

# Preservice Principals' Post-Internship Concerns About Becoming a Principal: America and Scotland in Review

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## Introduction

The capstone experience of teacher preparation and principal preparation programs is generally the internship. These experiences should provide preservice teachers and principals with the opportunities to develop their skills in teaching and school leadership respectively. Research has documented preservice teachers' concerns about becoming teachers.<sup>1</sup> The results show that preservice teachers depart their experiences with self concerns, task concerns, and impact concerns. Teacher education units have used this research to address their concerns during and after the internship.

However, no research has determined if preservice principals depart their internship with similar concerns. If, as Hall and Hord suggest,<sup>2</sup> many new American principals struggle to provide effective school leadership, could identifying and addressing their concerns during and after the internship be helpful? In addition, no research has investigated the possible differences between the internship experiences and concerns of preservice principals from the United States with those from other countries. Such comparisons could promote productive international discussions on the principal internship, diversifying our understanding of what constitutes a meaningful internship experience. To that end, the purpose of this study was to compare American and Scottish preservice principals' post-internship concerns about becoming a principal. This study was centered on the following research question: What are the differences between American and Scottish preservice principals' post-internship concerns about becoming a principal?

## Theoretical Framework: Concerns Theory

Fuller theorized that preservice teachers experience self, task, and impact concerns about teaching.<sup>3</sup> During the concern for self stage, preservice teachers are focused on their ability to survive in the profession. They are especially concerned about dealing with the daily problems that accompany teaching. The task concerns stage is characterized by a focus on the daily requirements of teaching. These tasks range from securing instructional materials to participating in

parent-teacher conferences. When preservice teachers move to the impact concerns stage, they are focused on making a difference in the profession of teaching. Here they are concerned about developing innovative ways to help students. Fuller concluded that preservice teachers rarely experience the impact concerns stage because the majority of the internship activities are centered on mastery of the fundamentals of teaching.<sup>4</sup> In spite of this focus, she maintained that the effectiveness of the internship experience is contingent upon the quality of preservice teachers' exposure to various teaching responsibilities. This study sought to determine this theory's relevance to preservice principals' concerns about the principalship.

## Related Literature

According to Alford and Spall, the principal preparation internship should provide aspiring principals with practical experience in performing leadership duties,<sup>5</sup> while Duffrin proposed seven broad goals for the internship experience:

- 1) Develop a practical understanding of the human relations skills needed to serve as principal;
- 2) Participate in experiences that link acquired theories and real world applications of the principalship;
- 3) Observe the supervising principal on a daily basis;
- 4) Recognize differences between the managerial and leadership aspects of the principalship;
- 5) Complete simple and complex tasks that accompany the principalship;
- 6) Focus on building relationships with faculty, staff, students, and parents;
- 7) Reflect on progress towards becoming an effective school leader.<sup>6</sup>

However, Fry, Bottoms, and O'Neill maintained that in reality internship experiences usually consisted of completing meaningless duties at the behest of the principal.<sup>7</sup> Their research found that preservice principals mostly observed and followed orders instead of directing and leading activities. University personnel and school districts seldom collaborated to provide a meaningful internship for the preservice principals, and most internship students departed their internship experiences without a clear understanding of the role of the principal. This study investigated the extent to which the concerns were found among American and Scottish preservice principals.

## Methodology

The study consisted of 69 American and Scottish preservice principals. The 33 American participants were selected from a university in Texas, and the 36 Scottish preservice principals were selected from a university in Scotland. At the end of their internship experience, they completed a survey regarding the concerns about becoming principals. In addition, The author held brief discussions with both groups about their internship experiences.

The survey was developed using Fowler's work on concerns theory.<sup>8</sup> A panel of American and Scottish principals was used to develop the constructs for the survey items and to establish the validity of the survey.<sup>9</sup> The survey was then piloted with a small group of American and Scottish preservice principals. The survey consisted of 33 statements that participants rated on a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (not concerned) to 5 (very concerned). Survey items were organized under three constructs: Self Concerns (Alpha =.89); Task Concerns (Alpha=.91); and Impact Concerns (Alpha=.92) constructs.

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(See Appendix for a copy of the survey instrument.) Sample items under each construct included:

- Self concerns: Feeling like a competent principal.
- Task concerns: Finding the time to serve as the instructional leader of the school.
- Impact concerns: Convincing community leaders to contribute to the educational mission of the school.

A t-test for independent means was selected to analyze the differences in survey responses between American and Scottish preservice principals' post-internship concerns.

