' opinions are discussed in the context of the three research questions posited in Chapter One. To ensure the participants' responses remained anonymous, I have aggregated the responses from the closed form questions, and responses to open form questions have been collated for themes using no direct quotations.

Presentation of Data

The survey questionnaire distributed was divided into three sections. Section one utilized closed form questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003) intended to gather information about the participants' gender, current position, qualifications, areas of training, intentions for the next three years, and inspiration to seek administration. I felt that gathering this information would allow me to identify patterns in opinions of essential skills based on participants' positions, gender, and qualifications. I believed that gathering information regarding participants' intentions for the next three years would demonstrate a need and reason for classroom teachers to act on their aspirations of administration to fill future vacancies. It was also my intention to identify the most common source of inspiration for the participants in assuming their specific leadership appointment.

Section two was adapted from Daresh's (1994) original survey questionnaire. Daresh's original study required participants to rate the same essential skills on a 5-point Likert scale. I decided upon a 4-point scale and reworded the explanation for each position of the rating scale. The Likert scale was used to calculate mean score, frequencies (in percent), and commonalities in opinions. Table 4.1 shows the differences between Daresh's and my rating scales.

Table 4.1

Differences in Likert Scale between Daresh (1994) and My Adaptation

Daresh (1994, 2002)		My Adaptation	
Likert Scale	Explanation	Likert Scale	Explanation
Rating		Rating	
5	Extremely Critical		
4	Critical	4	Extremely Important
3	Somewhat Important	3	Somewhat Important
2	Not Critical	2	Not important
1	Irrelevant	1	Irrelevant

Differences between Daresh's (1994, 2002) and my Likert scale were slight. I felt it necessary to create similarities between the explanations for each of the rating points. Daresh's original survey questionnaire contains different explicit words for the points. I questioned the difference between *critical* and *important* as well as the difference between *extremely critical* and *critical* and, therefore, I chose to eliminate the 5th point. I believed that the difference between my point 4 and point 3 were

easier to understand and interpret on the basis that *extremely* and *somewhat* was a substantial difference when relating the levels of importance.

The final section of the survey questionnaire utilized open form questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003) and allowed participants to offer their insights into four areas: (a) programs and supports currently available to aspiring administrators, (b) programs and supports that assisted them in acquiring essential leadership skills, (c) recommendations for aspiring administrators as to how they could acquire essential leadership skills, and (d) programs that the participants feel a school board should offer to aspiring administrators to acquire essential leadership skills. Responses from these open form questions were pasted into Microsoft Word and were typologically analyzed (Hatch, 2002) under the guidance of my three research questions. Using the highlighting option found in Microsoft Word, I color coded the commonly expressed programs and supports allowing me to visualize common answers. Data were later disaggregated to examine the similarities and differences between male and female; superintendent, principal, and vice principal; and acting and permanent positions.

All data from sections one and two of my survey questionnaires were entered into a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel. I used standard computations in Microsoft Excel to generate percentages and totals for questions in section one of the survey questionnaire. Data from section two of the survey questionnaire, Daresh's (1994) skill sets questions, were entered into the quantitative data program SPSS to calculate means, standard deviation, and frequencies of responses, which is presented in tables 4.2 through 4.4 (pp.46-51).

The first research question focused on what school board personnel and school leaders identified as essential skills for school administrators. The second question focused on how classroom teachers can prepare themselves for potential administrator roles. The final research question focused on identifying the necessary programs and supports needed to develop classroom teachers into potential administrators.

Question 1: What do school board personnel and school leaders identify as essential skills for school based administrators?

My study supports Daresh's (1994) study which reported aspiring administrators were perceived to require three different, yet connected, skill sets: technical, social, and self-awareness. Participants used a 4-point Likert scale to rate eight skills statements within these three skill sets. The most commonly identified set of essential skills, as rated by the respondents, was the *self-awareness* skills, followed by the *social* skills, and finally *technical* skills. I did not set out to determine if a specific skill set was unimportant.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (77%) rated the *self-awareness* skills set, either by itself or in combination with another skill set, as being the most important skill required to be an effective in-school administrator. Many of the same respondents did, however, identify *technical* and *social* skills as both being necessary for effective educational leadership. Ten participants' responses emphasized the importance of aspirants developing technical skills prior to assuming the role of administration. Table 4.2 (pp. 43-44) provides a breakdown of all participants' responses along with the means, standard deviations, and standard error of the means.

Table 4.2

Aggregated Results of Likert Scale with Focus on Total of Each Skill Set

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation*	Std. Error Mean*
Technical Skills				
How to evaluate staff	47	3.4468	.68552	.09999
How to facilitate/conduct group meetings	47	3.4255	.58028	.08464
How to design and implement a data-based improvement process, including goal setting and evaluation	47	3.3191	.62923	.09178
How to develop and monitor a building budget	46**	2.9348	.71187	.10496
How to organize and conduct parent-teacher-student conferences	47	3.1064	.69888	.10194
How to establish a scheduling program for students and staff	46**	3.3261	.66848	.09856
Awareness of issues related to local school law	47	3.4468	.58267	.08499
How to manage food services, custodial, and secretarial staff	46**	3.0870	.69366	.10227
Total	47	25.894	2.7993	.40832
Technical Skills (<i>Daresh Total</i>)***	47	3.2367	.34992	.05104
Social Skills				
Establishing a positive and cooperative relationship with other administrators	47	3.5106	.50529	.07370
How to determine who is what in a school setting	45**	3.3111	.63325	.09440
Knowing how to relate to school board members and central office personnel	47	3.2553	.48759	.07112
Knowing where the limits exist within the district or building, and balancing that knowledge with one's own professional values	47	3.3191	.55585	.08108
Understanding how the principalship changes family and other personal relationships	47	3.3191	.72551	.10583

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation*	Std. Error Mean*
Developing interpersonal networking skills that may be used with individuals inside and outside the system	47	3.5745	.54152	.07899
Ability to encourage involvement by all parties in the educational system	47	3.5319	.58425	.08522
How to develop positive relationships with other organizations and agencies located in the school's surrounding community	47	3.4681	.68687	.10019
Total	47	27.149	2.5107	.36622
Social Skills (<i>Daresh Total</i>)***	47	3.3936	.31383	.04578
Self-Awareness Skills				
Demonstrating an awareness of what it means to possess organizational power and authority	47	3.3830	.64448	.09401
Demonstrating an awareness of why one was selected for a leadership position in the first place	46**	3.2391	.56509	.08332
Portraying a sense of self-confidence on the job	47	3.6383	.52856	.07710
Having a vision along with an understanding needed to achieve organizational goals	47	3.7660	.42798	.06243
Demonstrating a desire to make a significant difference in the lives of students	47	3.9362	.24709	.03604
Being aware of one's biases, strengths, and weaknesses	47	3.7234	.45215	.06595
Understanding and seeing that change is ongoing, and that it results in a continually changing vision of the principalship	47	3.7021	.46227	.06743
How to assess job responsibilities in terms of the "real role" of the principalship	47	3.4043	.61360	.08950
Total	47	28.723	2.2136	.32289
Self-awareness Skills (<i>Daresh Total</i>)***	47	3.5904	.27670	.04036

*Std = Standard

**Discrepancies in N are due to participants leaving the question blank

****Daresh totals* = calculated by adding each section's responses and dividing answer by 8

All but three respondents identified the most important skill for any aspiring administrator to possess, acquire, or develop was found in the self-awareness skills. *Demonstrating a desire to make a significant difference in the lives of students* produced a mean value of 3.9362 ($SD=.24709$). It is evident and extremely important that administrators must be in a leadership position for the sake of others and not only themselves. The skill that received the least attention by the respondents was found in the technical skills section, namely *how to develop and monitor a building budget* (mean = 2.9348; $SD = 0.71187$). This finding may be somewhat altered from other questions as $N=46$ for this question and not 47 like most other questions.

Listing the skill sets in the following order – self-awareness (28.723), social (27.149), and technical (25.894) – accentuates the respondents' overall opinion of the essential skill sets aspiring administrators should develop to become an effective educational leader. Based on this finding, self-awareness skills continued to be of primary importance. When I compare the total self-awareness scores to both the technical skills scores and the social skills scores, a smaller discrepancy exists between self-awareness and social skills (1.5745) suggesting the importance of developing social skills more intensely than technical skills. Although data from the survey questionnaire suggested developing all three skill sets, self-awareness and social skills are, by far, the most important skills to being an effective administrator. Table 4.3 (p. 46) presents a breakdown of the most essential skills as identified by superintendents, principals, and vice principals in my study.

Table 4.3

Essential Skills Sets as Identified by Respondents

	Technical Skills		Social Skills		Self-awareness Skills		Technical, Social, and Self-awareness Skills*		Technical and Social Skills*		Social and Self-awareness Skills*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Superintendents	0	0	1	33	1	33	1	33	0	0	0	0
Principals	3	13	3	13	14	54	0	0	1	4	3	13
Vice Principals	1	5	3	15	11	55	0	0	3	15	2	10

* Combination of skill sets as a result of equal weight from participants' responses

% = Percentage

Question 11 of the survey invited each participant to identify, in order, the five most important essential skills from the Daresh (1994, 2002) list. From these responses, the most frequently identified essential skill ($f=44\%$) was *demonstrating a desire to make a significant difference in the lives of students* found in the self-awareness skill set. This previously mentioned skill was followed by *having a vision along with an understanding needed to achieve organizational goals* (self-awareness skill, $f=20\%$) and *developing interpersonal networking skills that may be used with individuals inside and outside of the system* (social skill, $f=13\%$). Table 4.4 (p. 47) provides a breakdown of the frequency of each essential skill from the participants' responses when asked to identify the five most essential skills from Daresh's list.

Table 4.4

Administrative Skills Identified as Most Critical by Respondents

		Question 11										
		I		ii		iii		iv		v		
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Valid	1	3	6.4	4	8.5	4	8.5	2	4.3	2	4.3	
	2	1	2.1	0	0	0	0	1	2.1	2	4.3	
	3	0	0	4	8.5	4	8.5	6	12.8	2	4.3	
	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4.3	2	4.3	
	6	0	0	1	2.1	1	2.1	4	8.5	0	0	
	7	0	0	2	4.3	2	4.3	0	0	1	2.1	
	9	1	2.1	2	4.3	2	4.3	1	2.1	0	0	
	12	1	2.1	2	4.3	2	4.3	0	0	3	6.4	
	14	6	12.8	4	8.5	4	8.5	3	6.4	3	6.4	
	15	1	2.1	5	10.6	5	10.6	7	14.9	4	8.5	
	16	0	0	2	4.3	2	4.3	3	6.4	4	8.5	
	19	1	2.1	3	6.4	3	6.4	0	0	1	2.1	
	20	9	19.1	7	14.9	7	14.9	2	4.3	3	6.4	
	21	20	42.6	4	4.3	2	4.3	2	4.3	3	6.4	
	22	1	2.1	4	4.3	2	4.3	4	8.5	2	4.3	
	23	1	2.1	3	6.4	3	6.4	3	6.4	3	6.4	
	Total		45	95.7	44	93.6	44	93.6	43	91.5	43	91.5
	Missing		2	4.3	3	6.4	3	6.4	4	8.5	4	8.5
	Total		47	100.0	47	100.0	47	100.0	47	100.0	47	100.0

Skills 5, 8, 10, 11 were deleted because they were never identified in this question

Skills 13, 17, 18, 24 were deleted because of insignificant response numbers

Most frequent responses are shaded.

It is noteworthy that all of the top responses in the first of three sub-questions, those being the most frequently expressed essential skills, were found in the self-awareness skill set. However, important essential skills were also recognized in the social and technical skills sets. Two commonly acknowledged skills from the social skills were *ability to encourage involvement by all parties in the educational system* and *developing interpersonal networking skills that may be used with individuals inside and outside of the system*. As well, two technical skills frequently identified by the veteran administrators included *how to design and implement a data-based improvement process, including goal setting and evaluation* and *how to evaluate staff*. Administrators recognized the importance of all three skill sets, but gave most importance to the development of self-awareness skills.

It was interesting to note that essential skill sets identified by males and females and by superintendents, principals, and vice principals provided exactly the same rank order no matter how the data were disaggregated. More clearly stated, all levels of administrators stated the following order: self-awareness skills, social skills, then, technical skills. One interesting finding from this desegregation was that the gap between social and technical skills was the largest when looking at opinions of male administrators suggesting an emphasis was placed on networking in their experiences. Data from the female respondents, on the other hand, reported an almost non-existent difference between social and technical skills. Nonetheless, all administrators stressed the importance of self-awareness skills as essential for effective leadership.

Summary: Question One

These administrators reported that of all three skill sets – *technical, social, and self-awareness* – self-awareness skills were rated as most important. Disaggregating the data between male and female and superintendent, principal, and vice principal shaped no significant divergences in this finding. The implications of these findings in terms of the research question will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Question 2: How can classroom teachers prepare themselves for potential administrative roles?

Section three of my survey questionnaire invited participating administrators to think through different areas of leadership development for aspiring administrators. This research question focused on the following two areas: (a) programs and supports that *are offered* by the school division to enhance the skills of potential administrators, and (b) programs or professional development opportunities that *assisted them* in becoming an administrator. The remaining two areas from the open form questions will be examined more closely in question three.

School Board Programs and Supports

When respondents were asked to comment on programs or supports offered by the school division, thirteen respondents (28%) admitted they did not know of any programs or supports available. Some of these same 13 respondents, however, recognized funding was provided for working administrators – not aspiring administrators – to attend leadership development modules, seminars, and conferences.

Many respondents also noted that classroom teachers were also provided funding to attend an introductory workshop entitled *Is the Principalship for You?* (Renihan & Leonard, 2000) presented by faculty from the University of Saskatchewan's Department of Educational Administration. The presentation takes aspiring administrators on a journey through what it means to be an educational administrator. Discussions with and presentations by local administrators assist aspirants in examining the administrator's role, job requirements, duties, implications of the *Education Act* (1995), and in networking with potential colleagues. The *Is the Principalship for You?* workshop was a commonly identified support offered to aspiring administrators as it presented an opportunity to hear firsthand the realities of school administration from someone outside the school division. Respondents found this presentation inspired them to further investigate information about becoming an educational administrator by means of graduate-level classes in educational administration.

Respondents mentioned other noteworthy supports or programs. First, ten respondents (21%) identified educational leaves as an avenue by which the school division assisted teachers with acquiring essential skills necessary to become an effective administrator. In a contractual agreement between the school board and classroom teacher, leave is granted to successful applicants to pursue additional education.

Second, the school board offers opportunities including school-based professional learning communities for classroom teachers to become involved at the division level. Professional development, pertaining to specific school system's

strategic planning, offers opportunities to teachers to become involved with establishing and transmitting the school division's vision. Classroom teachers have the opportunity to participate in system-wide activities such as planning, developing, and presenting at workshops, all of which, initiate essential professional networks with practicing administrators. As educational leaders' responsibilities continually change, focus on best practice and "keeping up with the times" offers additional opportunities for ongoing leadership development.

Six respondents posited the importance of neophyte or interested candidates to assume the role of acting vice principal at a school. The chance to take a dry run at the situation was reported to persuade or dissuade interested candidates from pursuing their aspirations. In an acting role, aspirants received invaluable "on-the-job" experiences; experiences that would be almost unobtainable in a regular training classroom setting. Daily challenges including student discipline, working with parents, and guiding staff members through the mandated strategic direction, were some of the daily experiences encountered according to these administrators.

One final program offered by the school board, as recognized by respondents, was mentorship. In this school division, according to some respondents, first year administrators were partnered with mentors to ease the transition from teacher to administrator. The mentorship experience coincided with workshops on various leadership topics to assist neophyte administrators. The experiences provided formal and informal networking between the neophyte and veteran administrators.

This section focused on the programs and supports offered by the school division in assisting aspiring and neophyte administrators prepare themselves for the

difficult task of school leadership. It was interesting to find that there were no significant differences in opinions between male and female respondents. Also, all three groups of administrators shared similar insights as to what supports and programs were offered by the school board. There were no major divergences in the responses. The next section will focus on the programs and opportunities that assisted the respondents in their pursuit of an administrative role.

Leadership Opportunities that Assisted Respondents

Almost all respondents in my study suggested the importance of becoming involved in leadership opportunities within the school level and/or school division level. Although some respondents noted a decrease in the number of leadership opportunities, the element of becoming involved and of being visible on committees at both levels was imperative. Respondents expressed the importance of principals assisting interested teachers with assuming opportunities and making information about leadership roles available at the school and division level. References were made by many respondents to the importance of becoming involved with local and provincial associations including Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF), local teachers' associations, and Local Implementation and Negotiations Committee (LINC), and at the school level on a school's professional development committee or school-based professional learning communities.

Another suggestion by respondents of a leadership opportunity was to volunteer as one of two staff representatives from each school to participate in conveying the system-wide professional development initiative to the entire teaching population at their respective schools. Together, these staff leaders assist in planning

professional development in the division while seeking collaborative opportunities with schools having similar foci. Getting teachers to present information back to colleagues at a staff meeting was a common suggestion by responding administrators. Some respondents further reported that the experience of attending school division meetings and presenting the information back to the staff members at the school was a valuable step in their leadership development. It assisted them in gaining confidence in addressing a group of experienced professionals while conveying important information from the school division level.

Leadership Development Programs and Supports that Assisted Respondents

Five suggestions regarding professional learning development programs and supports arose from the survey questionnaire responses. The first leadership development program identified by responding administrators stressed the extremely important and influential leadership skills and knowledge development provided by participating in the University of Saskatchewan's Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit's (SELU, n. d.) Saskatchewan Principal's Short Course. This course is an intensive in-service week for current and future administrators personnel that explores all facets of the role of principal. The second noteworthy leadership development program and support was the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit's (SPDU, n. d.), which is a Saskatchewan based professional growth partnership organization that delivers programs, resources, and services to educators in conjunction with the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA, 2007) Administrators' Leadership Modules. The SPDU leadership modules were among

the most frequently suggested professional development programs for the entire survey.

The third professional learning program and support identified by these administrators as being the most useful in their leadership development was professional or educational leave. Nine percent of respondents discussed the importance of their applying for and completing a professional or educational leave. Many responses stated that this time was used to upgrade skills or complete a Master's or Doctorate in education or another business orientated field. An additional 11 respondents (23%), did not suggest necessarily obtaining a leave to complete higher education but did respond positively to the experience of working toward or completing a Master of Education degree or Doctorate degree.

Comments from these 11 respondents strengthened the argument that the skills learned from Master's and Doctoral degree programs proved to be invaluable. Graduate and doctorate level education provided the respondents with a fresh look at common problems as well as innovative solutions that will assist students, parents, and/or staff members with school related issues.

The fourth professional leadership development program and support described identified by respondents noted the need for extending classroom learning through onsite mentorship programs. Mentorship experiences were recognized as being worthwhile experiences where protégés gained insight, support, and networking from their mentors. Of these previously noted three worthwhile experiences, networking was among the most valuable aspect of their mentorship reported by these respondents.

The final suggestion of leadership development programs useful in preparing the respondents for their current positions focused on assuming an acting administration role. In an acting position, aspiring administration acquired “on-the-job” training in an actual school setting. They dealt with real problems, created real solutions, and influenced the school’s atmosphere and strategic direction. Many comments also pointed out that the experience of acting administrator finalized their decision to seek a permanent placement as an administrator. A strong feeling of need for more acting positions within a school division was voiced by some of these same respondents.

Two unique ideas were gathered from the survey questionnaires. The first focused on aspiring administrators participating in a professional book club. Although this idea appeared to parallel professional networking, book clubs presented an opportunity for aspirants to focus on professional literature applicable to educational leadership. The second unique idea focused on aspiring administrators becoming involved with the professional development at the school level. One participant suggested the idea that organizing and selecting a guest speaker demonstrated leadership to the staff while strengthening the school’s strategic direction. Both ideas presented alternative methods to acquire valuable leadership skills.

Summary: Question Two

This question focused on two key aspects of aspiring administrators’ leadership development through the voices of the respondents: a) supports and programs that were offered by the school board, and b) programs and supports that

assisted them in preparing for an administrative position. These two aspects attempted to answer the question, “How can classroom teachers prepare themselves for potential administrative roles?” Thirty-eight respondents shared their insight into leadership development programs and opportunities they found useful in acquiring leadership training. These leadership programs and opportunities included: getting involved in local and provincial committees, furthering education at the graduate level, assuming an acting role in administration, and taking in professional development sessions. Respondents felt that these activities could help aspiring administrators prepare to be educational administrators. There were no significantly divergent responses offered.

The next question focused on programs that the respondents in my study felt aspiring administrators could partake in to develop essential leadership skills. Also, respondents commented on what they felt the school board should offer in regards to leadership training and essential skill development.

Question 3: What programs or supports are necessary to develop classroom teachers into potential administrators?

Data for my final research question attended to two aspects. The first was to solicit from these respondents what “non-formalized” developmental supports within the school division were available for aspiring administrators to acquire essential leadership skills. The second aspect invited the participating administrators to offer ideas about effective “formalized” leadership development programs for essential leadership skills development. Respondents offered three supports and two programs through which classroom teachers could acquire essential leadership skills.

Non-Formalized Development Supports for Aspiring Administrators

The first recommendation offered by respondents was that classroom teachers could be innovative in classroom instruction. Initiating a new program within a classroom or school demonstrates strong attributes of leadership to practicing administrators and school board level personnel. A few respondents described these ideas as ways for aspirants to prove themselves as leaders at the school level. The second support noted was that teachers could position themselves in roles that demonstrated their leadership capabilities outside their classrooms. These leadership experiences could include chairing a school professional development committee or professional learning community as well as assuming the role of staff president, learning leader, or being a local association representative. Skill development occurred for respondents when they were forced to extend experiences outside their comfort zone.

The final leadership opportunity suggestion was that classroom teachers should take advantage of gaining teaching experience in diverse teaching settings. Each teaching situation challenges a teacher to grow professionally and intellectually, both of which create a more grounded leader. Respondents also stated the importance of classroom teachers extending their present educational skills by assuming a role as department head, learning leader, or by becoming accredited in specific subject areas including math, English, and the sciences.

Formalized Developmental Programs for Aspiring Administrators

The first formalized development program offered by respondents focused on graduate studies. Respondents reported that preparation for in-school administration

should not be limited to only graduate-level courses. Fourteen administrators (30%) believed enrolling in Master's level studies was advisable, especially in developing technical skills. Completing a Master of Education degree was thought to provide valuable time to generate professional thought and discussion of leadership philosophy, professional vision and beliefs, and to assess one's areas of strength. Master of Education degree programs also assist aspiring administrators to identify and to seek out additional assistance in areas of weakness while continuing to develop their personal skills in Daresh's (1994, 2002) three areas – technical, social, and self-awareness – position themselves well for future administration positions.

After acquiring experience at the graduate level, the second formalized developmental program idea that respondents recommended for aspiring administrators was to assume an acting in-school administration role. During a placement, as discussed earlier in question two, aspirants utilize the skills acquired in their training, putting into practice their beliefs, values, and visions. “On-the-job” training provides experience and confidence in areas, which, as many respondents stated, could never be learned in a classroom setting. Learning becomes the focus of the final leadership development program or support in which aspiring administrators could partake.

Two interesting divergences surfaced from the survey questionnaires. The first was the importance of attending parent council meetings and board meetings. No further explanation was given as to why this would support leadership development. One possible explanation is that attendance at these events may provide the aspirant with a sense of how organizational structure and decision making

potentially affect schools. The other suggestion was to initiate one's own research. Again, no further explanation was offered but it may connect to the suggestion for aspirants to pursue graduate studies. This may identify and address practical issues from theoretical perspectives.

The next section discusses the necessary school board programs and supports for leadership development. Four prevalent themes from the open form questions will be discussed.

Essential School Board Leadership Development Programs and Supports

I created four themes from the data collected in the open form question number fifteen on my survey. The first theme states that the school division and practicing administrators must work together to encourage classroom teachers to become aspiring administrators. Respondents expressed that encouragement from practicing administrators, in their own cases, provided incentive and clarity as to why they wanted to become administrators, and assisted them to enter into the career change. A base on which classroom teachers begin to develop essential leadership skills starts at the school level. Leadership opportunities included learning leaders, staff president, and being a staff-representative for system-wide professional development planning.

Other respondents stressed the importance of the school division offering opportunities for leadership at the division level. As stated in question one, the changes in today's professional planning, the reality of school-based professional learning communities has limited some of the previously accessible leadership opportunities for aspiring administrators. Practicing administrators, in rebuttal to

changes in complexity of administrative duties, voiced the opinion that they still found opportunities for interested classroom teachers to develop leadership skills within the school and at the school division level. Often administrators would encourage classroom teachers with strong leadership qualities to apply for consultant positions or design and initiate a new program within their own classroom.

My second theme echoes many respondents' suggestions of a need for job shadowing for interested candidates to help them understand job requirements. In these opportunities classroom teachers could be released from regular teaching duties to shadow an in-school administrator for a period of time to witness firsthand the job requirements and essential skills required to perform the duties of in-school administrators. Many respondents expressed the need to formalize job shadowing through a mentorship program and through short term acting administrator roles, especially for aspiring and neophyte administrators.

The third theme reflects what was stated earlier in this chapter. Respondents discussed the idea of having short-term acting positions for aspiring administrators to assume the actual role of administration. Some suggested the short term to be two or three months. In this position, acting administrators would deal with school-related issues including student discipline, planning professional development, and developing effective communication skills testing their ideas and solutions. Working with staff, students, parents, and the surrounding community would provide much insight into whether the position is really their career choice. Situations such as this short-term acting position would provide potential candidates with "on-the-job" professional development.

Finally, these respondents highlighted the importance of professional development for effective leadership. Nineteen administrators (40%) reported the importance of the school board supporting continued leadership professional development opportunities for both aspiring and veteran administrators. Many respondents suggested the school board should offer more specialized in-services and workshops to aspiring administrators to develop leadership skills in specific and current areas. Topics suggested by respondents included conflict management, restitution training, human resource training, staff direction training, understanding the *Education Act*, and working with students of special needs such as attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), and fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). The main ideas behind professional development reported by the respondents were to ensure that administrators continue to be provided with learning opportunities to keep them up-to-date with the changing complexities of administration roles.

Summary: Question Three

The data collected from my survey questionnaire addressed the question, “What programs or supports are necessary to develop classroom teachers into potential administrators?” The respondents indicated that the best programs and supports from which aspiring administrators could acquire essential leadership skills should come from both individual and the school division initiatives. The implications of these findings in terms of the three research questions will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Summary of Chapter Four

This chapter presented the findings from 47 completed survey questionnaire. The research findings from the survey instrument suggested that aspiring administrators who acquired and developed all three types of leadership skills – technical, social, and self-awareness – but placed additional emphasis on self-awareness skills would better position themselves for potential success as a school administrator. This previously stated finding contradicted Daresh's (1994) original findings. Data indicated that classroom teachers who capitalized on leadership opportunities including both school and division level stood a greater chance of becoming an effective leader. The study further suggested that aspiring administrators could develop many essential skills individually but still should be provided with financial support from and leadership opportunities within the school division. A summary and discussion of the findings, as well as implications for future practice and research will be the focus of Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings in this study. The discussion is based on the results of the findings from the data presented in Chapter Four and is further supported by the literature review in Chapter Two. This chapter will summarize the research questions, discuss the essential skills necessary for classroom teachers with aspirations of administration to develop in order to become potential candidates for administration placements, and examine suggestions from the participating administrators about the most effective programs and supports available to acquire essential leadership skills. The chapter will culminate with implications for practice and research.

Summary of Project

The purpose of this study was to report administration personnel's perceptions, from one Saskatchewan school division, about essential skills for classroom teachers to develop as future in-school administrators. The following three questions guided the research:

1. What do school board personnel and school leaders identify as essential skills for school-based administrators?
2. How can classroom teachers prepare themselves for potential administrator roles?
3. What programs or supports are necessary to develop classroom teachers into potential administrators?

Data for my descriptive study were gathered using the self-reporting (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003) methodology. A mixed-methods survey questionnaire was distributed to 117 administrative personnel in one Saskatchewan urban school division. The survey questionnaire solicited practicing administrators' perceptions of essential skills required to be an effective administrator and investigated avenues through which classroom teachers might acquire and develop essential leadership skills. Forty-seven participants representing superintendents, principals and vice principals completed the survey questionnaire (Gall et al., 2003).

Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

This section interprets and discusses the findings from the survey questionnaires. Findings will be presented in terms of the three research questions and supported with relevant selected literature.

Question 1: What do school board personnel and school leaders identify as essential skills for school-based administrators?

The analysis of the responses from the survey questionnaire revealed that a well-rounded educational leader must possess essential leadership skills in all three Daresh (1994) skill sets: technical, social, and self-awareness. Developing self-awareness skills, however, is most essential to becoming an effective educational administrator. Respondents in my study contradicted Daresh's findings; no diversions were noted among administrators' levels or among males and females.

In his original study, Daresh (1994) reported all three groups of administrators possessed different opinions of essential leadership skills required to effectively lead.

Aspiring administrators identified technical skills, principals identified social skills, and superintendents identified self-awareness as being most essential for effective educational leadership. In comparison to the Daresh study, in my study, respondents suggested that aspiring administrators must confidently exude who they are, what they think, what they believe; the outcome is an outward portrayal of an effective school administrator. This supports Day's (2006) finding of passion being the most common attribute among effective head teachers. People who are passionate about their work "generate energy, determination, conviction, commitment and even obsession in people" (p. 427) and is far more essential for effective leadership than most technical skills acquired in a preparation program.

In my opinion, social and self-awareness skills are more closely related to each other as compared to social and technical skills or self-awareness and technical skills. I offer the following explanation of why a significant change has occurred in the most essential leadership skills set. I believe university preparation programs have, since 1994, changed their approach to leadership training to focus more equally on technical skills, social skills, and, most importantly, self-awareness skills. The change comes from changing complexities in administrators' roles, from the need for aspiring administrators to possess a "balanced" set of leadership skills, and from the need for future leaders to exude self-awareness. This suggestion supports that of Menter et al. (2005) who believed that it was reasonable to expect aspiring administrators to seek development of skills and qualities what will enable them to successfully enter into the initiation phase of school administration.

Question 2: How can classroom teachers prepare themselves for potential administrator roles?

Respondents' most prevalent suggestion was to capitalize on leadership programs and to participate in a variety of professional development opportunities. These administrators stated, however, many essential leadership skills including passion and determination could be acquired only through leadership experience. Examples of leadership programs and professional development opportunities were assuming an acting administration positions, obtaining a Master's degree in educational administration or another leadership field, and developing skills through a variety of teaching experiences. Aspirants build confidence in their leadership abilities and strengthen their self-awareness skills, social skills, and technical skills as they learn by leading. Learning by leading upheld Wong's (2004) arguments around the need for learning to be outcome-based. Outcome-based learning can be achieved in many different forms. Other researchers (Briggs et al., 2006; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Hix et al., 2003; Marshak & Klotz, 2001; Walker & Dimmock, 2006) agreed that outcome-based learning in preparation for administration should include some form of field experience, on-the-job experience, internship, learning-by-doing, or mentorship.

According to the data from the surveys, aspirants should apply for acting positions prior to assuming a permanent position in administration. Respondents' stated that acting positions provided them with insight into the realities of school administration positions. Aspirants used acting roles as a training opportunity to apply acquired skills while clarifying areas of weakness. This statement supports