At the beginning of the internship, the author gave the American and Scottish preservice principals, cooperating principals, and university supervisors a list of internship activities aligned with the survey items in order to ensure consistency in participants' internship experience.. In addition, the author hosted an ITV conference with all of the participants to explain and discuss each activity, and secured the agreement of their cooperating principal to take part in this activity.

### Analysis of Results

The results of the t-test for independent means between responses of American and Scottish preservice principals revealed statistically significant differences across all three constructs: Self concerns; task concerns; and impact concerns. (See Table.) In particular, the responses of American preservice principals showed substantially higher levels of concerns across all three levels. However, in relationship to the priority of concerns, both groups ranked them the same. The area of highest concern for both groups was task concerns, followed by self concerns. Last were impact concerns.

To better understand the findings from the survey, the author held brief discussions with both groups about their internship experiences. In spite of being given a common list of activities, American and Scottish preservice principal participants had very different internship experiences. The three most significant differences were the structure of the internship; support for the internship; and length and coherence of the internship.

From a structural perspective, American preservice principals completed the internship experience with an individual cooperating principal and a university supervisor, although the supervisor generally was overseeing multiple internships. Scottish preservice principals had both an individual university supervisor and cooperating principal.

Internship experiences for American preservice principals consisted largely of daily observations of the cooperating principal completing specific duties. Although Scottish preservice principals also observed their cooperating principal, afterward they met with the cooperating principal to discuss their observations. During these meetings, preservice principals were encouraged to ask questions about the activity they had observed. In collaboration with the cooperating principal, preservice principals then developed strategies for leading and completing the same tasks. After completing these tasks under the guidance of the cooperating principal, preservice principals were provided with feedback about their performance. As such, Scottish preservice principals' internship experiences were broader, consisting not only of observations but also active learning and reflection.

Mentoring for American and Scottish preservice principals also differed. American preservice principals received most of their mentoring from the cooperating principal. Scottish preservice principals were mentored by three people: The cooperating principal; the university supervisor; and a principal from a different school district. The cooperating principal coached preservice principals through every school activity. University supervisors mentored preservice principals by sharing their leadership experiences and relating them to school leadership. The other principal provided the preservice principal with information about their leadership experiences in another school district. This information provided Scottish preservice principals with multiple perspectives on school leadership and school environments.

The length and coherence of the internship experience were very different for American and Scottish preservice principals as well. American preservice principals completed their internship in one semester where they were required to complete a certain number of clock hours for embedded activities. In contrast, Scottish preservice principals completed a two semester internship. The first semester consisted of developing a school improvement project that matched the needs of the school and Scottish standards for management and leadership. Preservice principals then presented their plan to the cooperating principal, university supervisor, and a panel of teachers; and based upon this group's advice, they revised the plan if needed. During the second semester, preservice principals evaluated the school's readiness for accommodating the plan and then used the findings to determine how to implement it. Preservice principals were also required to incorporate daily internship tasks into the framework

**Table**  
**Results of Survey: Preervice Principals' Concerns About Becoming a Principal**

| Categorical Concerns | Preservice Principals |                    |                   |                    | T-Values |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------|
|                      | American (n = 36)     |                    | Scottish (n = 33) |                    |          |
|                      | Mean                  | Standard Deviation | Mean              | Standard Deviation |          |
| Self Concerns        | 22.23                 | 6.91               | 17.96             | 3.06               | 7.21*    |
| Task Concerns        | 24.67                 | 7.77               | 18.43             | 5.28               | 8.30*    |
| Impact Concerns      | 15.29                 | 4.51               | 11.50             | 3.05               | 8.35*    |

\*Statistically significant at the .0001 level.

of the school improvement project. Throughout, Scottish preservice principals provided their cooperating principal and university supervisor with bimonthly written progress reports. Preservice principals used feedback on these reports to strengthen the project's impact on the school.

### Discussion

The survey findings for this study showed that overall American preservice principals were more concerned about becoming principals than their Scottish preservice counterparts. Based on the groups' discussion of their internship experiences, these differences may be related to three factors. First, because Scottish preservice principals had individual university supervisors, they may have received more individual attention, enabling them to more readily share their concerns about becoming a principal. Second, Scottish preservice principals had more formal mentors in the internship experience. The addition of a principal from a different district as a mentor may have been particularly helpful in addressing a wider range of preservice principal concerns. Finally, Scottish preservice principals' internship experience was twice as long and was based upon development and implementation of a school improvement plan rather than a list of activities. In sum, Scottish preservice principals benefited from more time and opportunities to practice and receive feedback on their leadership skills.

### Implications and Need for Future Research

This study of a small group of American and Scottish preservice principals raised several important questions about the potential of the internship experience to address interns' concerns and help them build confidence in their ability to be effective school leaders:

- What is the appropriate length for the principal preservice internship?
- Who, and how many, should serve as mentors during the internship?
- How should the internship experience be structured?

A study of this size cannot provide definitive answers. More research is needed with larger samples across more institutions and more countries. These larger studies would likely want to add the variable of gender.<sup>10</sup> Future researchers may also want to investigate the impact of the cooperating principals' leadership style on preservice principals and their internship experience.<sup>11</sup> Another helpful measure would be the addition of a pre-internship measure of preservice principals' confidence to compare to the results of the post-internship survey.

Pragmatically, research that monitors preservice principals' concerns throughout the internship experience would provide helpful insights to those overseeing the internship as to when and how preservice principals develop particular concerns. With this information, university supervisors and cooperating principals can develop timely strategies to address such concerns..

In spite of its limited scope, this study has made a significant contribution to the field of educational leadership by raising important questions about how to maximize the effectiveness of principal preparation internships. The findings are a starting point for identifying and analyzing concerns of preservice principals. Additionally, they present a new way to understand how the internship experience can build confidence and leadership skills..

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gene Hall and Shirley Hord, *Changes in Schools: Facilitating the Process* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne Adams, "Good Schools, Good Principals," *Thrust for Educational Leadership* 29 (Fall 1999): 9.

<sup>3</sup> Frances Fuller, "Concerns of Teachers: A Developmental Conceptualization," *American Educational Research Journal* 6 (Spring 1969): 207.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Betty Alford and Sharon Spall, "Promoting Student Learning through Integrated Internship Experiences in Principal Preparation Courses: Critical Factors and Recommendations," *Education Leadership Review*, 2 (Fall 2001): 16-22.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Duffrin, "Chicago Program Helps Leaders Test Drive Principal's Job," *Journal of Staff Development* 22 (Fall 2001): 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Betty Fry, Gene Bottoms, and Betty O'Neill, *The Principal Internship: How can We Get it Right?* (Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Educational Board, 2005), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Fuller, "Concerns of Teachers."

<sup>9</sup> Telephone and ITV conference calls were used develop the constructs for this survey.

<sup>10</sup> Alice Eagly, Steven Karau, and Blair Johnson, "Gender and Leadership Style Among School Principals: A Meta-Analysis," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1992):: 79.

<sup>11</sup> Terrence Deal and Kenneth Peterson, *Shaping School Culture: The School Leader's Role* (San Francisco: CA. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 105.

## Appendix

### ***Preservice Principal Concerns Survey***

Directions: As a school administrator, you will be required to perform various duties. To that end, please circle the number that highlights your present concerns about the ability to perform each of the listed duties.

1 = Not Concerned  
4 = Concerned

2 = Not Really Concerned  
5 = Very Concerned

3 = Somewhat Concerned

#### **Self Concerns**

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Maintaining poise and confidence in front of teachers and student.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Feeling like a competent principal.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Being accepted and respected by parents and students.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Being accepted and respected by teachers, other administrators, and district level officials. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Receiving a positive evaluation from teachers and students.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Receiving a positive evaluation from the Superintendent.                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Maintaining a professional relationship with faculty and staff members.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Implementing my philosophy of educational leadership into the school.                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Receiving the opportunity to participate in staff development activities for principals.      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Receiving a mentor.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

#### **Task Concerns**

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Ordering and providing teachers with instructional materials in a timely manner.             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Completing paper work in a timely manner.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Sending correspondence to parents.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Finding the time to serve as the instructional leader of the school.                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Managing and allocating budget funds.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Responding to e-mails, letters, and other correspondence in a timely and appropriate manner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Finding substitute teachers to cover classrooms.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Being flexible with students and teachers.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Using consistent discipline to manage student behavior.                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Working 14-15 hour days.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Supervising after school activities.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Appendix**  
**Preservice Principal Concerns Survey continued**

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 22. Solving disputes between faculty members or faculty members and parents.           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Raising test scores  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Conducting parent teacher conferences.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Providing teachers with timely and meaningful feedback about teacher observations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Impact Concerns**

|  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26. Challenging and preparing students for becoming contributors to society.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Ensuring that ALL students receive meaningful teaching and learning activities.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. Involving families in the school.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Creating professional development activities that improve the teaching and learning process. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. Identifying the students who need special services.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. Securing additional community resources to enhance the school.                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. Involving students in meaningful extracurricular activities.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. Convincing community leaders to support the vision and mission of the school.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |