

ABSTRACT

WILLIAMS, CATHY CHADA. *Walking in the Footsteps: An Ethnographic Study of a First Year Principal*. (Under the direction of Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli).

The role of the principal in directing school success is becoming increasingly important. With the student accountability movement, the additional public scrutiny of schools, the variety of pre-service programs, and a shrinking labor pool, it is getting more difficult to find and retain effective school administrators. Novice school administrators face an even greater challenge of being immediately effective while struggling to understand the culture of their new school. This ethnographic study uses observation, interviews, and document analysis to record the challenges facing a first-year school principal, how they reconcile the external pressure of student accountability with the current school culture, and how a novice principal begins to implement their vision within the existing culture of the school.

The findings indicate that the isolating nature of the job is a major concern and that understanding the existing school culture is critical for success. The first year principal must understand how to align their mental models of a successful school with those of the current staff. Two methods of support were the most effective for the new principal in this study. The first was someone to respond to specific and immediate questions and the second was having time to reflect on decisions and situations with a more veteran principal on a regular basis. This increases their feelings of success and helps a new principal look at issues from a variety of angles. And finally, this study re-enforces the opinion that the assistant

principalship is not an effective training ground for a new principal. Additional study is necessary to extend these findings.

Walking in the Footsteps: An Ethnographic Study of a First Year Principal

by
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DEDICATION

With love and gratitude, I dedicate this study to all of the school administrators who work tirelessly on behalf of all children and to my daughters, Anne, Julia, Kate, and Mary.

Their love and support have sustained me throughout this journey.

BIOGRAPHY

Cathy Chada Williams grew up on the west side of Chicago and attended Chicago Public Schools. She earned an undergraduate degree from North Park College and a master's degree in Industrial Relations from Loyola University of Chicago. Her first career was in Human Resource Management and she worked at St. Francis Hospital and Chicago Title and Trust, specializing in Compensation Services.

In 1985, she moved to North Carolina. She earned her teaching certificate in Marketing Education in 1990 and taught at Enloe and Apex High Schools. In 1999, she became the School-to-Career Coordinator for the Wake County Public School System. In 2002, she earned her Masters of School Administration degree from North Carolina State University and served at Ligon Magnet Middle School and Enloe High School as an assistant principal before accepting the position of principal of East Garner Magnet Middle School in 2006.

She lives in Cary, North Carolina and is the mother of four talented and lovely adult daughters and the grandmother to Grace, Joseph, Connor, and Dylan.

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The principal I observed and his entire staff. They welcomed me into their school family and allowed me to share the most intimate details of their professional and personal lives.

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Whoever survives a test, must tell a story. It is his duty.
Eli Wiesel (2003)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Historical Context

During the last twenty-five years, the role and job expectations of the school principal have changed. Before the mid-1980's, the role of the school principal was primarily building management. The community mindset was some students were successful in school and some were not. Those that were successful were destined for college. Those that were not were destined for farms and factories. Then, in 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education stunned the American educational community with the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. The publication indicated that educators had become complacent and that the students of the United States were not prepared to face the oncoming challenge of a global world. The report began (as cited in Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003):

Our nation is at risk. Competitors, throughout the world, are overtaking our once challenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation. The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people...If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might have viewed it as an act of war. (pp. 36-37)

The reaction of the American educational community was swift. Within 12 months of the publication of *A Nation at Risk* an estimated 275 state and local task forces were formed

to “tighten educational standards, strengthen professional certification requirements, and increase accountability” (IES, 1994, p. 1; Jacobson, 1996; Spring 2005; Wirt & Kirst, 2005).

A second wave of educational reform that shook the American educational community resulted from the Goals 2000 Summit held in Charlottesville, Virginia. Goals 2000 stressed the complete restructuring of the American educational system in order to become a world-class system. It was the beginning of the era known as the excellence movement, which called for higher academic standards and an improved educational system (Jacobson, 1996; Spring 2005; Wirt & Kirst, 2005).

Throughout the 1990’s school districts began to focus on student achievement by placing greater emphasis on summative tests. These tests were typically state or district developed. This emphasis on high stakes testing culminated with the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). While states and districts could still measure student achievement using their own standards, the federal legislation mandated that all schools receiving federal funding show adequate yearly progress in student achievement as measured through disaggregated student subgroups.

These external accountability forces have changed the role of the school principal. As districts, states, and the federal government required schools to demonstrate yearly gains in student achievement, the role of the principal moved from building manager to instructional leader. As a result, the school principal of today has a job that is highly complex. They are expected to be visionaries and change agents as well as experts in instructional techniques,

collaboration, marketing, community relations, and conflict resolution (Harris, 2008; IES, 1994). Gary Crow (2006) states, “Although the relationship between student achievement [and the school principal] is indirect, the importance of this role for developing and maintaining school culture, promoting a vision of academic success for all students, and creating professional learning communities has clearly been supported by research and theory” (p. 1). For a person entering the principalship for the first time, the job can be overwhelming and difficult.

Statement of the Problem

Concurrent to the accountability movement and the changing role of the school principal, researchers report that the applicant pool of qualified principals is shrinking (U.S. Dept. of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001; Goodwin, Cunningham & Childress, 2003; Harris, 2008; Huber, 2004; McCreight, 2001). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) reports over 27,000 new principals will be needed either to replace retired school administrators or to staff new schools by the year 2012. There are a number of reasons for the declining pool of applicants and they align with the reasons that new principals struggle as they navigate through their first year of a principalship. First, a sharp increase in responsibilities in recent years has made the job more stressful and has discouraged some teachers from taking positions in administration (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001). Second, principals are increasingly accountable for the performance of students and teachers, while at the same time they are required to adhere to a growing number of federal and state government regulations. Third,

overcrowded classrooms, safety issues, budgetary concerns, and teacher shortages in some areas create additional stress for administrators. Fourth, many principal applicants believe the increased pay for becoming an administrator is not adequate compensation for the greater responsibilities. Fifth, today a school principal is required to address non-school issues such as the decaying family structure and school violence. Finally, principal applicants perceive a lack of support from central office staff and local school boards and believe that they are alone and isolated in their position (BLS, 2008; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; McCreight, 2001).

Although a growing body of research indicates that the school principal is the key to achieving excellence in schools, research on the actual day-to-day challenges facing a new principal is scant. Likewise, while there is a significant amount of research calling for new principal induction strategies, there is little agreement in how to deliver these programs or what they actually should contain (Crow, 2006; Leithwood, 2002; Murphy, 2002b).

Induction programs and resources for beginning principals range from nothing to mentoring, coaching, and workshops. These induction resources are often “piecemeal without an underlying conceptualization of principal socialization based on the features of work in a complex society” (Crow, 2006, p. 1). Considering that a new principal is immediately responsible for the instructional program, the students, the staff, and the building it is important that we develop ways to insure that they will be successful.

The literature abounds with studies that focus on pre-service training for potential school administrators, leadership styles of effective principals, and information gathered

from veteran principals. In 2006, there were approximately 500 pre-service programs in the United States but little evidence to indicate their relative effectiveness (Anderson, 1989; Crow, 2006; Levine, 2005; Southern Regional Education Board, 2005).

Wolcott reported in as early as 1973 that literature regarding school administration tends to be normative, telling principals what they ought to do and remaining unaware of what actually happens inside the principal's office and the school (Griffin, 2000). His concern is valid today. Sustained and systemic research regarding the programmatic needs of a new principal is limited (Anderson, 1989) and there is little or no information that chronicles the journey of a first-year school administrator as they navigate through their first year as a principal. Donaldson and Marnik (1995) offer the following reasons for this lack of information:

We run risks to ourselves as well. If we publish accounts of our thoughts, worries, feelings, self-doubts, beliefs, and actions as leaders, we swing a camera in on many things about us that others don't often see, hear, or feel. What conclusions about us might others reach from this messy, inside footage? That we're insecure? Vindictive? Narrow-minded? Power-hungry? Unworthy of trust? Lost? (p. 92)

As a result, researchers continue to call for additional study to understand the complex role of the school principal, effective leadership techniques, and the complex environment in which induction and socialization of new principals takes place (Crow, 2006; Leithwood, 2002; Murphy, 2002b).

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study will be to document the experiences and challenges of a first-year principal. In addition to the pressure of external accountability and legislative

mandates, the novice principal also has to assess and fit into the existing culture of the school. Many new principals are faced with the ‘ghosts of principals past’ and the former principal’s methods of leading and managing. School personnel are at times resistant to change and whether the previous administrator was a saint or an ogre, teachers often take up the chant—that is not how we do things—when faced with a new administration and potential change. As a result, new principals have difficulty assessing and fitting into the existing culture of the school and often experience a sense of isolation (Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Walker & Qian, 2006).

Research on the role of the school principal is underdeveloped. The complexity of the subject and the lack of consensus on whom to study has led to the scarcity of useful research and research findings (Firestone & Riehl, 2005). This study will chronicle the experiences of a first-year principal as they face the challenges of fitting into an existing culture, attempt to promote change, and strive to help all students be successful.

Research Questions

In order to understand the experiences of a new principal, my study will focus on hearing the voice and documenting the experiences of a new principal as they navigate through the first year on the job. My research questions will be:

1. What are the experiences of a first-year principal?
2. How does a new principal begin to reconcile external pressure such as accountability and a focus on data and expectations of the stakeholders with the current school culture?

3. How does a novice principal begin to implement their vision within an existing culture that may or may not align with this vision?

To answer these questions, I will use an ethnographic methodology to document the experiences of a first-year principal. Using observations, interviews, field notes, audio recordings, and document analysis, I will produce a rich, thick description of the professional life of a first-year principal.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be utilized in my study:

Coaching – The practice of providing deliberate support to another individual to help him/her to clarify and/or achieve goals (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2003, p. 5).

Ethnography – The study of groups or people in a natural setting as they go about their everyday lives (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 1).

First-Year Principal – A school principal who is in their first year of a principalship; also called a beginning principal or a novice principal.

Induction – The process of acquainting a person to the roles and responsibilities of a new position.

Naturalistic Setting – The location where people conduct their everyday lives.

Mentoring – A trusted guide who works with a student to answer questions and/or provide answers to questions.

Socialization – The process by which individuals acquire the values and attitudes of the group and learn social roles.

Significance of the Study

As a fourth-year principal, I understand the complexity of the job. I also remember the overwhelming feeling of being responsible for everything within the school community and the incredibly steep learning curve I had when I became a middle school principal. Before becoming a principal, I had worked in the same school system for 16 years, including several years in Central Services where I had an opportunity to understand the district's bigger picture and to develop relationships with administrators throughout the district. I also was an assistant principal for several years with a variety of job responsibilities that extended far beyond the usual 'bodies and buses.' I am a graduate from a prestigious university with a degree in school administration. However, I was not prepared for the enormous responsibility of the principalship.

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) indicate, "[School] leadership not only matters, it is second only to teaching among school related factors in its impact upon student learning" (p. 5). To support and nurture a first-year principal, understanding the challenges facing a novice school principal is paramount. By hearing the voice and documenting the experiences of a beginning principal as they navigate through their first year, I hope to add to the body of literature regarding new principal support and to contribute to the dialog regarding new and aspiring principals.

Theoretical Framework

To investigate the challenges of a first year principal I will use the social constructivist theoretical framework. Social constructivism postulates that each person

constructs their own reality and makes meaning through experiences and interactions with others and their environment. Social constructivism encourages the learner to arrive at their version of the truth, which is influenced by each person's unique background and culture. The creation of knowledge cannot be separated from the social environment in which it is formed. (Adams, 2006; McMahon, 1997).

The constructivist framework postulates that each person has a uniquely constructed version of reality that they carry around in their day-to-day experience as human beings. Since there is no meaning until constructed, two people never actually see the same thing in the same way. A new principal, walking into a new building, begins to construct their own reality of the building, the staff, and the extended community. The principal's existing mental models, background knowledge, belief system, and values frame their experiences and help them make meaning of all new situations. It also makes the assimilation of a novice principal into an existing school culture more complex. The reality constructed by current staff most likely will be different from the reality and meaning made by the novice principal. The challenge of being a first-time building leader coupled with the additional layer of culture insures that there is no clear path to success for a first time school administrator (Gredler, 1997; Kukla, 2000; McMahon, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994).

Overview of the Approach

In the preface of the 2004 reprint of *the Man in the Principal's Office*, Wolcott states:

The purpose of any ethnographic account is to provide description and analysis regarding social behavior... The account provided in these pages is an ethnographic inquiry into the elementary school principalship. The purpose of the study is to

describe and analyze the elementary school principalship from a cultural perspective... The attention to context and to complex interrelationships in human lives is what makes ethnographic accounts different from accounts written from the perspective of other social sciences. Ethnographic accounts deal with real human beings and actual human behavior, with an emphasis on social rather than on physiological or psychological aspects of behavior. (p.xi)

In 2008, Wolcott reiterated this point by stating that an ethnography “should be a theory of cultural behavior in a particular society” (p. 33). While Wolcott (2008) states that an ethnographic study does not require a “Grand Theory (with a capital T)” (p. 74), he claimed that it is helpful to have a theory in place before beginning the work. “There has to be an *idea* guiding what we choose to describe and how we choose to describe it. We do not and cannot simply *observe, watch, or look*; we must observe, watch, or look at something” (p. 74). The *something* that I intend to observe are the experiences of a new principal as they discover, understand, and react to the existing school culture and the internal and external forces that affect the school culture.

I will use a qualitative approach to my study. My goal is to give a voice to the new principal and to understand their experiences in a naturalistic setting. I will approach the study with the belief reality is constructed by the individuals involved in the research setting (Creswell, 2007) and to “present phenomena in new and revealing ways” (Hammersley, 1992, p. 13).

I will use an ethnographic methodology as a framework for the study.

Hammersley (1992) states:

The purpose of ethnographic analysis is to produce sensitizing concepts and models that allow people to see events in new ways. The value of these models is to be

judged by others in terms of how useful they find them: they are not intended to be theories in the conventional sense of the term, allowing prediction and control; or to represent privileged information of any kind. Rather, they are simply contributions to a public dialogue that should compete on equal terms with those from other sources. (p. 15)

Since I have intentionally designed my study to capture the voice of the new principal throughout their first year, I will be actively involved in all phases of data collection and analysis. The focus is to understand the events in context and to provide a rich description of the experiences through the lens of school culture.

I used observations as my primary method of capturing information, but also relied on both audio and in person reflections by the participant. In addition, I conducted two teacher focus groups to hear their voices as they learn to work with a new principal. I also interviewed the area superintendent who is responsible for hiring and supervising the new principal. Finally, I examined artifacts and documents produced and distributed throughout the year by the new principal.

The role of the school principal becomes more complex each year. The external forces of accountability and the internal forces of culture within the school present even the most seasoned veteran with daily challenges. Yet, the school community expects a first-year principal to respond to these questions in a manner that promotes student achievement, satisfies stakeholder expectations, and builds collaboration. Through my observation of a first-year principal, I hope to begin to discern information that will add to the body of knowledge about the challenges facing a new principal.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into nine chapters. This chapter included an introduction to the topic, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the definition of terms, the significance of the study, the theoretical framework, and an overview of the approach. The second chapter is a review of pertinent literature. The third chapter explains my research methodology. The fourth chapter is background information on the school and the key staff. The fifth chapter contains reflections from the new principal on being new. The sixth chapter contains a description of trust, building relationships, and the biggest challenges facing the new principal. The seventh chapter is a description of the school culture from the perspective of the new principal and the teachers. The eighth chapter highlights the activities of the new principal on several days throughout the year. Finally, chapter nine is a summary of my findings, their alignment with the literature, and possible recommendations for further study.

*I have climbed to the top of the greasy pole.
Benjamin Disraeli, 1868
upon his appointment as the Prime Minister of Great Britain.*

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The focus of this literature review is to detail the information available regarding the experiences of a first-year principal. Organized thematically, it begins with a brief summary of the historical perspective of the principalship, a review of state and ISLLC standards, an investigation of school culture, and information relating to the current situation regarding potential principal applicants. The remaining sections review various programs including pre-service training, induction, socialization, cognitive problem solving, mentoring, and coaching. The final section is a summary and a preview of the third chapter. This literature review details the current information available on what a first year principal should do and highlights the lack of information about what challenges a novice principal actually faces during their first year.

Historical Perspective

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and *Goals 2000* (1999) set in motion a national dialog around the issues of school reform and restructuring. These national conversations included questions surrounding the role and effectiveness of the school principal in promoting student achievement. One result of these conversations was the

dramatic change in the role and responsibilities of the school principal throughout the last thirty years (Harris, 2008).

Cuban and Milstein (1993) divide the changing role of the principal into three distinct historical eras. During the first era, from 1900—1950, school administrators trained as school managers and did not focus on instructional practices. Using a positivistic paradigm, school leadership was based on authority and control. The second era began in the 1950's when the social science field began playing an important role in education. Leadership theories and trait analyses of *What is a good leader?* became the essence of school administration and principal preparation.

The third era began in the 1980's with the advent of student accountability discussions. The vision of the school principal that emerged in the late 1980's and early 1990's was that of an instructional leader who was “an efficient, top-down, task oriented manager who focused on curriculum and instruction rather than buildings and budgets” (Lashway, 2002, p. 3). Today's principal articulates and identifies a vision, encourages acceptance of group goals, and promotes teacher decision-making. They are accountable for student success and tasked with promoting social justice and equity of educational opportunities for all students by creating a collaborative culture of adult and student learners (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Lashway, 2002).

Though Cuban and Milstein wrote about these three eras in 1993, I believe the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 ushered in a fourth era of school leadership. As the role of the school principal has continued to evolve, the school principal of today is an

administrator who is data driven and focuses on student achievement while at the same time, creates leadership capacity with their school. They promote social justice and educational equity while being a community-minded leader who develops relationships within and outside the school community (Duncan & Seguin, 2002). English (2009) suggests that the role of a school principal should be examined both internally and externally and that the job is decidedly non-standard within a changing environment. These changes and broadening responsibilities point to the necessity of understanding the challenges facing a current day school administrator and how understanding their day-to-day workings can inform support for new administrators. My study will chronicle the work of a new administrator as they tackle these challenges.

ISLLC and North Carolina Standards

As the role and responsibilities of the school administrator have evolved, in 1992 the North Carolina General Assembly established the Educational Leadership Task Force. The mission of the task force was to study the preparation, licensure, and professional development of public school administrators. Their findings included the establishment of the North Carolina Standards Board, an independent board of practicing professionals responsible for developing standards and assessments governing entrance into the profession (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008).

The Standards Board began their study of the profession using both research and input from veteran administrators. Since the accountability movement was a nationwide effort, the Standards Board originally partnered with Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi, and

Texas and eventually formalized this relationship by entering into a multi-state consortium headed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). In 1996, four states formally adopted the ISLLC (Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium) School Administrator Standards. The 1996 ISLLC standards represented a common core of knowledge, dispositions, and performances that were thought to be the necessary to link between leadership and productive schools and increase student achievement. The standards reflect seven key principals. First, they focus on the centrality of student learning. Second, they acknowledge the changing role of the school leader. Third, they recognize the collaborative nature of school leadership. Fourth, they are sufficiently high as to upgrade the quality of the profession. Fifth, they are of sufficient specification for developing performance-based systems of assessment and evaluation. Sixth, they are integrated and coherent as guides. Finally, they are predicated on the concepts of access, opportunity, and empowerment for all members of the school community.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, using the ISLLC standards as a guide, developed its own standards for school administrators. Table 1 is a comparison of the 1996 ISLLC Standards and the North Carolina Standards (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2008).

In December 2007, the ISLLC consortium updated the standards to “reflect new information and lessons learned about education leadership” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 1) There were four significant changes to the standards. The first was to change the wording *school administrator* to *educational leader*. The second modification to the standards was to change

the phrase *success of all students to every student*. The third change was the substitution of the word *faculties* instead of families. The fourth change was to eliminate the descriptive core, knowledge, behavior and dispositions associated with each standard and replace it with a set of functions that delineate the standard (CCSSO, 2008).

In 2008 the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction introduced new standards for school executives, *A New Vision for School Leadership*. These standards indicate that schools executives of today must: (NCDPI, 2008):

create systems for change and build relationships with and across staff...create a culture in which leadership is distributed and encouraged with teachers, which consists of open, honest communication, which is focused on the use of data, teamwork, research-based best practices, and which uses modern tools to drive ethical and principled, goal-oriented action. (NCDPI, 2008)

Table 2 compares the 2008 ISLLC Standards and the 2008 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Executive Standards.

Table 1

Comparison of ISLLC Standards and North Carolina Standards(1996)

ISLLC Standards (1996)	NCDPI Standards
A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by:	The principal is an educational leader who:
<i>Implementation of a Vision</i>	
Standard 1 - Facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.	Standard 1 - Facilitates the development, implementation, and communication of a shared vision of learning that reflects excellence and equity for all students.
<i>Creation of positive school culture/climate for students and staff</i>	
Standard 2 - Advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.	Standard 2 - Promotes the development of organizational, instructional, and assessment strategies to enhance teaching and learning.

Table 1 Continued

Standard 3 - Works with others to ensure a working and learning climate that is safe, secure, and respectful of diversity.

Standard 8 - Demonstrates academic success, intellectual ability, and a commitment to life-long learning.

Standard 10 - Fosters a culture of continuous improvement focused upon teaching and learning.

Ensuring safe and efficient operations

Standard 3 - Ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 6 - Uses excellent management and leadership skills to achieve effective and efficient organizational operations.

Collaborating with all stakeholders and the larger school community

Standard 4 - Collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5 - Facilitates school improvement by engaging the school community's stakeholders in collaboration, team-building, problem solving, and shared decision making.

Acting ethically

Standard 5 - Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 4 - Demonstrates integrity and behaves in an ethical manner.

Understanding political, social, and economic context

Standard 6 - Understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social economic, legal, and cultural context.

Effective interpersonal skills

Standard 7 - Employs effective interpersonal, communication, and human relations skills.

Effective use of data

Standard 9 - Promotes the appropriate use of valid and reliable information to facilitate progress, evaluate personnel and programs, and to make decisions.

Table 2

Comparison of ISLLC Standards (2007) and North Carolina Standards (2008)

Strategic Leadership (Creating a vision)

ISLLC	Standard 1 - An educational leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.
NCDPI	Standard 1 - Principals will create conditions that result in strategically re-imagining the school's vision, mission and goals in the 21 st century. Understanding that schools ideally prepare students for an unseen but not altogether unpredictable future, the leaders create a climate of inquiry that challenges the school community to continually re-purpose itself by building on its core values and beliefs about its preferred future and then developing a pathway to reach it.

Instructional Leadership

ISLLC	
NCDPI	Standard 2 - Principals set high standards for the professional practice of 21 st century instruction and assessment that result in a no-nonsense accountable environment. The school executive must be knowledgeable of best instructional and school practices and must use this knowledge to cause the creation of collaborative structures within the school for the design of highly engaging schoolwork for students, the on-going peer review of this work, and the sharing of this work throughout the professional community.

Standard 3 – Cultural Leadership

ISLLC	Standard 2 - An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
NCDPI	Standard 3 - Principals will understand and act on the understanding of the important role of a school's culture plays in contributing to the exemplary performance of the school. Principals must support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and positive values and norms of the school and community that result in a sense of identity and pride upon which to build a positive future. A principal must be able to "reculture" the school if needed to align with school's goals of improving student and adult learning and to infuse the work of the adults and students with passion, meaning and purpose. Cultural leadership implies understanding the school and the people in it each day, how they came to their current states, and how to connect with their traditions in order to move them forward to support the school's efforts to achieve individual and collective goals.

Human Resource Leadership

ISLLC	
NCDPI	Standard 4 - Principals will ensure that the school is a professional learning community. Principals will ensure that process and systems are in place which results in recruitment, induction, support, evaluation, development and retention of high performing staff. The principal must engage and empower accomplished teachers in a distributive manner, including support of teachers in day-to-day decisions such as discipline, communication with parents/guardians, and protecting teachers from duties that interfere with teaching, and must practice fair and consistent

Table 2 Continued

evaluations of teachers. The principal must engage teachers and other professional staff in conversations to plan their career paths and support district succession planning.

Managerial leadership

- ISLLC Standard 3 - An educational leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
- NCDPI Standard 5 - Principals will ensure that the school has processes and systems in place for budgeting, staffing, and problem solving, communicating expectations, and scheduling that result in organizing the work routines in the building. The principal must be responsible for the monitoring of the school budget and the inclusion of all teachers in the budget decision so as to meet the 21st century needs of every classroom. Effectively and efficiently managing the complexity of everyday life is critical for staff to be able to focus its energy on improvement.

Ethical Leadership

- ISLLC Standard 5 - An educational leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

NCDPI

External Leadership Development

- ISLLC Standard 4 - An educational leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculties and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 6 - An educational leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social economic, legal, and cultural context.

- NCDPI Standard 6 - A principal will design structures and processes that result in community engagement, support, and ownership. Acknowledging that schools no longer reflect but, in fact, build community, the leader proactively creates with staff, opportunities for parents/guardians, community and business representatives to participate as “stockholders” in the school such as continued investment of resources and good will are not left to chance.

Micro-political leadership

ISLLC

- NCDPI Standard 7 - Principals will build systems and relationships that utilize the staff’s diversity, encourage constructive ideological conflict in order to leverage staff expertise, power, and influence in order to realize the school’s vision for success. The principal will also creatively employ an awareness of staff’s professional needs, issues, and interests to build cohesion and to facilitate distributed governance and shared decision-making.

With the revision of the standards, it is obvious that the role of the school principal is transforming. External factors such as student accountability, the increased public scrutiny of schools, budget cuts, overcrowding, poverty, inadequate health care, and unemployment, plus the development of professional education leadership standards, focus attention on the changing responsibilities of the principal. Similarly, internal forces from within schools continue to shape and define the role of the principal. This volatile education leadership landscape can be a treacherous terrain for a first-year principal. My study, designed to listen to the voice of a first year principal, provides additional information about the implications and implementation of these standards.

School Culture

A survey of the current literature regarding school culture finds that the culture of a school has a greater influence on the daily operation of a school, the success of the students, the retention of the teachers, and the attitudes of stakeholders toward the school than any other variable within the school (Barth, 2001; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Wagner, et al.). Barth (2001) defines school culture as:

A complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. It is the invisible, but powerful meanings, that people subscribe to the activities and events of the school. They transmit these hidden meanings through actions, oral history, story-telling, ceremonies, rituals, and school artifacts. (p. 1)

School cultures are invisible, unexamined, implicit, multi-layered, and never complete or permanent (Dufour, DuFour, Eaker, 2008). The attitudes, beliefs, values, and communications of staff, students, and stakeholders continually form and reform the culture

within the school (Barth, 2002; Gruenert, 2000; Rebore & Walmsley, 2009). Barth (2002) describes the health of a school in terms of non-discussibles—the issues that are not spoken about aloud, but whispered in the lounge or the carpool and are laden with anxiety and fear. He claims the fewer the non-discussibles, the healthier the school culture. Likewise, the more non-discussibles, the more toxic the school culture becomes. Often, these issues revolve around the school leadership and staff morale. This anxiety and whispering only escalates when a new administrator enters the building.

It is important to situate the conversation of school culture in the professional standards for all school administrators. Both the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction School Executives Standards (Standard 3) and the ISLLC Standards (Standard 2) have a separate standard devoted to the development and promotion of a healthy and positive school culture. The 2008 NCDPI standard states:

Principals will understand and act on the understanding of the important role of a school's culture plays in contributing to the exemplary performance of the school. Principals must support and value the traditions, artifacts, symbols and positive values and norms of the school and community that result in a sense of identity and pride upon which to build a positive future. A principal must be able to “reculture” the school if needed to align with school's goals of improving student and adult learning and to infuse the work of the adults and students with passion, meaning and purpose. Cultural leadership implies understanding the school and the people in it each day, how they came to their current states, and how to connect with their traditions in order to move them forward to support the school's effects to achieve individual and collective goals. (NCDPI, 2008)

And the 2007 ISLLC standard states:

An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

As the ISLLC and the NCDPI standards have changed to reflect a school administrator who builds and values relationships, the importance of a healthy school culture cannot be minimized. The principal's role is evolving to one of "empowering rather than controlling and establishing meaning rather than directing" (Shipman, Queen, & Peel, 2007, p. 36).

Promoting a healthy school culture is the greatest challenge to a school administrator because school cultures cannot be built. In a study of 158 urban principals, Osterman, Crow, and Rosen (1997) found that the new principals did not realize the importance of school culture even though the process of "learning about attitudes, values, and beliefs of the school context is central to gaining acceptance of others" (p. 612).

Monitoring a culture is "non-linear" (Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2008, p. 109) and often necessitates a quick response to a problem or issue. While one person cannot create a positive culture, one person can damage it. "One cannot change a school culture alone. But one can provide forms of leadership that invite others to join as observers of the old and architects of the new" (Barth, 2002, p. 1).

To continue the discussion of school culture and its effect on a novice school administrator, the following describes what researchers indicate are the characteristics and challenges of creating a positive school culture, the characteristics and effects of a negative school culture, and the impact this has on a new administrator.

Since school cultures are deeply woven, historical ways of thinking, acting, and building relationships, they are incredibly resistant to change. School cultures can be positive forces for increased student achievement and productive collaboration. Saphier and King (1985) identified a dozen healthy cultural norms: collegiality, experimentation, high expectations, trust and confidence, tangible support, reaching out to the knowledge bases, appreciation and recognition, caring celebration and humor, involvement in decision making, protection of what's important, traditions, and honest and open communication. Shipman, Queen, and Peel (2007) identify four essential characteristics of effective cultures: high expectations, safety and order, responsibility and empathy, and praise. Ansbacher (2008) investigated five principal of the year recipients and found that a school administrator cultivates a positive school culture by promoting a learning organization using reflective practice, collaboration, and school rituals.

School cultures can also be negative forces that undermine needed change and present a formidable obstacle for a first-year principal (Barth, 2001). Deal and Peterson (1999) explain a negative culture by describing the types of characters present in a toxic culture. There are saboteurs, pessimistic storytellers, keepers of the nightmare, negaholics, prima donnas, space cadets, martyrs, deadwood, driftwood, or ballast. Any or all of these personalities can present a significant roadblock for a first-year principal.

In a study of a first year principal, Eilers and Camacho (2007) found that he was able to effect a culture change by being very strategic in his objectives. He focused on low achievement scores and built a culture of high expectations for all students through a series

of team building activities, collaborative work, positioning himself as the lead learner, and aligning district initiatives to meet the needs of the school. He implemented structural changes to facilitate learning such as schedule changes and aligning staff development with the curriculum. He also worked at building relationships with a principal of a nearby school to develop a mentor/mentee relationship and to provide an opportunity for his teachers to visit a successful school with the same demographics. He also fostered relationships with district personnel and pioneered the use of data within the school to inform instruction. The results of the two-year study indicated a culture change in the areas of teacher professionalism, school collaboration, and the use of data.

An additional ethnographic study conducted by Duncan and Seguin (2002) of a female principal studied the relationship of power and success during the first year of a principalship. Methods included observation, data analysis, and interviews. The new principal wrote in her journal, “9 months = Lifetime of Experience...the real principalship is an amazing beast—one that takes every ounce of positive drive and servant leadership housed in every tiny bone of the body and still demands 1,000 times more. Some days its love, others—exhaustion” (p. 617). The findings of this study indicate successful principals must: a) Empower the teachers to become leaders within the school, b) Include teachers in the decision-making process, c) Listen and hear the staff, d) Work hard at building trust, e) Develop and articulate a vision for the school, and

f) Take time to learn the culture of the school (pp. 627-228). Shaprio (2000) refers to these findings as cultural mapping or taking the time to understand the culture thoroughly to discover the issues, concerns, and problems of the organization.

So how does a school administrator—especially a novice school administrator—avoid these roadblocks? In their continuing studies on developing and sustaining a positive school culture, Barth (2001), Deal and Peterson (1999), Reeves (2006), and Rooney (2008) found the school principal should work to develop teacher-leaders through the promotion of a community of learners. School principals should encourage risk-taking by empowering teacher-leaders, sharing responsibility for failure, and giving recognition for successes. Finally, principals should be willing to *walk the talk*, to be actively involved in the change through building relationships and working collaboratively with all stakeholders.

Murphy (2002a) describes three roles of a school leader that are necessary to build a positive school culture: moral steward, educator, and community builder. Moral leadership translates to seeing the moral-ethical and justice implications in thousands of daily decisions made by school administrators. Educator refers to the collaborative process of encouraging teachers to engage in on-going learning and to being the champion learner in the school. Community builder refers to a principal needing to learn to lead, not from the top but from a web of relationships with people. They must learn to lead, not through control, but through empowerment. Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) outline three sets of core leadership practices. The first is developing people and providing support. The second is setting a direction for organizations by developing shared goals and effective

communication. The third is to redesign the organization by creating a productive culture, modifying organizational structures, and building collaboration.

To change a school culture requires a clear vision and the courage to confront the toxic elements of a school. There are several antidotes for a toxic school culture mentioned in the literature. The school administrator should confront the negativity head-on or give people a chance to vent in a public forum. School administrators should protect positive cultural elements and clearly delineate what is changing and what will not change. They should focus their energy on recruitment of new staff and retention of effective, positive staff. School administrators should celebrate the positive and the possible, develop new stories, and celebrate successes (Barth, 2001; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Reeves, 2006).

While researchers agree that change cannot occur within an organization without first changing the culture, school administrators often make the mistake of changing structures within a school in hopes of changing the culture. Fullan (2006) states:

Most strategies for reform focus on structures, formal requirements, and events-based activities....They do not struggle directly with the existing cultures within which new values and practices may be required...Restructuring (which can be done by fiat) occurs time and time again whereas reculturing (how teachers come to question and change beliefs and habits) is what is needed. (p. 25)

Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) echo Fullan's position regarding the importance in recognizing the difference between altering structures and building a culture. They describe two barriers to changing the school culture. The first is that educators are conditioned to regard school improvement as a program to implement instead of a process to build capacity. The second is that a school culture cannot change unless the change is embraced by the

school community. This last barrier is on point with Barth's (2002) comment that one person alone cannot create a positive culture.

The conversation about school culture would not be complete without a parallel conversation about mental models and making meaning. A school culture is a "moral compass" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 21), a microcosm of mental models created by the entire school community, steeped in the history of the school, and perpetuated by ceremonies, customs, and rituals. It is definitely, as Barth (2001) often writes, "The way we do things around here" (pp. 7-8). It is the meaning that every member of the school community makes when encountering every situation. All people make meaning and use mental models to filter and make sense of observations and experiences. They interpret the new based on the old—what is familiar and what is in their personal toolkits of experiences. Educators [teachers, administrators, counselors] will often discount or ignore new information and/or experiences that do not conform to their existing models, thereby making change more difficult (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

It is clear that existing school personnel share a history and belief system that will be foreign to a new principal. The current school community already has mental models of students, learning, teaching strategies, data, leadership, and the roles and responsibilities of the school administrator. Specific rituals, ceremonies, and the ways of doing business within the school will also be unfamiliar to the new principal. Additionally, the new administrator has their own mental models and constructs, their own background knowledge and previous experiences that they bring to the new position.

While the previous discussion described school culture including the characteristics of a positive and a negative school culture, we are left with Wolcott's lament in *The Man in the Principal's Office* (2003). "The literature regarding school administration tends to be normative, telling principals what they ought to do and remaining unaware of what actually happens inside the principal's office and the school" (p. xvi).

Several recent studies have begun to respond to this critique. Bolman and Deal (2002) suggest that when a novice principal walks into the door of a new school they are busy trying to find their way around while the natives are actively trying to figure out the new principal. They want to know what you are bringing. Will you fit in? Are you a troublemaker? Are you a threat? They suggest that a new principal should pay attention to these questions. They are important clues about the staff's expectations and yardsticks with which they will evaluate the new principal. They encourage a new principal to walk around. How are you greeted? How does the school look? How does it smell? What are people wearing? What is on the walls? Bolman and Deal (2002) indicate these observations will yield thousands of clues to better understand the cultural practices.

Shipman, Queen, and Peel (2007) and Rooney (2000) offer this advice for a first-year principal when learning to navigate an established school culture: a) Respect the past with its heroes, heroines, icons, and rituals; b) Meet each teacher and department chair; c) Locate the power; d) Keep the central office informed; e) Find friends and mentors among your colleagues; f) When in doubt, keep still; g) Take care of yourself physically, emotionally,

professionally, and spiritually; h) Continue to learn by reading, attending professional meetings, and conversing with professional friends; and i) Pick your battles.

Without a doubt, the school culture is a critical component of school success and a powerful, intangible force that drives the workings of a school. “The school’s culture dictates, in no uncertain terms, how we do things around here” (Barth, 2001, pp. 7-8). Ultimately, the school culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal can ever have (Crow, 2006).

Navigating through a school culture is a challenge for a seasoned principal and a formidable task for a new principal. A first-year principal entering a school with an established culture cannot begin to effect lasting change without first understanding and possibly altering the climate of the school. How they learn the unwritten rules of the school culture and how it can affect their effectiveness as an administrator is the focus of my study.

Building Trust, Developing Relationships, and Transparency

A critical component of a healthy school culture is positive relationships between the principal and all stakeholder groups: teachers, students, parents, and community members. In 2001, Barth claimed that the principal is the person responsible for setting the tone within the environment for building and sustaining healthy relationships. These healthy relationships are built on trust, which is a social resource (Cosner, 2009). Trust is present in a school when the members of a school community share a vision of success and the path to achieve these

goals. Sergiovanni (2007) describes relational trust as “a complex web of social exchanges that condition the actions within the school” (p. 159).

There is a small but growing body of research that supports this concept. Studies indicate that a principal is the key element in building school capacity, that capacity is expanded within a trusting environment, and that principals play a pivotal role in creating the environment that promotes trusting relationships among the adults within a school (Cosner, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). These findings demonstrate that principals create this trusting environment by modeling an inclusive leadership style that empowers teachers to make decisions that affect the life of the school, promotes a sense of professionalism among the staff, and provides teachers the opportunity to collaborate and interact. In recent studies, Cosner (2009), Edmondson (2004), and Bryk and Schneider (2003) found that developing this culture of trust leads to five positive teacher behaviors: feedback seeking, help seeking, speaking up about concerns or mistakes, innovation, and boundary spanning. Taking the final leap, Bryk and Edmondson (2003) found that “schools with high trust were much more likely to demonstrate marked improvements in student learning” (p. 43).

A school in which trusting and honest relationships are the norm is defined by people’s relationships to each other, their personal connections, and mutual respect (Crowe, 2002). A principal needs to model openness and honesty to promote full participation of ideas by all stakeholders. This trusting environment leads to shared values and organizational goal attainment. The absence of this trust is anxiety, isolation, and estrangement (Cosner, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Wahlstrom & Seashore-Louis, 2008).

In order to do this, a school administrator should continually reflect and reframe situations to look at and weigh issues to make the best decisions for the school community. An effective school administrator should examine their own motives, values, and beliefs systems to insure that they are aligned with the best interests of the staff and students (Davis, 2004).

One of the problems often encountered by a new principal is the sense of isolation. Burmeister and Hensley (2004) suggest that to reduce isolation a successful administrator understands that they cannot do the job alone. Instead, they must build solid and trusting relationships with all individuals within the organization. Rooney (2008) states that, “Building relationships is the foundation for a successful principalship” (p. 85). Another method of building trust and relationships is to deal with conflict openly and honestly. Staff members appreciate a principal who can confront conflict. People need to have an opportunity to voice their concerns. Without this venue, conflict can fester and turn into animosity which can negatively infect a school culture (Bolman & Deal, 2001).

In a study of schools in program improvement, Daly (2009) found that the principals found themselves in a difficult position of competing demands—enforcing top down accountability standards while trying to increase the morale of the teachers and build trust. They found it sent mixed messages to the teachers. To increase student achievement, Daily (2009) found that principals who created a supportive environment that promoted teacher-to-teacher collaboration and professionalism yielded greater results. In a similar study, Tschannen-Moran (2009) discovered that principals play a pivotal role in developing a

trusting environment by creating a professional orientation toward the work of the school. It cultivates norms that enable teachers to productively engage in collective inquiry and contribute to student needs. Teachers who felt their principals trusted their efforts were more likely to trust one another, their students, and parents.

Recent studies indicate that there is a thin, but growing, connection between trust, teacher capacity, and student achievement. High trust behaviors include collective decision-making, engaging in problem solving, risk-taking, and collaboration. The principal must set the tone and create the environment that supports and encourages rich dialogue (Wahlstrom-Louis, 2008). Building these relationships, trust, and transparency is difficult for any principal. It takes courage to focus on openness, trust, and transparency when everyone in the building is a stranger. My study chronicles a first year principal's attempt to build and sustain these relationships.

Metaphors to Describe Leadership

As a principal moves from managing to leading, they move from the concrete to the abstract. Articulating a vision requires using a different vocabulary and creating new mental models of the future. Metaphors are one technique used to help describe this vision. Senge (1990) suggests using metaphors to expand our mental models; “mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even a picture or an image that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (p. 8). Metaphors are image-generating devices that help people think about what is not yet known or understood and help people explore their thinking and push toward expanded perspectives (Dufour, DuFour, & Eaker,

2008; Linn, Sherman, & Gill, 2007). “Metaphorical thinking produces new insights and learning...by comparing a known with an unknown to gain insight” (Noonan & Fish, 2005, p. 56).

Metaphors are a useful tool for interpreting and communicating our knowledge and experiences to others through story-telling, questioning, comparisons, and creative thinking. For example, the question: “How is a school like an extended family?” (Noonan & Fish, 2005, p. 56) can help a staff think about relationships, rivalries, and compassion. They compress complicated issues into understandable images (Bowman & Deal, 2003; Linn, Sherman, & Gill, 2007). When leaders used metaphors to describe leadership or leadership situations, they give the speaker (or writer) an expanded vocabulary and richer descriptions.

Metaphorical language is also used to describe the principalship. Using metaphors, Beck and Murphy (1993) examined the historical perspective of the principalship. Beginning in the 1920's their characterizations are: 1920's—value broker; 1930's—scientific manager; 1940's—democratic leader; 1950's—theory-guided administrator; 1960's—bureaucratic executive; 1970's—humanistic facilitator; 1980's—instructional leader. Linn, Sherman and Gill (2007) suggest that the 1990's would be characterized as learning organization catalyst. More recently, Cherry and Spiegel (2006) examined leadership and categorized it under three metaphorical themes: the advocate, the parent, and the touchstone. Jackson and McDermott (2009) describe present day school leadership as an architect, minister, soul-friend, and muse. The architect sets the tone in the building by encouraging risk-taking, sharing, openness, and transparency. The minister is the moral compass and takes the power out of the relationship

through service and a focus on the common good. The soul friend works to develop relationships with students, teachers, and members of the school community by getting to the heart of what matters to another person. The soul friend shares cultural perspectives and personal contexts in a safe place where understanding and recognition are nourished and celebrated. The muse provides inspiration and communicates.

Linn, Sherman, and Gill (2007) conducted a survey of 41 students in a school administration pre-service program. They asked an open-ended question, “The principalship is like..... because.....” (p. 166). The answers fit into four themes: nurture, adventure, challenge, and luck or chance. The nurturing answers listed gardens, parents, a mother hen, and a woman giving birth after nine months of pregnancy. The adventure answers included a jigsaw puzzle, climbing a mountain, and juggling torches. The challenge metaphors included a small boat on an open ocean, riding a bull, a horror film, a ship at sea on a foggy night, and an octopus. The luck or chance metaphors were hunting Easter eggs, fishing, and East Texas. The question raised by the authors of the study is—Does perception shape reality or does reality shape perception?

Using metaphors to understand the meaning making of aspiring principals helps to understand the frames of reference they might have when they actually become a principal. Gaziel (2203) states, “Frames of reference shape how situations are defined and determine what actions take place...Learning from experience often plays a more powerful role than formal education” (p. 477). Educational administrators should understand the importance and influence of metaphor in detecting, framing, communicating present and future realities, as

well as expanding mental models and open new avenues of thinking and learning (Noonan & Fish, 2005; Senge, 1990).

In my study, I examined the use of metaphors by the new principal to communicate his mental models.

Managing Versus Leading

Although studies stress the importance of the principal as instructional leader, the consensus in the literature is that principals spend most of their time dealing with managerial issues (Doyle & Rice, 2002). The reality is—schools are complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical organizations, populated by people who all view the school through a different lens (Salo, 2008) and the managing and leading of schools requires complex, complimentary, and interrelated skills (Huber, 2004). Lewis and Murphy (2008) state, “Effective leadership is often enacted through apparently small details of how managers manage, so that leadership and management are not easily disentwined” (p. 130). Having an organizational understanding of schools, both internally and externally, is important for a school administrator. “We all construct the world through the lenses of our own making that filter and select. Leaders have mental models that determine their behavior and expectations that, in turn, shape and direct organizational responses” (Linn, Sherman, & Gill, 2007, p. 169). “Visionary leaders who can use all of their wisdom to marshal their resources are needed to meet the current challenges in our schools” (Ylimaki, 2006, p. 47).

Optimally, management and leadership occur simultaneously. However, management and leadership skills are often at odds with each other. Management requires micro skills and

daily attention, orderliness, and oversight. It involves keeping the details of the organization such as heat, air conditioning, scheduling, cleaning, student assignment, the cafeteria, and transportation running efficiently. Leadership, on the other hand, requires vision, willingness to revise, messiness, and the willingness to experiment and change (Huber, 2004). It refers to keeping sight of the long-term goals and steering the school in that direction. The fact that both school management and school leadership are standards in the ISLLC Standards and the 2008 NCDPI School Executive Standards highlights the importance of these skills. Without a doubt, a school principal needs to be both an accomplished manager and a leader.

Rishi and Muskal (2005), using the Dreyfus model, found that novice principals spend more time doing routine tasks and prioritizing their work. They focus on managerial and socio-interpersonal skills such as managing time, defining their role, developing rapport, establishing credibility, and managing teachers, parents, and other adults. First year principals also focus on responding to feedback and demands from the district office and training and understanding district procedures. The study indicates that as their time in the position lengthens novice principals begin to learn from experiences and develop additional lenses and mental models to respond to situations. Ansbacher (2008) suggests but ultimately rejects the idea that in the current era of accountability, focus on data, and increased federal and state guidelines, a current school administrator does not exert leadership as much as management. He states, "Vision [leadership skills] is most necessary when there are numerous paths to be chosen and the principal had the autonomy to choose them...when the path is dictated by data or mandate, we may call upon our principals to be visionary less

often” (p. 94). Lewis and Murphy (2008) postulate that while it is assumed that the school administrator is in charge of the school’s destiny, in reality, a school administrator is more like a branch manager than a CEO. They receive directives, expectations, targets, new initiative, and resources while they may or not be manageable within the specific context of the school. Lewis and Murphy (2008) state, “Managing without leading is possible—leading without managing is not possible” (p. 138).

When a new principal enters their school building for the first time, they are the person who knows the least about almost everything related to that particular school, but instantaneously they are supposed to be the expert (Alvy & Robbins, 2005). Being a foreigner in a new cultural land and having mental models that might not align with the current inhabitants of this foreign land, it is easy to assume that a new principal might grab onto the management tasks. They have boundaries and are finite and tangible. It is more likely that the current staff and the new principal might share a common language and idea of the management tasks.

My study will investigate the managing/leading situation and add to the body of knowledge on how a new principal learns to balance and entwine managing and leading.

The Principal Shortage

The current issue of the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (2008-09), published annually by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, estimates that there are 226,000 elementary and secondary school principals in the United States. It reports that about 12% or over 27,000 principals will be needed to either replace retiring administrators or to staff new schools. The

National Association of Secondary School Principals (2002) confirms this information by reporting that 40% of all current principals will retire by 2012.

Research suggests (Brown, 2005; Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001) that the principal shortage is due to a lack of interest in applying for and accepting a position in school administration and not to a lack of qualified applicants. Instead, research indicates that there are more than enough licensed people to fill the vacancies. Studies indicate that potential applicants cite several reasons for their lack of interest in applying for principal positions. The reasons include, too little pay, too many pressures, too many responsibilities, too little time to affect significant change, and too little authority to truly make a difference (Bass, 2006; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; McCreight, 2001). Since researchers believe that there are adequate numbers of licensed potential principals to fill future vacancies, they have postulated that the shortage is a consequence of changes in the role of the principal and the scope of the job responsibilities.

The Role of the Assistant Principal as a Training Ground

Most principals come up through the ranks of education. They are teachers, assistant principals and finally the principal. Studies (Batenhurst, 2002; Chan, Webb, & Bowan, 2003; Marshall & Holley, 2006; Royal, 2003; Schneider & Townley, 1994) have consistently shown, however, that the role of the assistant principal is markedly different from that of a school principal and often provides little training for the principalship. In fact, the findings indicate that long-term assistant principals actually lose their leadership skills through under-utilization.

In a study of assistant principals and principals, Royal (2003) found that assistant principals lacked experience in budget and finance, student scheduling, and building maintenance. The majority of their time was devoted to handling discipline. In their study, Marshall and Holley (2006) state that the role of the assistant principal is not well-defined and that the position varies from school to school, year to year, and principal to principal. Often the assistant principal is the mop-up person for the principal, performing jobs that the principal does not have time to do or prefers not to do. They suggest that being an assistant principal might actually undermine the educator's ability for instructional leadership since they are no longer in the classroom and separated from curricular areas. In a review of the literature, Batenhurst (2002) indicates that the on-the-job skills learned by assistant principals have little to do with instructional leadership. In a survey of assistant principals, Chan, Webb, and Bowan (2003) found they spent the majority of their time handling student discipline, supervising the cafeteria, meeting with parents, providing a safe environment, and observing teachers for evaluation purposes. In a study of assistant principals, Garduno, (2009) found that they believed their course for licensure provided minimal preparation to be successful. They indicated the need for day-to-day, on-the job experiences with a method for reflecting with another person on their decisions, interactions, and direction on how to improve their skills. They listed school safety and discipline, goal setting and attainment, school climate, and professional actions as the areas in which they needed the most professional development.

It is clear that the on-the-job training as an assistant principal does not always prepare an individual for the principalship. Marshall and Holley (2006) state that the assistant principal is often the most visible administrator in the building, serving on the front line addressing the daily problems and confrontations while they have the least developed coping skills for handling the problems.

My study listens to the voice of a new principal as they transition to the principalship and how the skills acquired as an assistant principal aid the principal in the transition.

Principal Pre-Service Programs

The life of a school administrator involves responding to a continual stream of problems and issues “while concurrently creating school cultures and communities that optimize opportunities for learning” (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2004, p. 172). The daily problems encountered by a principal are messy, often rapid fire, and complex. Solutions require a range of skills such as sensitivity, ethical thinking, and good judgment (Muth, Bellamy, Fulmer, & Murphy, 2003).

Creighton (2004) refers to school leadership as leading both above and below the surface. Above the surface are issues and challenges that are visible and tangible such as building maintenance, student discipline, and resources. Below the surface, the challenges are less tangible. Questions regarding staff moral, building capacity, and the perceptions of the school community do not come with easy answers and are more subjective. It is because of the below the surface challenges that pre-service programs for school leaders are under continual scrutiny (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

In 1987, the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (NCEEAA), sponsored by the University Council in Educational Administration (UCEA), issued a report criticizing school leadership preparation programs (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). The report stated that principal preparation programs are not adequately preparing aspiring principals for the complexity of the job. More recently, Levine (2005) found “the majority of [educational administration] programs range from inadequate to appalling (p. 23). In a 2004 study, Young and Kochan found that 96% of principals surveyed found that on-the-job experience was more helpful than university preparation and 67% indicated that university preparation programs are out of touch with reality (p. 93). While being critical of school leadership, most researchers stress that the school principal is the person to bring schools out of the decline and contribute to excellence (Björk & Ginsberg, 1995).

Several recent studies indicate that pre-service programs are becoming more responsive to the needs of new principals. Militello, Gajda, and Bowers (2009) indicate that new principals report taking more courses that include using data and accountability standards. Alsby and Hackman (2006) and Pounder and Crow (2005) report that the newer models of preparation include mentoring experiences, succession planning, and a proliferation of alternative certification programs.

However, changing pre-service programs is a slow process. Studies conducted suggest that pre-service programs should include information about dealing with stress, time management, and handling accountability pressures as part of their core curriculum (Jackson & Kelly, 2002). Other studies report that principal preparation programs should focus on

social justice, moral-ethical issues, democratic administration, and school improvement (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Murphy, 2002a). Additionally, the core curriculum should be combined with realistic internships, case studies, real-life simulations, problem-based learning, a cohort structure, collaborative partnerships between universities and school districts, and multiple field experiences (Bass, 2006; Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Murphy, 2002a). Studies (Hess & Kelly, 2005; 2007) indicate that pre-service programs need to add topics such as research, accountability, and staff terminations. Another study, conducted by Royal (2007) on four university programs in Georgia, confirms that experiential learning through internships is most effective when linked to prior learning. With this array of suggestions, a variety of state governmental requirements, and specific university requirements, it is understandable that university pre-service programs can vary in scope and sequence.

Current preparation programs make assumptions about the work of principals. Traditional approaches include course work in leadership, resource management, supervision, educational theory, and politics. Yet, new principals have continued to affirm that experiential learning is the most critical learning method (Rishi & Muskal, 2005). Murphy (2002b) uses the metaphor of a “bridge to nowhere” (p. 181) when discussing the separateness of university preparation and the actual practice of school administration. He claims they are separate and no one is truly interested in building this bridge.

More recently, researchers (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005) report four key findings relating to pre-service and principal preparation. The first is the

essential elements of good leadership. They indicate that successful school leaders influence student achievement through the support and development of effective teachers and the implementation of effective organizational processes. However, they found that even with the growing body of evidence, additional research is necessary in the areas of curriculum, assessment, and adaptation to local contexts.

The second finding is effective program design and that certain program features are essential in the development of effective school leaders. Pre-service programs should be research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, and be structured to enable collaborative activity between the program and area schools. They also state that despite existing consensus, empirical evidence for the impact of these features is currently minimal.

The third finding is that multiple pathways to high quality leadership development currently exist and innovations in both leadership development programs and program structures have proliferated. However, differentiating these programs requires in-depth research into the implementation and coherence of program features.

The fourth finding is aligning effective policy reform with knowledge of program components and the systems that support their implementation and sustainability. Additional research is needed to examine how various programs are implemented, governed, and financed.

The combination of these four important factors—the increasing complexity of the role of the principal, the reluctance of qualified applicants to move into administrative

positions, the influence of school culture, and the variety of pre-service programs—presents an alarming picture of school administration. With the complexity of the principalship and the high expectations for success, how do new principals survive and thrive their first year? It indicates that principals, both as applicants and as novice principals, need a program of support and guidance. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) states that the “making and education of a principal extends beyond completion of a preparation program but should also include support during the novice years” (p. 10). To address this need, many states and local districts have established a variety of induction programs available for first-year principals. The following section of the literature review focuses on induction, socialization, cognitive problem solving, mentoring, and coaching as induction strategies for first year principals.

Methods of Induction

There are a variety of induction techniques to assist a beginning principal including official and unofficial mentoring, networking, workshops, shadowing, visiting other schools, internships, coaching, and district orientation programs. “Principal induction is the process by which new school principals make the transition from theoretical leadership to operational leadership” (Andrews, 1989, p. 3). Villani (2006) defines induction as, “A multidimensional process that orients new principals to a school and school system while strengthening their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be an educational leader” (p. 19). Induction programs vary by school district size and resources available (Anderson, 1989; Andrews, 1989; Daresh, 2001b; Daresh, 2004; Daresh & Playko, 1994; Ellsberry & Bishop, 1993). However, the need for induction programs for beginning principals does not vary. Isolation from peers,

lack of feedback, and interpersonal support are the most difficult problems facing a novice principal (Crow, 2002; Rooney, 2008).

To study the effectiveness and implementation of induction programs, Ellsberry and Bishop (1993) conducted a study of induction practices in three southeastern states. The respondents were asked to rank ten areas of responsibility in order of need for an induction program. The top five were: goal setting and planning, curriculum and instruction, policy understanding implementation, time management, and conflict management. While in-service workshops, professional association meetings, and shadowing were the most frequently used induction practices, the respondents ranked them the least effective.

It is important to create and offer induction programs that meet the needs of first year principals. Beginning with the first day on the job, the school community expects the beginning principal to have absolute knowledge and expertise about the school. They expect the beginning principal to have a clear understanding of their role, know how to empower their staff, and to distribute the leadership they just received. The school community expects a novice principal to design and implement a process or processes for student achievement. In addition, the responsibility for all school rules and for solving all problems as soon as they arise is the responsibility of the beginning principal the day they walk in the door (Walker & Qian, 2006).

Understanding these expectations and the impact that effective leadership has on a school and on student achievement underlines the importance of induction programs for novice principals. By understanding the problems faced by beginning principals and by

listening to their voice, my study offers additional ideas in constructing methods of support for new principals (Walker & Qian, 2006).

Socialization

Daresh (2001a) and Daresh and Playko (1994) indicate the most critical skills needed by principals are socialization skills. Socialization is the learning of new social roles through the acquisition of skills and behaviors that are needed to survive and ultimately thrive in a new situation. Principals have different socialization experiences depending on their life experiences, backgrounds, mental models, and school systems (Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006). Previously the socialization process was considered static, with a definite beginning and end. More recently, it has been considered transformational, a “constant evolving phenomenon” (Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 18), a learning of oneself, others, and the organization. As others continuously influence the new principal’s environment, their perceptions and reactions to their environment changes. The work of a principal has become less predictable, less structured, and more conflict-laden.

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) model of socialization holds that individuals create a future based on past successful experiences. “It is generative theory—not a mapping of yesterday’s world, but anticipatory articulations of tomorrow’s possibilities” (Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2008, p. 23). Using AI, new principals articulate their successes to each other and learn to frame themselves as successful through these conversations. AI suggests that new principals learn and grow in their role as administrators when they can reflect on their success stories. It creates, in their minds, a positive image of what constitutes success.

Crowe (2006) outlines three types of socialization experienced by novice principals. The first is anticipatory socialization. This consists of the knowledge that novice principals bring to the job from their own experiences as a teacher, counselor, or assistant principal. This experience leads to anticipatory role conceptions. First year principals who have school experience as a teacher, counselor, or assistant principal report that they have an easier time socializing into a new school (Aiken, 2002; Darseh, 2004; Norton, 1994). On the other hand, principals report problems with role clarification and socializing into the fabric of the school when they have limited technical expertise or bring limited background knowledge to the position (Crow & Glascock, 1995).

The second type of socialization is professional socialization or university training in educational administration. While this training is essential, Brown-Ferrigno (2003) suggests combining classroom instruction and authentic field experiences. Authentic internships provide each student the opportunity to apply newly acquired knowledge to professional practice. Additionally, trained mentors should supervise these field experiences and include an assessment or performance evaluation (Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neil, 2005).

The third type of socialization is organizational socialization. This happens when a novice principal begins the job and learns how things are done at the school. The socializing agents are students, parents, teachers, other principals, professors, and members of the business community.

Often, there is a lack of mediated entry for new principals. Stakeholders expect novice principals to “hit the halls running” (Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neil, 2007, p. 9) which

can lead to stress and burnout. Norton (1994) indicates the reason for these difficulties is many of the induction techniques used by school systems are not adequate. Supporting this idea, Aiken (2002) conducted a study of 12 new principals to understand the socialization process. Her findings demonstrate that the school culture plays an important role in whether a principal is able to socialize into the school community. She states that principals must understand the culture of the school before socialization can successfully occur and that principals were more easily socialized when there was a match between the values of the new principal and the values of the school community. The principals report difficulty in developing their own voice and articulating their own vision when the school community exerts pressure to maintain the status quo.

Blunenreich (2005) postulates that socialization is individualistic, situational, non-linear, and strongly influenced by an individual's values, beliefs, and norms of behavior. Today, in our complex society with changing school demographics and an increased focus on student achievement through high stakes testing, it is imperative to understand the mental constructs of successful principals in order to help novice principals socialize into the cultural communities of their schools (Crow & Glascock, 1995). "The key to supporting new principals does not begin or end with the formal preparation programs. If we intend to support and sustain new principals for our schools, then we must become more deliberate in helping leaders acquire the maps that will help them facilitate their own transformation into the very systems and structures they are expected to change" (Aiken, 2002, p. 39).

My study documents the challenges faced by a first year principal as they are socialized into a new school culture and a new school community.

Cognitive Problem Solving

School administrators confront a variety of problems and challenges each day. Discovering how school administrators solve problems within their schools can guide understanding of effective leadership and how beginning principals acquire expertise. Several studies that investigate the cognitive processes used by novice and expert principals will be examined to understand how school principals become effective leaders (Cuban, 1993; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1993).

Practice, reflection, and context are the ingredients of Kerchner's (1993) argument about defining and executing educational strategy. He maintains that school principals must be trained to recognize the strategic importance of their everyday activities. It is the small and ordinary decisions that principals make multiple times each day that should add up to the big picture vision for the school. He states, "Finding the strategic potential in ordinary actions provides the opportunity to interconnect daily life and enactment of a vision or direction; problem-finding is as important as problem solving" (p. 17). He claims that both beginning and veteran school administrators need to see the interconnectedness of the smallest activity and the large vision and mandate for the school.

How school a principal views their school, develops their vision of school success, and implements their courses of action is dependent on their leadership frames or how leaders make meaning out of their experiences. Bolman and Deal (1993) assert that people

classify situations, other people, and situations based on their previous life experiences. They refer to these frames, maps, or lenses through which people put experiences into a context as cognitive schemata. Bolman and Deal (1993) believe that a novice principal might ignore important facets of a situation or issue because cognitive schemata develops through experiences. In investigating types of knowledge used during decision-making, Ohde and Murphy (1993) term the various schemata or maps as procedural knowledge and practice knowledge. They claim that new principals begin with procedural knowledge or limited schemata or maps. However, to be an effective leader, a school administrator must also create new and innovative maps through the acquisition of knowledge through practice.

Bolman and Deal (1993) suggest that novice principals can avoid framing situations incorrectly through group and individual reflection. Group reflection allows principals to give each other feedback, define problems of practice, and generate new strategies, or maps, for dealing with challenges. Individual reflection allows a “decision-maker to become a more sophisticated thinker by externalizing and studying a previously implicit map” (p. 27). They suggest that reframing or remapping gives both veteran and new principals additional tools to deal with complex challenges.

Ohde and Murphy (1993) believe that the path from a beginner to an expert school administrator is a journey. It begins with content knowledge and through experiences, reflection, feedback, and application a school administrator can develop additional maps or frames to increase their expertise. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) developed a model of this continuum that includes five stages: novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficiency,

and expertise. In addition, Ohde and Murphy (1993) suggest, “The connection between content and strategic knowledge is context-dependent. Studies of educational administrators must take place in the environment in which the interaction occurs—the school. When studies of administrative expertise operate within the context of the school milieu, important social-contextual variables such as motivation and values can be identified, evaluated and understood” (p. 85).

Wagner (1993) echoes the findings of Ohde and Murphy (1993). He claims in order to be an effective problem-solver, a school administrator needs both content and context knowledge. He claims that effective school administration cannot be reduced to what works or a set of guiding principles. School administration is not a science but an art in which each administrator or artist develops their own style on the journey to expertise.

Leithwood and Steinbach (1993) indicate novice principals rely on their own maps or schemata but as they move toward expertise their problem-solving skills become more collaborative. They posit that relying on one’s own working memory places severe limitations on decision-making. Instead, collaborative problem solving leads to better solutions, an increased commitment to the solution by the school community members, and long-term growth of the participants. Collaborative decision-makers share the qualities of setting goals or a vision of success, being self-reflective, and possessing the skills and knowledge to handle, calmly and rationally, the unexpected.

Allison and Allison (1993) agree that experience is an indispensable condition for developing expertise though tenure as a principal does not guarantee expertise. “Experience

can only contribute to expertise if practitioners are capable of learning from it” (p. 131).

Their findings indicate that experience alone does not create expertise. Instead, the beginning principal must possess that capacity for abstract thinking and information processing to convert experiences into expertise. Yekovich (1993) states that formal training (pre-service) leads to the development of declarative knowledge, however, practice and experience allows this knowledge to translate to thinking and reasoning. Hart (1993) echoes this belief by claiming that reflection turns experience into learning.

Bransford (1993) made the distinction between specific knowledge versus general expertise. He claims that real learning is not the transmission of inert knowledge but instead the active engagement in problem solving. Prestine (1993) calls this problem solving in context “situated” (p. 192) or anchored learning. She claims that people who activate knowledge through contextual situations are more creative and flexible.

In this section, I examined a body of literature that claims principals (and all people) view life through a series of frames that develop through a person’s own life experiences. New principals approach their new position with their own personal frames. Through experience, reflection, and collaboration they have the potential to widen their lenses and develop expertise. My study will look at how the mental models of a first year principal and how they align or conflict with the existing culture of the school community.

Mentoring

In 1992, Cohn and Sweeny studied principal mentoring programs in southern California. Out of 40 schools surveyed, only eight had any type of mentor program. Their

findings indicate that the programs were informal with varying degrees of district support and a wide variety of mentor-mentee activities. While the district provided no formalized mentor training, they selected mentors based on their exceptional performance, understanding of human dynamics, knowledge of curriculum, the community, and district policies and practices. However, the most important aspect of the mentor-mentee relationship was a willingness to reflect together. “A new principal needs to have support to be able to talk things out, and have a ‘sounding board’ where he or she can explore alternatives without fear of repercussions” (Ellsberry & Bishop, 1993, p. 23).

“Administrators must be coached and supported in the same way an effective system supports teacher learning” (Barry & Kaneko, 2002, p. 29). Villani (2006) claims, “Mentoring is support from a more experienced colleague who is trained to promote new principals’ heightened job performance and self-reflection” (p. 19). The goals of a mentor program are to provide support for new principals using the knowledge and experience of the veteran principal (mentor) in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Mentors are not evaluative, but help build administrative capacity by empowering the new principal through authentic conversations and self-reflection (Hansford & Erlich, 2006; Malone, 2002). However, mentoring must be more than a sympathetic ear. It is real guidance from a trained professional for a significant length of time (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, L., & Haycock, 2007).

Related to the cognitive problem solving (Allison & Allison, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 1993; Bransford, 1993; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1993; Ohde & Murphy, 1993; Prestine,

1993; Yekovich, 1993), Villani (2006) states there are two types of mentor relationships. The first relates to technical knowledge. The mentor provides technical information when the new principal simply needs to know the how-to of an activity. The other type of mentoring uses reflective questioning. It involves helping a new principal arrive at a solution or an idea through a series of self-reflective questions. The mentor might ask what the new principal sees as a goal or an outcome and then has them reflect on possible avenues to arrive at the desired outcome. “Asking good questions and promoting another’s thinking is actually a lot harder than sharing lessons learned and war stories (Villani, 2006, p. 23). The goals of cognitive mentoring practices are to promote independence through collaboration and collegiality.

The DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, L., & Haycock (2007) conducted a study to define the critical elements necessary for effective mentor-mentee programs. The first critical element is a formalized program with established criteria for choosing mentors. Mentors should be principals with excellent interpersonal, communication, and curriculum skills. Second, mentors should be enthusiastic about working with beginning principals and be willing to attend a formal training program to guarantee a quality experience for both the mentor and mentee. In addition, there should be a meaningful evaluation of the mentors, both formative and summative. Third, mentors should be assigned to mentees of similar race, ethnicity, gender, cultural background, and school context (Robinson, Eddy, & Irving, 2006). Cohn and Sweeney (1992) called this, “having the same voice” (p. 12). Fourth, formally trained mentors should

receive compensation for their services by either money or additional time such as vacation days, professional days, or extra time to attend conferences. Finally, the mentor-mentee experience should be a growth experience for all (Barry & Kaneko, 2002; Cohn & Sweeney, 1992; Daresh, 2004; Daresh & Playko, 1994; Malone, 2001; Rowley, 1999; Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neil, 2007; Villani, 2006).

Mentor programs exist in 35 states and 32 states have laws and policies that require support programs designed to assist first year school administrators (Daresh, 2004). Table 3 highlights examples of some components of state mentor programs. In most of the states, mentors are veteran principals or recently retired principals who receive compensation for their services. The programs vary in mentor support. Some states provide on-going mentor support and training and others do not. None of the programs mentioned have collected data to investigate the effectiveness of the mentor program. Only Ohio surveys the mentors annually for their feedback regarding program effectiveness (Villani, 2006).

Table 3

Examples of State Mentor Program Components

<u>State</u>	<u>State Mandated and/or State Funded</u>	<u>Mentors Trained</u>	<u>Mentors Paid</u>	<u>Program Duration</u>
Arkansas	State mandated and funded \$1,200 per new principal	Trained but no ongoing support	\$400/ year	One-three years
Indiana	State mandated and funded	Training and on-going support	\$600/year	One-two years

Table 3 Continued

Mississippi	Not mandated and sporadically state funded	Training and on-going support	Varies	One year
Ohio	State mandated and funded	Training and on-going support	\$750 for 2 years	Two years
Tennessee	Mandated but not funded	Training and on-going support	None	Two years

From *Mentoring and Induction Programs that Support New Principals* by S. Villani, 2006, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Several professional organizations have developed mentoring programs that are available to states and local districts. Mentors in these programs are veteran or recently retired principals. Program evaluation ranges from anecdotal information to formalized evaluation mandated by state law. Mentors and mentees are not matched by any set criteria, but are assigned to each other usually through the local districts. Table 4 describes examples of professional organization programs. In addition to the professional associations listed in Table 4, several states have agreements to conduct programs with local universities. The collective goals of the programs are to support new principals, to assist new leaders in fulfilling their roles as instructional leaders, and to deepen the knowledge and skill base of veteran-mentor principals (Villani, 2006). Table 5 describes components of a variety of these programs.

Table 4

Examples of Professional Association Models

<u>Organization Program</u>	<u>Mentor Training and Support</u>	<u>Cost of the Program</u>	<u>Program Duration</u>	<u>Higher Education Affiliation</u>
National Association of Elementary School Principals Principals Advisory Leadership Service (PALS)	Training and on-going support	\$750	One Year	Nova Southeastern University
Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association The Consulting Mentor Program	Training and on-going support	\$1,000	One Year	None
New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association New Jersey Leaders to Leaders	Training and on-going support	\$1,800/year 1 \$1,300/year 2 \$800/year 3	One-three years	None
Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association First Time Texas Campus Administrator Program	Training and on-going support	Varies by region and district	Two years	None
National Association of Secondary School Principals Selecting and Developing the 21 st Century Principal	Training and on-going support	Varies by the number of mentors trained	Flexible depending on needs of individual	Varies
Association of Washington School Principals Assessing and Developing the 21 st Century Principal	Training and on-going support as needed	\$650,000	One year	None

From *Mentoring and Induction Programs that Support New Principals* by S. Villiani, 2006, Thousand Oaks,

CA: Corwin Press.

Table 5

Examples of Collaborative Mentoring Models

<u>Organization, Program and Location</u>	<u>Mandated for Licensure</u>	<u>Mentor Training and Support</u>	<u>Cost of the Program</u>	<u>Program Duration</u>	<u>University Affiliation</u>
Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA) Induction and Support Program San Diego, CA	Yes	Training and on-going support	\$702,500	Two years	University of San Diego
Independence (Missouri) Comprehensive Leadership Program*	Yes	Training and on-going support	\$45,000	Three years	University of Missouri
The New York City Leadership Academy's Principal Mentoring Program in Collaboration with New Visions for Public Schools	Not for licensure but participation is mandated	Training and on-going support	\$1.7 million (130 first year principals and 46 second year principals)	One-two years	None
Principals' Leadership Academy of Nashville (TN)	Yes	No training but on-going support	\$176,500	One year	Vanderbilt University

*Administrators may earn a doctorate through the program

From *Mentoring and Induction Programs that Support New Principals* by S. Villiani, 2006, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

This section explains the variety of mentor programs that are available to first year principals. From the discussion it is easy to see that there is not one method or program of support that is consistently effective in supporting new principals as they navigate through

their first year on the job. My study will document the support given to a first year principal. The following section is a description of the Kentucky Model of Principal Certification and Support. It brings to light the difficulty of offering the right combination of support and pre-service instruction to new principals.

These tables (Tables 4 & 5) highlight the variety of mentor programs available to first-year principal. This information also calls attention to the lack of consistency of programs and their components.

The Kentucky Model of Principal Certification and Support

In 1998, Kentucky launched one of the most comprehensive principal preparation programs in the United States through the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). The legislation restructured PreK-12 education including finance, curriculum, school governance, and accountability standards. Additionally, KERA brought significant changes to the role and preparation of the school principal (Browne-Ferrigno & Fusarelli, 2005).

Before the passage of the KERA legislation, Kentucky had a rigorous program for new principal credentialing. The requirements included three years teaching experience, a master's degree in an education-related field, and an intensive curriculum that included modern administrative theories and practices, techniques in instructional supervision, the use of technological tools, and instruction relating to the role of the principal (Browne-Ferrigno & Fusarelli, 2005).

The KERA legislation established an independent board to regulate and credential teachers and principals. The legislature also adopted, without modification, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders (ISLLC). The newly appointed board used the ISLLC standards to require programmatic changes in pre-service education, school administration certification requirements, state mandated first-year induction programs, and school principal assessment. While Kentucky aggressively restructured the principal preparation and induction process, there is little research available to determine the effectiveness of the programmatic and licensure changes (Browne-Ferrigno & Fusarelli, 2005).

In April 2005, Kentucky began a renewed study of the status of principal preparation programs. This study, funded by the Wallace Foundation (2007), resulted in a series of recommendations, *Learning Centered Leadership* (2007), for redesigning principal preparation in Kentucky. The recommendations for pre-service programs include establishing dynamic relationships between school districts and local universities, adoption of highly selective admission standards, and the redesign of curriculum to support raising student achievement and inclusion of school-based learning experiences. The recommendations for induction programs included high quality mentoring and collegial support for new principals. The recommendations for professional development included improving standards for approval and accountability to renew administrative certificates, the development of an electronic tracking system, the establishment of an interdisciplinary Professional Development Academy, and the requirement that all new principals pass both state and

national tests for administrative licensure. Clearly, the state of Kentucky has done some significant work on principal pre-service, induction, and licensure, yet continues to struggle with the right combination of support and instruction (Browne-Ferrigno & Fusarelli, 2005).

Additional Mentor Program Information

Aligned with the questions of consistency of mentor program delivery, there have been several studies that highlight this dilemma. Hansford and Erich (2006) conducted a survey of 40 research-based studies on mentoring conducted from 1987 to 2004. Their results indicate that 31 of the 40 studies mentioned at least one positive outcome from the mentor relationship, most notably personal growth. The negatives cited were the lack of time and mismatches between the mentor and the mentee (Palermo, 2004). While none of the studies indicate that the schools received specific benefits as a result of the mentor relationships, the authors postulate increased teacher retention, management continuity, increased productivity, and improved communication. However, they found no evidence that mentored principals perform their jobs better than non-mentored principals do.

In 2007, DeVita, M. C., Colvin, R. L., Darling-Hammond, L., Haycock, L studied the New York City Leadership Academy and Jefferson County Kentucky Public Schools. They chose these two mentor programs because they both have put effort, time, and resources into developing strong mentor programs. The findings of DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, L., & Haycock (2007) indicate that both programs fall short of their potential. They have vague or unclear goals with an insufficient focus on instructional leadership. Training for mentors is weak or non-existent and mentors and mentees report difficulty in finding sufficient time to

sustain the relationship. They found a lack of meaningful data to assess benefits and build a credible case for continued support of mentor programs.

The DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, L., & Haycock (2007) reports that more information about mentoring programs is needed to determine their efficacy and how they contribute to behaviors and dispositions that are needed to change the culture of schools toward improving teaching and learning. They outline several recommendations for all mentor programs: First, all mentor programs should provide mentor support for novice principals for at least one year and preferably two. Second, all mentor programs should be adequately funded. Third, each program should have clearly outlined goals to help novice principals “become leaders with knowledge, skills, and courage to become leaders of change who put learning first in their schools” (p. 4).

In 2007, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) released a report which states, “The present mentoring situation is far from satisfactory. [The practice of allowing first-year principals to] sink or swim is indefensible in the era of increased school accountability” (p. 16). Their findings indicate, “School districts have not claimed ownership of the mentor selection process—and are not capitalizing on mentoring as a means of securing a reliable supply of well-prepared new principals” (p. 16).

Coaching

Coaching is gaining popularity as a method of inducting and developing new principals. Coaching is a reciprocal learning relationship between two people, often a new and veteran principal, though as a continuing professional development technique, this is not

necessary. Coaching focuses on developing leadership skills in context. The method relies on the principles of life-long learning, capacity building, and continual improvement. It is collegial and collaborative in its approach. Coaching allows a principal to critically reflect on practice and offers support and challenge. Coaching exists within experiential practice and allows for affirmation and validation of practice (Robertson, 2008).

There is value to shared learning. The learning within coaching model often goes in both directions. The coach learns and reflects on their own practice as they work with their coachee. Often imbedded within the coaching framework is action research. The principal attempts new strategies, gathers results, and reflects on effectiveness with their coach. It allows for the development of an organizational culture that is collaborative, reflective, and creates authentic learning opportunities for all participants (Robertson, 2008).

The coaching relationship builds on trust, confidentiality, respect, and on a commitment to professional development and regularity of contact. Skills needed by the coach include active listening, effective questioning, time for reflection, and knowledge of the educational context. Most important, coaching is a relationship and focusing on the process of developing and sustaining that relationship must be paramount in the coaching process. Coaching creates opportunities for shared dialog about common issues. Using the coaching model of professional school administrator development builds capacity within the entire organization. Leadership is an isolating role and the coaching model brings professional support and can build greater feelings of self-confidence and self-efficacy (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2003; Robertson, 2008).

One well-known coaching program is the Coaching Leaders for Student Success (CLASS) program, which is a collaborative effort between the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz and the Association of California School Administrators. This program, though unfunded by the state, is required for licensure. It provides the new principals with just-in-time support. The new principal is required to provide evidence they have met the state standards by compiling a portfolio of artifacts and documenting a variety of activities. The coaches are retired administrators who attend training and support sessions to improve their skills. After one year of successful coaching, coaches can also apply for full certification as a certified leadership coach (Bloom, Duff, Danilovich, & Fogel, 2005).

The coaching model is a newer version of the mentor model. The difference is that it recognizes that both the coach and the coachee are learners—that is, they both improve their practice through reflection and inquiry. While there is limited research to confirm the effectiveness of the coaching model, it has potential for assisting a new principal to learn throughout their first year.

The Wayside School District Coaching Initiative

In 2009, the Wayside School District developed a blended coaching model for new administrators who were not new to the district. The coaches, who are current principals, attend two-day training before meeting with their coachee. Using an inquiry-based model, the coach is expected to spend two hours during the first two months working with their coachee. The following months, they are expected to spend at least one hour each month working with

their coachee. This can be face-to-face, phone, or email contact. The coaches are recommended by their superiors for the position. It is unpaid, and the coach and the coachee sign an agreement to meet and work together. New principals who are also new to the district do not receive a coach, but instead attend quarterly meetings to receive information from district personnel in the areas of auxiliary services, administration, communications, technical services, and curriculum and instruction (WCPSS, 2009).

Summary

Training and retaining effective school principals is becoming increasingly critical. Record student enrollment, an anticipated retirement of 40% of the current principals, and a shrinking pool of applicants willing to become a school principal necessitates the support structure for novice principals be effective and sustaining (Bloom & Kravetz 2001; Daresh 2001a; Daresh & Playko 1994; Malone, 2001, Malone 2002; Smylie, Bennett, Konkol, & Fendt, 2005). However, Smylie et al. (2005) report, “Our general conclusion is that existing research tells us little about these things and that we have the problem of school leadership development with remarkably weak evidence to guide us” (p. 154).

Ellsberry and Bishop (1993) agree with this assessment and report that little educational research exists regarding the entry-level needs of beginning principals. They found that generally, induction strategies are poorly planned or non-existent. Firestone and Riehl (2005) concur, “Research on school leadership has led to few conclusions and it has not yet reached broadly or deeply enough to account sufficiently for the extensive variations

that leaders face in the contexts they serve, the people and organizations they lead, the actions they take and the outcomes they pursue” (p. 6).

While there is a significant body of literature that describes induction programs and processes, there is little evidence to indicate effectiveness. Through observation, interviews, and document analysis I immersed myself in the life and workings of a first year principal to document their experiences. By hearing the voice of a beginning principal, we can begin to understand the experiences of beginning principals and to discuss the best methods of support. The next chapter is a description of my research methodology. Following the methodology used by Harry F. Wolcott in *The Man in the Principal's Office* (1973), through observation, interviews, and document analysis, I documented the voice and needs of a beginning principal.

The role of the principal is such an important one in terms of its impact on school that it merits careful and continuous analysis.

John Daresh (1987)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The role of the school principal is considered critical for school and student success. However, the definition of an effective school principal is elusive and changing (Andrews, 1989). Recent studies of various principal induction programs (Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neil, 2007; DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, L., & Haycock, 2007) report spotty success and call for additional study of principal induction programs. Surveys of pre-service programs yield a variety of curriculum and experiences (Anderson, 1989; Crow, 2006; SREB, 2005). The number of qualified applicants to fill vacant principal positions is shrinking (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001). Finally, an inviting school culture is a critical component for developing and sustaining a learning community, but it is hard to quantify and harder to change (Barth, 2001; Deal & Peterson, 1999).

I believe to effectively support and nurture first year principals, it is important to listen to their voices and to observe their experiences. To do this, I used an ethnographic methodology to explore the experiences of a first-year principal. Using observations, interviews, field notes, audio recordings, document analysis, and evolving design, I produced a rich description of the professional life of a first-year principal.

Appropriateness of the Qualitative Approach

Creswell (2007) defines qualitative research as an “inquiry into the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). Qualitative researchers position themselves as interpreters of social worlds rather than recorders of verifiable data (Talbert, 2004).

Qualitative researchers conduct their study in a natural setting. Woods (1996) refers to this as being “contextualized within the situation” (p. 51). The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and gathers data by spending time on location. When either video or audio recordings are used, the tapes are reviewed in their entirety and supplemented by information gathered by the researcher from their field work (Creswell, 2007; Hammersley, 1992; Wolcott, 2008). “First-hand experience through observation is both the starting point and the filter through which everything else is screened as we make sense of all that we have observed” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 53). Their research tends to evolve as data is gathered and new avenues of inquiry are presented.

Qualitative research is descriptive and holistic. The researcher collects data in words and pictures and uses rich, thick description to present a complete picture of a complex problem or situation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007). Wolcott (2008) states, “It is a responsible use of ethnography simply to attach myself to some group to study some phenomenon in which I am deeply interested, with the intent of trying better to understand how it works, without having to tamper with it or isolate some tiny facet amenable to statistical treatments or laboratory study” (p. 67).

Qualitative research is interpretive, descriptive, and evolving. The findings generated are rich, thick, descriptive interpretations of events and situations through the eyes and mind of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Seidman (1998) refers to this as listening to participants tell their stories. Telling stories is a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select the details of their experiences that have significance. “It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes story telling a meaning-making experience. Every word [used by people when they tell their] stories is a microcosm of their consciousness” (p. 1).

Finally, qualitative research uses emergent design (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative study emerges and evolves from field notes. The researcher looks through their notes to identify common threads or themes and weaves them together to tell a story. The researcher may conduct more observations or interviews based on the initial findings. The researcher is not bound to a preconceived theory, but instead allows the themes and the stories to emerge and evolve from the data (Emerson Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Talburt, 2004; Wolcott, 2001).

General Introduction to the Methods

Ethnography is originally from the anthropological field of research. Ethnographers developed and carried out research studies in remote places around the world. The place was the most important facet of ethnography. “Where became a much more important question, actually than what we would do (one could always think of something, so much was unstudied) when we got there” (Geertz, 1995, p. 102). Over time, this emphasis on place has diminished and today it is more important to decide what to study rather than where to study.

As place has been de-emphasized, so has the idea of studying others who are dissimilar in some way from the researcher. Instead, today, the notion of culture, culture interpretation, and how people make meaning within the context of culture are the main tenets of ethnography (Wolcott, 2008).

Ethnography has appeal as a methodology because it involves real people in real situations. It does not offer neat answers to questions, but instead is a response to what has been discovered through the study. Lyotard (1977, as cited in Talburt, 2004) explained, “Response is not to answer, but to address and carry forward” (p. 98).

Ethnography is a method of entering and extending a conversation (Talburt, 2004; Wolcott, 2001) using multiple sources of data—typically observation, interviews, and document analysis (Creswell, 2007). Wolcott (2008) refers to this as experiencing, inquiring, and examining. Experiencing refers to the researcher’s commitment to spend an extended time with the study participants as a passive observer to document behaviors, interactions, and daily routines. This is being “in situ” (Woods, 2006, p. 47) because all study takes place in the natural setting. Inquiring involves actively asking questions using interviews and focus groups. Interviewing is an integral complimentary activity to observation. It allows the researcher to develop detailed descriptions and integrate multiple perspectives. Interviews also help to describe processes and contribute a holistic description of the situation (Wolcott, 2008). Examining is looking at the documents and artifacts produced by the study participants. This data collection technique allows the researcher to explore additional avenues of inquiry or corroborate previously gathered information.

Wolcott pioneered the use of ethnography in education. He examined, not what a school administrator ought to be doing, but what they actually do. From the preface of his 1984 reprint, he states:

The rationale for pursuing the ethnographic approach was that almost no attention has been given in the literature on school administrators to what elementary school principals actually do....Most of the literature of educational administration readily available to the student or practitioner, however, tends to be normative in its approach—it tells principals and would-be principals what they ought to do and remains seemingly unaware of what is actually going on...What little data exist in the actual daily behavior of school administrators depend mostly on self-reporting techniques in which a principal keeps a time-distribution chart of his own behavior. Such data are influenced and therefore limited by each subject's ability to recall and to record those of his actions relevant to a behavioral study particularly in light of the complexity and multiplicity of the encounters in which an administrator engages...To a literature that has dealt with almost exclusively with the behavior of school administrators as it ought to be or as it is interpreted and reported by the person performing it, the present study [*The Man in the Principal's Office*] adds another dimension—what an administrator actually does as observed by someone else. (p.xii)

The ethnographic method of research lends itself to the study of schools and school personnel. As an educational research tool, ethnography gained prominence during the 1960's. A school is a complex organization composed of a variety of individuals with specific belief systems and influenced by legal mandates, historical mores, traditions, and customs. Additionally, education is not static—issues change, personnel change, and students with a variety of abilities move in and out of the schools. Therefore, qualitative study, ethnography in particular, was an appropriate method to understand how individuals within the school make meaning of and navigate through the school culture (Creswell, 2007; Wolcott, 2008).

Research Questions

The research questions I used to guide my study were:

1. What are the experiences of a first-year principal?
2. How does a new principal begin to reconcile external pressure such as accountability and a focus on data and expectations of the stakeholders with the current school culture?
3. How does a novice principal begin to implement their vision within an existing culture that may or may not align with this vision?

These questions created the starting point for my study. As data was gathered and analyzed, my study continued to evolve as I followed additional lines of inquiry using extended conversations with the new principal and other staff. Wolcott (2001) indicates that a key advantage of qualitative inquiry is flexibility. He claims that data gathering and analysis inform the problem statement just as the problem statement originally informed the research questions. The key is to be aware of the possibilities of change through reflection and data analysis.

Site Selection

Context

Context is a critical component of ethnographic research. The researcher conducts ethnographic research “in situ,” (Woods, 1996, p. 47) the natural setting, observing participants within the environment that they live and work. The context is important for another reason. The readers of ethnographic research need to be oriented to the setting, which

is why these studies often begin with a description of the setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 1998; Wolcott, 1990,, 2001, 2008; Woods, 1996).

Woods (1996) identifies two reasons for situating the research. First, the situation can affect perspectives and behavior, and second, perspectives affect situations. Interaction and interpretation are not static but evolve and transform depending on the participants and the context. People are continually interpreting the indications of others and constructing their behavior accordingly. “Social interaction is a moving process, with people defining, assigning meaning, aligning, and realigning their actions, seeing how they can best satisfy their interests, comparing and contrasting them with others, adjusting them if necessary, and devising strategies” (Woods, 1996, p. 45).

Location – Wayside School System

My research study focused on a first year elementary school principal in the Wayside School System (WSS). Consistent with acceptable practices of qualitative research, I used a pseudonym for the actual school system used in this study. The Wayside School System is located in the Southeastern United States and is a countywide school system. For the last several years, the WSS has experienced unprecedented growth and with this growth has come the need for more schools to accommodate the increase in student enrollment. In 2007-2008, 134,002 students attended schools in the WSS making it the largest school system in the state and the 19th largest in the nation.

To manage a school district of this size, it is divided into five administrative areas, each headed by an area superintendent. Each area superintendent is responsible for the hiring

and induction of new principals within their area. Due to the opening of new schools and retirements of current principals, 54 new principals were appointed during the 2007-2008 school year. This equates to a 35% turnover in school leadership within the district.

With this number of new principals entering schools every year, it is important to understand how to nurture and support new principals as they begin their work in school, each with a distinct and enduring school culture. My research involved documenting the experiences of a first year principal.

Data Collection

I used an ethnographic methodology to explore the experiences of a first-year principal. Using observations, interviews, field notes, audio recordings, and document analysis, I produced a rich, thick description of the professional life of a first-year principal. One of the unsung advantages of qualitative research is the use of multiple techniques (Wolcott, 2008). Therefore, my study utilized the following components.

Principal observation. The majority of my research involved observing a new principal for one year. I conducted over forty observations of the principal during this time. Each observation was no less than four hours and most time, an entire school day (see Appendix C for a list of observations and meetings). It is the witnessing and recording of “slices of life” (Woods, 1996, p. 52) through extended observations that I was able to discern the unvarnished experiences of a novice principal. While I hoped the principal would audiotape their reflections, this did not happen. Instead, we met informally after school on several occasions during which the new principal reflected on his work. Additionally, I

interviewed the new principal before I began my study and when the study was completed. The purpose of the pre-study interview was to explain the process more fully, learn about the school, and to more fully understand what he considered the challenges he was facing. The purpose of the post interview was to thank Mr. Allen for allowing me to conduct the study, to ask any lingering questions, and to reflect back to him some of my observations.

The strengths of using observations as a data collection tool are important to mention. Observations allowed me to see what the new principal was experiencing without having to rely on their reporting of the experiences. Using observations to collect data provided a degree of realism and an objective measurement of behavior not available with other methodologies. Finally, observation provided the context for the rich, thick description (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

Interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups were also components of my research. I conducted a series of interviews (focus groups) with a teacher group from within the school to specifically determine their perspectives of the novice principal and to hear their opinion of the school culture (see Appendix A for the teacher focus group protocol and interview questions). The focus groups consisted of a purposeful sample of six teachers. They had a range of years of teaching experience and a variety of years of experience at that particular school. The teachers participated in a series of two group interviews one at the beginning of the study and one towards the end of the study (Seidman, 1998; Wolcott, 2008).

I also conducted an interview with the direct superior of the new principal (see Appendix B for the area superintendent protocol and interview questions). For both the

teacher focus groups and the direct supervisor interview, I used a semi-structured interview process that allowed for probing of pertinent information and responses. I posed open-ended questions to allow for people to make meaning and to reconstruct their experiences within the topic of study (Seidman, 1998). I requested permission from these participants by explaining the nature and purpose of the interviews and focus groups and through compliance with IRB requirements. I insured anonymity through the use of pseudonyms for all participants.

The use of interviews and focus groups are an important component of an ethnography study (Wolcott, 2001, 2008). They allow for the exploration of ideas through probing and follow-up questions. They can provide in-depth information with an immediate turn-around rate. The useable information is usually high and the sessions can be audio-taped for future review. Additionally, focus groups allowed me to observe the interactions between the participants (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

Document analysis. The final method of data collection I used was document analysis. I reviewed documents such as meeting minutes and agendas at which the novice principal was either a participant or presenter (see Appendix D for a list of the documents examined). I also reviewed the principal's calendar and emails, letters, and memos produced by the principal. These documents provided a continual context for the information I gathered as an observer.

Document analysis can provide insight into what people think and do. It is unobtrusive and less susceptible to investigator effects. Document analysis makes historical data available for reference and investigation. It is also useful in exploring topics generated

through other collection methods by generating additional lines of inquiry or by corroborating data already collected. Data collection provided an opportunity for me to triangulate the data to see if the observation and interview data reflected what was written in school documents (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

Rationale for Participant Selection

First-Year Principal

For my study I chose a first year principal who had worked within this school system for eleven years, three of them as an assistant principal. The school and study subject are within the district in which I work are in close proximity to my current place of employment. This close proximity gave me the opportunity to observe the new principal more frequently. Observing a principal within the same school system provided us with a common language of expectations and procedures.

When choosing my research subject, I was only interested in a person who was assuming the principalship for the very first time. I did not consider the gender, age, or years in education of the participant. Potentially, the number of variables that I might have considered is enormous. However, since I was looking at the challenges presented and not the person's response to these challenges, I did not believe that these variables would be significant.

Teacher Focus Groups

I selected a group of teachers with a wide range of experiences, both within the school and within the profession. I sent each teacher an invitation to meet in the morning

before the school day began. The literature states that staff members expect a new principal to walk into the school and immediately be proficient at leading (Crow, 2002). My purpose for selecting both novice and veteran teachers to participate in the focus group was to hear a wide range of voices regarding their expectations of the new principal.

Timetable of Observations

First-year principal. I observed the principal several times each month throughout the study. I varied the days of the week to provide the widest range of activities and situations. These included spent in his office and a variety of meetings such as staff, leadership, district, principal and PTA plus meet the teacher night, and professional development activities. The length of each observation varied from no less than four hours to a full school day, depending on my schedule or the event I was attending. The study began at the beginning of the summer, shortly after the new principal was named and continued throughout the school year. I also observed a variety of meetings in which the principal either moderated or participated such as faculty, PTA, principal, school improvement plan, and leadership meetings.

Teacher focus groups. I conducted two teacher focus groups—one at the beginning of the study and one towards the end of the study. The purpose of the first focus group was to determine the expectations of the teachers regarding the behavior of the new principal. The purpose of the second focus group was to ask the teachers their opinion of the new principal after one year on the job. I also asked their opinion of the school climate and if they believed it was a successful school year, how they made that determination, and whether the new

principal factors into their definition of success. After both focus group sessions, I provided the teachers with a written copy of the transcript and offered clarification of any unresolved issues. They did not have any questions or clarifications except for small informal snippets of conversations that I had with the teachers during my subsequent observations. None of these small conversations were directly related to the focus sessions and did not offer clarification of their original input.

Document analysis. Throughout the study, I examined documents and artifacts produced by the new principal. This included memos, staff emails, agendas, and letters. I also examined school documents such as the school improvement plan, schedules, PTA correspondence, the staff handbook, and other school group documents.

As the researcher, I gathered all of the data and conducted all of the observations and focus groups. The data collected was used to describe the expectations of a new principal, how they interacted with the existing school culture, how they attempted to implement their vision within the context of the current school culture, and how external requirements affected their job performance.

Limitations

This study contributes to the body of literature regarding the experiences of a first year principal. By ethnographically studying a novice principal, it documents the challenges facing a first year principal. However, ethnographic studies can be limited by environment, the qualifications of the researcher, or the willingness of the participant.

My study was limited by several factors. First, while observing the participant, it was not always possible to ascertain the correct motivation for the behaviors. There was the possibility of either reactive or observer effects, that is, my presence altered the situation because the participants possibly altered their behavior because they were being observed. I was not able to observe some content of interest because of the constraints of my schedule. Additionally, my study was only as truthful and accurate as the information I received from the participants. With observations, there was a high rate of unusable material and the data collection and analysis was time-intensive. There is also a subtle but important difference between observed behavior and inferred behavior. I was careful to describe observed behavior and not add my inferences to the description. The final limitation is that ethnographic design and reporting may limit generalization to other settings (Johnson & Turner, 2003; Wolcott, 2001).

Second, my role as the observer can be viewed as subjective since I am a school principal within the same school system and participated in the induction process. While some might view this as a limitation because of familiarity, I considered this an advantage. Each school system has unique policies, procedures, and routines. As a long time employee of this system, I was able to concentrate fully on the activities of the new principal since I did not have my own learning curve such as learning the procedures, goals, and mission of another school system. Regardless, I attempted to view and report the data without prejudice and as accurately as possible. An additional limitation of the study is that the information presented is from the viewpoint of one new principal. Others may have different perspectives

or experiences depending on the background knowledge and life experiences they bring with them to a new position.

Third, the limitations of the focus groups and in-person interviews included the possibility of the use of improperly worded or leading questions or perceived moderator bias. While there is always the possibility that a few outspoken participants will dominate the conversation and discourage involvement by the other members of the group, the participants were courteous and respectful of each other during the focus group. No one dominated the conversation and everyone participated in the conversation (Johnson & Turner, 2003; Wolcott, 2001).

Fourth, while there can be several possible limitations to document analysis, I found the school documents to be readily accessible. I was added to the staff email distribution list so I received all of the school emails throughout the year. I also was given access to the school Blackboard site so I had the opportunity to review all documents on this electronic site as well. The principal provided additional information including letters to parents and staff that he wrote throughout the year (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

Finally, ethnographic research is sometimes questioned as being a valid research methodology because of its style, the concern of the observer 'going native,' and its perceived lack of theoretical grounding.

Although there are a significant number of limitations, this study is a more complete examination of a first year principal than currently exists in the research literature.

Delimitations

It is equally important to state what this study did not accomplish (Wolcott, 2001). First, I did not develop a theory or program regarding principal induction. Second, I did not conduct the study to judge the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a specific principal. Third, I did not offer suggestions, mentor, or provide support for the new principal. And finally, I was not at the school to ascertain whether or not the school culture is inviting or it is not inviting.

Throughout the study, I remembered that I was only an observer. Every first-year principal has questions, wavers when making decisions, and second guesses their actions. As the observer, I remained passive and did not offer encouragement or advice. I was committed to not intervene unless the principal blatantly violated the law or endangered the safety of the students or staff. In *The Man in the Principal's Office* (1973), Wolcott writes about this exact problem. Wolcott wrote that Ed Bell, the principal he observed, often looked at Wolcott during the observations for an approving nod or openly asked Wolcott's opinion about a particular decision. Wolcott wrote that he never provided Mr. Bell with answers or the approving nod and that he felt bad about his passive stance but felt it was necessary to preserve the integrity of his data.

Data Analysis

Ethnographic research generates a substantial amount of data. Wolcott (1973) states in *The Man in the Principals Office*, that he never transcribed his field notes. Instead, he continually reread them to uncover themes and additional strands of inquiry. I typed my field notes while I conducted the observations, using a small, portable computer. I also audio

recorded and transcribed all of the observations and interviews. As the study evolved and to locate themes, I continually reviewed and annotated my field notes and transcriptions.

Since I had multi-data sources, I used the constant comparative method of data analysis. I looked for key issues, recurring events, or activities as I collected the data. I continued to double back and search for new information and emerging themes as I continued to collect more data. This method enabled me to locate new themes and strands of inquiry to either confirm or discount my information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Continually reading, transcribing, and comparing the data has many benefits. First, I was able to identify changes in relationships with participants. Second, I gained additional insights that often changed or altered my own interpretation. Third, it helped me recognize patterns, differences, and make comparisons. Fourth, I located emergent themes which helped me direct the additional data collection and analysis. My investigation continued until saturation occurred and no new information emerged.

I handled the interview data in a similar fashion. I reviewed the transcribed interviews for gaps, missing data, and emergent themes and used respondent validation or member checking to make sure interpretations were accurate. I received no feedback from my inquiries.

I reviewed the current school documents such as the principal's calendar, audio or written journals, emails, meeting minutes and agendas, and the school improvement plan for additional information and used this information to inform my interactions with the first-year principal and other stakeholders.

Trustworthiness, Validity, Reliability, and an N-of-One

Since all educational research is usually designed to improve practice, it is critical to address the issues of internal validity, reliability, and external validity. I have employed several strategies to insure internal and external validity and reliability including the expert qualitative review by the chair of my committee.

Merriam (1995) states, “the purpose of qualitative research is to clarify and understand phenomena in which variables cannot be identified a head of time, to find creative and fresh approaches to familiar problems, to understand how participants make meaning and perceive their roles within organizations, and to build a theory, hypothesis, or generalization” (p. 52). I understand the importance of internal and external validity and reliability. This study takes this into account as it strives to clarify and understand the experiences of a first-year principal and provides rich, thick description of the phenomena.

Internal Validity

Internal validity asks the question: Are we observing or measuring what we think we are measuring? This question goes to the heart of the definition of the concept of reality. Therefore, before discussing the internal validity of an ethnographic study, reality or truth must be discussed.

Is reality a fixed and certain thing or is it continually constructed as participants make meaning of new situations? To assume that there is one reality or one truth is to assume that it is fixed or stationary. Qualitative study postulates that reality is not a fixed point, but instead is continually constructed by participants as they make meaning of situations

(Talbert, 2004; Wolcott, 2001). Campbell and Stanley (1963) state that in a quasi-experimental research design, the threats of history and maturation must be considered. Since the design of my study was over an extended period of time, history and maturation of the subjects was expected.

There are several methods of insuring the validity of the qualitative findings. The first is triangulation or the use of multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings. The second is member checks or confirming the findings with the participants to make sure that the data accurately reflects their true feelings. The third is peer-colleague examination or asking peers or colleagues to review the data and comment on the plausibility of the findings. The fourth is delineating the subjectivity of the researcher outlining biases, experiences, and assumptions. And the fifth is to make sure that data is collected over a long enough period to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena or until saturation (Merriam, 1995).

As previously stated, my study used all of these techniques to insure validity. I used multiple sources of data—a first-year principal, focus groups, interviews with other key personnel, and document analysis. I used member checks with both the principal and the interviewees. My data was reviewed by colleagues within my cohort and by members of my committee. I clearly stated the limitations of the study and what I plan to do to compensate for the limitations. And finally, my study continued throughout a school year until no new information was available.

External Validity

External validity refers to the possibility of the findings being applied or generalized to other situations. Qualitative external validity is not a goal. Instead, qualitative research looks at one phenomenon in depth rather than determining what is generally true for many (Merriam, 1995). Wolcott (2008) claims the purpose of ethnography is to understand rather than convince. He suggested rigorous subjectivity and accurate recording and writing. “We should try to be as credible, balanced, fair, complete, sensitive, rigorously subjective, coherent, internally consistent, appropriate, plausible, and helpful as possible” (Woods, 1996, p. 59).

Hammersley (1992) agreed that validity and reliability within qualitative research can be problematic. He devised his own test to determine both the validity and reliability of a study. In terms of validity, Hammersley asked three questions: Is the study plausible and credible? Is the evidence presented central to the research question? Is the preponderance of evidence equal to the claim made within the study? Likewise, he devised two tests of relevance: Is the topic of significant importance that it is of interest and will add to the body of literature?

I believe that my study passed the Hammersley test in its conception and implementation. Understanding the experiences of a novice principal with the hope of using this type of information to support and nurture a first-year principal is critical for the continued success of our schools.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the possibility of the findings being replicable. While this is possible and desirable in the hard sciences, it becomes much more problematic in the social sciences. Reliability within the realm of qualitative research differs from quantitative reliability. Quantitative reliability is the potential for results to be replicated from study to study. Qualitative reliability is concerned with a fit between the observed and recorded data (Merriam, 1995). The most important requirement for an ethnographer is to explain behavior from the participant's point of view and to be systematic in data collection. Studying human behavior is not static. People will not necessarily make the same meaning of situations at different points in time. Therefore, qualitative reliability does not refer to replication. Instead, qualitative reliability refers to whether the findings are consistent with the data collected (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1995; Wolcott, 2008).

There are several strategies to insure qualitative reliability. The two techniques, peer examination and triangulation of data, that were previously mentioned regarding internal validity are also techniques used to insure reliability. An additional strategy used to insure reliability is an audit trail. An audit trail is a complete description of how data was collected, how themes or categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry (Merriam, 1995). I used all three strategies, peer examination, triangulation, and an audit trail, in my study.

N-of-One

An N-of-one is an unusual study, but certainly not unique. Wolcott's famous study, *The Man in the Principal's Office* (1973), is the most notable N-of-one study. Merriam states, "The goal of qualitative research, after all, is to understand the particular in depth, rather than finding what is true for many" (p. 57). This is what I did by observing one new principal for an extended period of time. Firsthand experience and intimate, long-term acquaintance correspond to ethnography. Ethnography is specific, idiosyncratic, and individualistic (Zou & Troueba, 2002).

A similar study was conducted by two researchers and one principal (Andrews & James, 2004). In their study they credit Wolcott's *The Man in the Principal's Office* for the idea, but thought a study of a female principal would add to the literature. Their methodology included observation, interviews, and document analysis.

An additional ethnographic study (Duncan & Seguin, 2002) of a female principal investigated the relationship of power and success during the first year of a principalship. Their methods included observation, data analysis, and interviews. The new principal wrote in her journal, "Nine months = Lifetime of Experience...the real principalship is an amazing beast—one that takes every ounce of positive drive and servant leadership housed in every tiny bone of the body and still demands 1,000 times more. Some days its love, others—exhaustion" (p. 617). This principal was ultimately unsuccessful and lost her job. An analysis of her performance indicated the following deficiencies: 1) She did not empower the teachers to become leaders within the school, 2) She did not include teachers in the decision-making

process, 3) She did not “hear the teachers”—did not listen, 4) She should have worked harder at building trust, and 5) She should have developed and articulated a vision for the school.

To use a metaphor originally crafted by Wolcott (Zou & Troueba, 2002) ethnography is like baking bread. Baking bread requires skill and the combining of everyday ingredients. Each baker has a general idea of what the end result will be, but they have the freedom to add additional ingredients, mold the dough into a variety of shapes, and present it to a variety of audiences. While there are new bread machines that can aid in the process of making bread, it still requires a baker who can select the correct ingredients, measure carefully, and know when the loaf is done. It is the same with ethnography. It requires a researcher who can look at the array of behaviors and select the right ones that will create the perfect product.

To insure rigor, reliability, and validity of an N-of-one research study, I followed all procedures and produced a rich, thick description (Merriam, 1995). Merriam offers a contrast between quantitative and qualitative studies. “The quantitative study must convince the reader that procedures have been followed faithfully because very little of the concrete description of what anyone does is provided. [On the other hand], qualitative research persuades [the reader] through its classical strengths of concrete depiction of detail, portrayal of process in an active mode, and attention to the perspectives of those studied” (Merriam p. 59). My study includes an extensive description of my methods, including triangulation, member checks, audit trails, and peer examination to insure rigor, validity, and reliability.

Safeguards against Researcher Bias

I believe that first-year principals need access to all resources necessary to learn their job and to be successful. Informal conversations with other first-year principals confirm that they are overwhelmed with the responsibility of the position, the amount of information that must be learned, and the immediacy of a variety of issues that must be decided.

As an observer, I was present during every phase of the study. I conducted the observations and interviews. I analyzed the data, drew the conclusions, and prepared the findings. In addition, since I am also an employee of the school system in the study, I understood the bias and knowledge that I brought to my role as the researcher.

In an attempt to minimize my inadvertent input into the study, I bracketed the following issues. First, my own experiences of being a first year principal including challenges and my personal coping mechanisms. Second, I bracketed my knowledge of the position and my understanding of the work necessary to be a successful principal. Third, my previous encounters with the people involved in the study and my expectations based on these encounters. Fourth, I bracketed my pre-conceived notions of the challenges facing a first-year principal.

However, I agree with Peskin (1998) that subjectivity and bias can be an asset when it is recognized and monitored. Being familiar with the setting and the position helps me to understand the complexity of the position. It also helps frame more probing questions for the focus groups with teachers. Being a long-term employee of the school system, I have developed trusting relationships with individuals throughout the system.

Finally, in my role as a school administrator, both as an assistant principal and as a principal, I have experience with observational tools. I observe teachers within their classrooms on a regular basis. I use my observational tools to assess a variety of situations within my school every day. Through these encounters, I have learned to remain objective, listen intently, and reserve judgment.

Ladkin (2005) states, “The nature of truth will be located, limited, and emergent” (p. 121). It was my responsibility as an observer to be present within the situation to hear the voices of the teachers and the voice of the principal. It was my responsibility to allow the data to emerge without bias or prejudice.

Ethical Issues (IRB)

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) listed the two traditional and official guidelines for ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm (pp. 44-45).

I secured informed consent from all participants. North Carolina State University has strict guidelines for using human subjects that I adhered to during my research. The informed consent form (Appendices E, F, & G) detailed a description of my study, how I planned to use my findings, the possible dangers to the subjects, and insured anonymity. I treated all subjects with respect, allowed them to remove themselves from the study if they desired, and respected their privacy. In addition to the informed consent form, since the study was “in situ” (Woods, 1996, p. 47), I traveled to the site for all observations and interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Creswell (2007) outlines additional ethical considerations that I will take into account during my study. The first is reciprocity or giving back to the participants for their time and effort. I continually thanked everyone for their time and effort. I included the principal and the entire staff in the acknowledgements. I gradually tapered off my visits so that the end would not be abrupt and the participants would not feel abandoned or deserted. After spending the amount of time within the school that was necessary to conduct this study, I did develop relationships and friendships with a variety of staff. The second was to be continually sensitive to my presence at the school possibly disturbing the daily workings of the learning environment. While I was in place to observe a variety of situations, I was also sensitive to confidential communication which the participants might not want to be included in the study. Only once, during all of my observations, did a teacher request that I not observe her conversation with the principal. Finally, I was sensitive to underrepresented groups, honored all languages and ethnic groups, and did not employ stereotypes.

Ethical considerations also concern the quality and experience of the researcher. I have taken two courses in qualitative research and read extensively about ethnographic methodology. Finally, I was under the supervision of an outstanding qualitative researcher and professor from the university. In the end, it comes down to the values of the researcher. It is important to treat people fairly and represent them accurately, both in person and in print (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Summary

Chapter Three outlined the methodology I used for my ethnographic study. My research questions involved documenting the experiences of a novice principal through the lenses of culture. I collected data through participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. I analyzed the data using intensive reading of field notes and transcripts. Since my study was an evolving design, I continually looked for emergent themes. I determined reliability and validity by using multiple data sources, triangulation, audit trails, peer review, and member checks. Finally, I conducted myself ethically and treated others respectfully throughout the study. The next chapter provides background information on the school and the participants.

I love what I do. I love the school and I love the people. Walk down the halls, look at the student work, the bulletin boards, and listen to the conversations. This is really who I am.
A New Principal, 2009

CHAPTER FOUR

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Wayside School System

The Wayside School System (WSS) is a countywide school system located in the Southeastern United States. For the last several years, the WSS has experienced unprecedented growth and with this growth has come the need for more schools to accommodate the increase in student enrollment. In 2007-2008, 134,002 students attended schools in the WSS making it the largest school system in the state and the 19th largest in the nation. Due to the opening of new schools and retirements of current principals, 54 new principals were appointed during the 2007-2008 school year. This equates to a 35% turnover in school leadership within the district.

The 2008-2009 school year brought significant changes to the school system. As the national economic crisis trickled down to the local level, the population growth of the entire county dropped from the original projections, the system slowed the building of new schools, and principal vacancies became less abundant. During the 2008-2009 school year 25 new principals were appointed which is almost 17% of all school principals.

As a countywide school system, it includes several cities, towns, and unincorporated county areas. To manage a school district of this size, it is divided into five administrative

areas, each headed by an area superintendent. Each area superintendent is responsible for the hiring and induction of new principals within their area.

The Town – Fern Valley

The school in which I did my study is located in a town rich in history and community spirit. Throughout the 1800's, Fern Valley established itself as a county tourist attraction and agricultural hub. Both the renowned mineral springs and the railroad that ran directly through the town helped bring people from the larger cities to this small community and move agricultural products to other locations. The town officially incorporated in 1936.

Fern Valley is located in the southern part of the county. While most of the county has experienced explosive commerce and population growth during the last twenty years, the southern part of the county has been only recently touched by this growth. The town remained unchanged until 1970. From 1970 until 2000 Fern Valley doubled its population to almost 8,000 people. Currently, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that there are over 17,000 people living in Fern Valley while housing and shopping areas continue to develop (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). This is a 115.3% population increase since 2000. Demographically, Fern Valley is 67% Caucasian, 25% Black, 7% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian (www.city-data.com, 2009).

Fern Valley is located 15 miles from the largest city in the county, which is also the state capital and 35 miles from a community of research-based, international organizations. It is primarily a residential community for the larger neighboring cities and towns. There is little major industry in the town though town officials are actively seeking new businesses to

relocate in the community and identifying real estate within the community for economic development. Fern Valley town officials are currently investing money in developing their infrastructure, such as water, sewer, streets and sidewalks, and parks in preparation for the expected growth.

Fern Valley Elementary School

Fern Valley Elementary School is the town's original elementary school. It is steeped in history and woven into the fabric of the community. Many residents attended the school and have significant emotional ties to it. It is nestled in an older, well-established community of small, brick, ranch-style homes just outside of the downtown area of the town. The majority of the staff lives in the same town. The school is on a traditional calendar, the students begin school in late August and end their school year in early June, and it is not a magnet school. It is a typical neighborhood elementary school. It is a Title I school for the 2009-2010 school year because the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch exceeds 30% of the student population. The student demographics are 2% American Indian, 5% Multi-racial, 12% Hispanic, 22% Black, and 59% Caucasian. The student population for the 2009-2010 school year is 750 students.

For this research study, I chose this school and this new principal for several reasons. He was a first time principal who had previous experience within the county as both a teacher and an assistant principal. The school was not known for extraordinary problems such as embezzlement or racial tensions. Mr. Allen was willing to let me observe and chronicle his first year and the location was near the school in which I work. The location was a significant

factor since I needed to be able to get to and from his school frequently. I was able to schedule one day a week to be in the school plus I was able to go to the school for special events such as leadership meetings, PTA events, open houses, faculty meetings, and when other unexpected events happened.

For the purposes of my study, this was an excellent choice of schools and novice principal. Because of its location, history, and current situation, I was able to focus on the socialization and induction of the new principal.

Current Situation

Regardless of the reasons that a principal leaves a school—retirement, promotion, or career change—it causes an upheaval in the rhythms and life of a school community. Fern Valley is no exception. The previous principal of Fern Valley Elementary School was at the school for six years. The staff members respected him as a professional, liked him as a person, and were disappointed when he accepted another position. Several teachers commented on his leaving. “He was a fantastic man in all areas.” “If he wants to be superintendent of this county, he will be and he would have our support—absolutely.”

In January, he was named the principal of a new elementary school within the same town. He left Fern Valley in February and the school was without a principal until Mr. Allen assumed the position in late April. One teacher commented, “I think one of the hard parts is he (the previous principal) went to a school very nearby so a lot of our teachers went [with him]—so I think it more than just losing a principal, it was dividing the staff and that was hard.” “We knew he wouldn’t stay here forever, but I was really hoping that they would give

him a middle school experience or a high school experience and not move him to another elementary school because it was so clear that's exactly what would happen—that the staff would [be divided and so many would] want to go with him to the new school.”

It is not unusual for some staff to leave and go to another school when a principal is transferred. However, this ended up being a unique situation. Since the previous principal was opening a new school and was able to hire an entire staff, many staff members followed him to his new school. When the dust settled, the secretary, the receptionist, the Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT), the head custodian, a custodian, six classroom teachers, one teacher assistant, one assistant principal, one intervention teacher, and one media specialist transferred to the new school with the principal. One teacher remarked, “I think some of the hurt came when it really took some of our core people. Typically when a principal goes it is kind of understood that the secretary will go—but when he took the other office staff, our IRT, head custodian, it was too many core people.” Another teacher continued, “It was almost like, to me, he'd come in as a new principal. We had helped him along to build it up and we have a good reputation and helped him get to the level he was and then he moves on, which we understood, but then he almost strips us for his school and there were...a lot of hurt feelings—a lot of people were very angry.”

Without a doubt, Mr. Allen had his work cut out for him when he assumed the principalship of this school in April. In addition to needing to fill key positions, the opening of two new schools within close proximity to Fern Valley Elementary School meant the reassignment of about 300 children from Fern Valley to these schools and therefore a

significant staff reduction. Luckily, through attrition and transfers, enough staff left the school at the end of the year so forced transfers and releases were not necessary. However, Mr. Allen was left with the task of rebuilding his core staff.

Mr. Allen was appointed the principal of Fern Valley Elementary School very late in the school year. Within a month of being appointed, the students were taking the end-of-year assessments and the school was, according to Mr. Allen, on autopilot until the end of the year. I decided that I would wait until the beginning of summer to begin my observations.

Key Staff

The office staff of Fern Valley Elementary School consists of the principal, the assistant principal, the school secretary, the data manager, head custodian, and the Instructional Resource Teacher. Mr. Allen said, “These are the key people that help run the day-to-day operations of the school. They interact with staff, parents, students, community members, and central service personnel. It is important that they can work together well without arguments and almost read each others thoughts.” He said he was going to take time to interview and hire these folks, because he wanted the right fit.

Colton Allen, Principal

Mr. Allen is a big, teddy bear of a man with a perpetual smile. He is in his late thirties, and except for a one year hiatus, has spent his entire career in education. He was born and raised in a very rural part of a county that adjoins the one in which he works. When you first meet him, he often spends time trying to figure out if you might know someone that he knows. He is a self-proclaimed extrovert who “gets energy from crowds of people. I am a

people person. I am always approachable. If I get hungry I get snippy. If I get overwhelmed and my head is full, I do this (he puts his fingers to his forehead). You can call me at home, here, there—I am a wide open book.” Professionally he is looking forward to the challenge of the principalship. However, he is clear that this will be a new adventure. “If I ever felt like I’ve arrived then I won’t keep questioning myself.”

He is one of three children and claims he is “nothing like his brother and sister.” His entire family lives in close proximity and he often sees his siblings and mother during the week for dinner or on the weekends.

He began his teaching career in a coastal area of the state, working at two different elementary schools over a span of six years. Both experiences were formative for him. He mentions the wonderful group of women who carpooled with him to one of the schools. He considers them his mentors and the people who taught him to be a teacher. The other formative memories were of the schools’ principals. One he remembers as being very autocratic. He demanded weekly staff meetings that would last for hours. He reprimanded his staff publically and did nothing to develop relationships with his staff. Mr. Allen recalls a specific time when he needed to leave a staff meeting early for a pressing personal reason. He told the principal of the situation and sat in the back of the room so as not to make a disturbance when he left early. Regardless of his planning, when he rose to leave, the principal called out a rhetorical question about his commitment to the school. The other principal was a formidable African American woman whose commitment to equity and fairness for all children in the school also made a lasting impression on Mr. Allen.

He eventually returned to his hometown area and secured a teaching position at Woods Elementary School in the Wayside School System. He remained at Woods Elementary School for eleven years until he was appointed principal of Fern Valley Elementary School. Throughout his tenure at Woods, he taught several grade levels and eventually became one of the assistant principals. While at Woods, he worked for a principal who was strong on developing relationships with staff and students, believed in the best in people, and had high expectations for all students. She was a firm believer in using data to inform instruction, making sure that each person hired was the best fit for the school, and giving both her assistant principals the skills they needed to be successful.

Shortly after Mr. Allen received his appointment as an assistant principal at Woods Elementary School, the principal retired and the other assistant principal with whom he worked was appointed principal. He has a close and continuing personal relationship with both of these people and talks to them often.

After eleven years at one school, with the last three years as an assistant principal, he was ready to “take the plunge” and become a school principal. He said, “I have to pinch myself sometimes to make sure it is all real. The other day I was thinking about—remembering when I was a teacher—but I am glad I made the plunge.”

Roy Miller, Assistant Principal

There is one assistant principal at Fern Valley Elementary School. Mr. Miller has been at this school in this position for 13 years and is nearing retirement with 28 years in education. He was born in the town and educated in the local schools. As Mr. Allen points

out, “He is very well connected in the community. Because of his long tenure at the school and in the community, he has built solid relationships with the faculty.” Since Mr. Miller is an eleven-month employee, he was not at the school for the entire month of July, which is when Mr. Allen hired most of the staff and prepared the building for opening. The assistant principal is a pleasant man and knowledgeable about the workings of the building. According to Mr. Allen, “He will do anything I ask him to do, though his strengths are things like buses and scheduling. He is good at details and I have learned that I have to give him certain things and I have to spell it out and if I do, it is done and it is done well.” Mr. Allen discovered, “He does not have experience with elementary school curriculum and is up front in stating that curriculum is not his strong suit. He is not a visionary, but will do anything I ask of him. He is single-minded and works best with one major project at a time.”

Sherri Edwards, Data Manager

Sherri Edwards is beginning her third year at the school. She is very dedicated to the school and has a child in the second grade. She is extremely knowledgeable about the staff, the students, and the building. I joked with her that she is the keeper of the history. Mr. Allen relies on her heavily to explain things and provide valuable background information on various situations. During the summer, when it was only Mr. Allen, Ms. Edwards, and the new secretary at the school, Mr. Allen would tell her, “I need you to figure this out and tell me what I should do.” Regarding a situation with the custodial staff, he deferred to her opinion, “Should I speak to them or should I let them come to me?” The admiration goes

both ways. Ms. Edwards states she appreciates Mr. Allen's willingness to ask questions, his openness about what he does not know, and his collegial spirit.

Lynn Winters, School Secretary

Lynn Winters is also new to Fern Valley Elementary School. Mr. Allen hired her about one month after he was appointed principal. She said, "Being new is so difficult, every time I talk to someone I make them tell me their name—it's the not knowing anything." Ms. Winters has experience within the Wayside School System as a teacher assistant and as a clerical assistant at Woods Elementary School. While she does not have any experience as a school secretary, she does have a relationship with Mr. Allen and he values that more than experience. The job of an elementary school secretary is complex. The school secretary manages all of the budgets, human resource paperwork, staff requests, and acts as the gatekeeper to the principal. The learning curve is steep. In addition to learning all of the routines of a new school, she had to learn the computer programs and assorted paperwork dealing with budgets, supplies, and human resources. Mr. Allen stated, "I am going to get Ms. Winters in here because we are learning this together and it helps her." She commented after completing her first purchase order, "Yes, it took forever—I had never done one before. I did one for each grade level. I double-checked, triple-checked, then I went to the clerical institute and met the girl who does them and she said, you did it great! Just send it in—so I hope the order comes."

Jody Northwoods, Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT)

The previous IRT also left with the previous principal to open a new school. Mr. Allen considers this position key within his staff and he worked hard to hire just the right person. He hired a person who has 15 years experience in the IRT position and had been at the same school for 22 years. Ms. Northwoods is knowledgeable with a good sense of humor. Mr. Allen initially relied on her heavily. In their first meeting, he stated, “I need your input where I need to put my energy. Where do you think you should start?”

The IRT is an important position in an elementary school. Since each elementary school only has one assistant principal, the IRT functions like one. They are deeply immersed in curriculum and data. They work with marginal teachers, helping them to improve their teacher methods. They are responsible for coordinating the universal assessments, which are given periodically to all students, and they are responsible for helping teachers understand and deliver modifications, maintain progress checks, and often function as test coordinators for the schools.

Juan Richards, Head Custodian

The Head Custodian was also a position that Mr. Allen filled during his first few months on the job because the former head custodian went with the former principal to the new school. Mr. Allen did not hire this person immediately, but waited about two months before bringing someone into this position. During the interim, Mr. Allen acted as head custodian, directing the staff of eight full and part-time workers on a regular basis. All of his full-time employees actually applied for the position, but Mr. Allen hired a person from

another school. This caused some dissention among the custodial staff, which Mr. Allen mediated throughout the summer and eventually throughout the year.

Juan Richards has excellent skills and is committed to making the school campus as attractive as possible. “I want everything perfect.” While he struggled with his relationships with the custodial staff, initially he had an excellent relationship with Mr. Allen and was held in high regard by the entire office staff. Throughout the year, this relationship deteriorated due to continuing personnel conflicts among the custodians and Mr. Richards resigned before the end of the year.

Initial Impressions during My First Visit to Fern Valley Elementary School

The purpose of my first visit to Fern Valley Elementary School was to tour the school, conduct some initial observations, and have some introductory conversations with Mr. Allen.

I arrived at the school early. I was supposed to be there at 8:30 am, but because I was not sure of the directions and travel time, I was there at about 8:15 am. It gave me a chance to look around the outside of the school. It was as Mr. Allen described: a one-story building with dark brown brick and dark brown trim. It sits on a large parcel of land that shares common areas with a town park. Mr. Allen, Ms. Winters, and Ms. Edwards all arrived at exactly the same time. They had decided to visit neighboring elementary schools that morning before coming to work. Mr. Allen is interested in doing some decorating to make the school brighter (and as he thinks – more inviting). They all reported their findings—Lynn

Winters reports, "It was orange!" There was no consensus or lengthy conversation about the colors.

Fern Valley Elementary School is not officially open on Fridays during the summer so they keep the door locked and the lights off in the main office. Signs posted outside indicate the office is open Monday through Thursday with morning hours and afternoon hours. Mr. Allen began by checking his email and working with Ms. Winters. He worked on his calendar regarding appointments for the following week, checked his voice mail, and fixed his printer.

The office reception area is small and usually lit by table lamps instead of the usual overhead lighting. The reception area contains a large, u-shaped desk that takes up most of the space. Student artwork from past years hangs on the walls, primarily winners of T-shirt design contests and plaques noting previous accomplishments.

Mr. Allen's office is small but comfortable with 1980's print wallpaper and a private bathroom. It contains his desk, a credenza, a table and three chairs, several lamps, family pictures, and two bookcases. His desk is clear except for two computers. He had one voice mail. It was from another principal offering her support in preparing to open the school for the 2009-2010 school year.

After he finished listening to his voice mail and checking and responding to his email, Mr. Allen and I toured the building. It was built in 1987, so while it is not old by some standards, it certainly is showing wear and tear. For the last three years the school was significantly overcrowded, housing almost 1,100 students in a 700 student space. The school

system is opening two new schools for the 2009-2010 school year and almost 300 of the current Fern Valley Elementary School students were reassigned to these new schools, which will bring the enrollment down to slightly over 700. While this will certainly bring relief to a stressed building and staff, it also means that Mr. Allen needs to deal with a significant staff reduction. It also means that teams of teachers who teach the same grades will be back together on the same hall and not spread throughout the building and modular units. Because of these changes, many teachers are moving to different rooms and many teachers will have classrooms this year who were travelers last year. Mr. Allen stated, "I feel good about more teachers having their own space and not being on carts and moving from room to room."

The building is laid out like a ladder with rungs or connecting hallways. The walls are painted off-white with brightly colored door trim. The floor tiles are primary color tiles interspersed with off-white. Mr. Allen said that the previous principal is responsible for the floor tiles—previously they were all beige. Mr. Allen said the art teacher, who has been at the school for 15 years and who is deeply invested in the school community, is creating a series of mosaic tile walls at the end of each hallway. She also did a tile mural in the cafeteria. The music teacher is also a long-term employee. In fact, several teachers have long tenure at the school and have a lot of stuff in their rooms. Mr. Allen said at the end of the year, he pushed a garbage can into one teacher's room and said, "Fill it. This will be the first of many." He comments on the clutter in many of the classrooms. "They are blocking the sinks and isles with their stuff. They have to get rid of a lot of it."

We toured the Title I pre-K classrooms. This year, Fern Valley Elementary School will have a pre-K program. Mr. Allen said the Title I program has federal regulations such as the sinks must be a certain height. He is excited about getting the students in the preschool program because 80% will attend kindergarten at Fern Valley Elementary School the following year since they live in the neighborhood.

As we walked outside, we were confronted by twenty-one trailers sitting on the back property. In previous years, they were all used, but this year, several will be vacant. However, there are no plans to remove the trailers. Mr. Allen comments, “The large modular unit will contain the entire third grade. Many of the others contain special teachers such as special programs.”

The school shares the property with a town park. It contains volleyball courts, a basketball court, a small amphitheater, a covered shelter, and playground equipment. The space is for the exclusive use of the school during the day but it used by the community in the evening and on weekends.

We re-entered the building near the cafeteria. Mr. Allen likes the cafeteria because the doors can be closed to hide the serving lines leaving a large open room that can be used for a variety of functions. He described the plans he has for the opening faculty meeting to be held in this space. He is borrowing round tables from the neighborhood church and table clothes from a local business. He mentioned that his custodial staff is doing an excellent job of deep cleaning the building this summer. It is possible because of fewer teachers and their belongings on campus this summer.

His attention to the cleanliness of the building and the amount of clutter are worth noting. He is by nature, a meticulous person, as evidenced by his office. Throughout the year, there were never piles of paper or work on his desk, credenza, or table. Additionally, cleaning the building was the first thing he could do as the principal. It was tangible and the results were evident. It was something that could be controlled and monitored, unlike many of the responsibilities of the job such as budgeting and staffing that he was facing.

We returned to the office and I began observing Mr. Allen at work. He began by looking at his projected student numbers and teaching positions. He believes that he can hire one more teacher for the fifth grade, but is concerned about his projected student enrollment. He has enrolled twenty new students and is looking for some assurance that his numbers will hold. He asked Ms. Edwards if she had numbers from previous years showing the number of students who actually showed up for school versus the numbers projected to show up. She said with two new schools opening in the area, the growth and planning department is not being as flexible as they used to be. She brought historical enrollment information from the first ten days of school from the previous year. Ms. Edwards said, "After the first day, I ask the social worker and counselors to call the parents of the no-shows. In the end we had about 20 children who just didn't come to school. There is more stability with the fourth and fifth grade." She provided additional information about some current teachers.

Mr. Allen answered all phone calls. He received one from a Central Services person asking for his contact person for a system-wide assessment program. Mr. Allen told her he does not have an Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT) and positions are frozen. He told the

person to list him as the contact and then asked if he could add another person to receive the information besides himself. “Can I just add another person—I like to be in the loop.”

The phone rang. It was a secretary of one of the area superintendents. She told Mr. Allen that an irate parent was calling from the school’s parking lot. She was there to register her child and the school doors were locked. Mr. Allen and Ms. Edwards opened the doors and helped the parent. By the time Mr. Allen and Ms. Edwards were finished helping the parent, she said, “It is nice to meet you—I need a principal who is a nice guy.” After the parent left, Mr. Allen said, “I was trying to win her over,” Ms. Edwards replied, “And you did good.”

Mr. Allen decided to work on his school budget. He called a school secretary from another school to learn how to access the budget from the on-line school system program. After printing the report, she explained the various fields, “I get confused on the flex-fields. I know what I have where—in terms of money.....First column – second column.....Activity report? It breaks it down by object code? How often is this report updated? What is the program total versus the fund? I am still a little overwhelmed by it.” Mr. Allen explained to her that he is more familiar with Title I regulations from his previous school.

I had a brief conversation with Lynn Winters, the school secretary, while Mr. Allen was printing his budget reports. She said she was struggling being new. She said, “The hardest part is not knowing any of the teachers and the rhythms of the school. After coming from a school where you know everyone and everything, this is hard.”

Summary

Each time a new principal enters a new school they encounter a unique set of circumstances and individuals. This chapter discussed the current situation that Mr. Allen encountered as he assumed the principalship of Fern Valley Elementary School. It also described the key personnel with whom he worked with each day. As they were all new, an advantage for Mr. Allen was that they were all able to learn together. A disadvantage was not knowing the instructional staff and not having any credibility with the instructional staff. At times, this proved to be a major obstacle for both Mr. Allen and his new administrative team. The next chapter reports the findings from the study as the new principal performed his job during various times throughout the school year.

*Until I can get through a year, I have just decided that I am going to be scared to death.
A New Principal, 2009*

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FIRST YEAR

Introduction

This chapter includes my observations of the new principal at the beginning of the research study and then at the four, six, eight, and twelve month mark. These interval views of the new principal display his learning curve and the types and intensity of the work confronting a school administrator. The chapter ends with a section on growth and a chart that displays major events confronting the principal by quarter.

Initial Reflection of the New Principal

Walking in the door of a school as the new principal is a daunting experience and it was no different for Mr. Allen. He reported, “Until I can get through a year, I have just decided that I am going to be scared to death.” After being at his previous school for eleven years, he had built relationships with the staff and knew every nook and cranny of the building. The routines and procedures of the school were not only familiar to him, but he was the author of many of them. Additionally, he had developed long and sustained relationships with most of the staff. Mr. Allen noted, “That is another thing that is different from Woods [my previous school]—I had been there for so long and moved through so many different positions—that even though I was in the fishbowl of administration—I still had my folks. I don’t have that yet.”

When he pondered the experiences and knowledge he brought with him and whether he felt prepared for the principalship, he said:

I thought I was [prepared to be a principal]. I had experiences across the board. I would say the budget and staffing have just been the most overwhelming. As for listening to people, hearing what they are saying, having a gauge for what is going on in the school, where you can gather your information—I felt good with my skill sets—but what to do with that information when I had it—that is the part I am trying to figure out... It has been overwhelming—but it has been a great challenge. It has not been—oh my gosh, what am doing? Well, maybe one time but for the most part, it has given me energy and it was kind of like an affirmation that I could go in and—I could really figure out what needs to be done—that I could do it and move it forward. It is going to take me a year to get a handle on everything—truly—to know what I am doing.

There are always differences between the previous principal and the new principal. This situation was no different. It helped Mr. Allen that he and the previous principal were colleagues and had known each other for years.

... I have known him for years—I worked with him when he was an AP at my previous school. But from working with him, I know that our styles are different—I get a lot of energy from groups of people. Give me a room full of 200 people and I am good to go. When I have to sit at home by myself for the weekend—I do not do well by myself. However, I know I have to balance it—I need that down time. It is important that I have it. He is much more comfortable in a small more intimate group. I am telling you this to explain the differences in our personalities. Neither is right nor wrong—we are just different.

The loneliness and isolation of the position was a topic that Mr. Allen often commented on during the first few months of his first principalship. “When I drive home I think, I am so lonely, I don’t have anyone to go through that with. I have some beginning relationships but I wonder, will it grow? Will the trust build?” Likewise, though he knew he was going into a situation where he knew no one, staff or students, the reality of the isolation

did not hit home until he was at the school. “[At my previous school] I had known all of them, the students—from start to finish—the whole cycle—it’s frustrating not knowing them. I just want to get to the point where everything is not new.”

He often reflected on his preparations for the first time he did something. This reflection refers to a meeting he was running for a group of selected teachers at the beginning of the school year. It describes his preparation and anxiety over the preparations for the meeting:

I was a little uneasy—I was nervous—I don’t know if it shows. Like yesterday, all day, I was in kind of a fit last night just like a shaking fit. I met a friend of mine over in Durham...and I really had worked Saturday for a little while and then I went to school on Sunday and when I left at 3:30, I didn’t do anything else. But at dinner I was like this (shows me his hand shaking) and I could just feel myself. I am trying to get everything done this week—I would like to go to the beach for the weekend. I really need to go because that is the way I am—I think about it from the time I wake up to the time I go to bed—I can’t get it out of my head—and ...so what I do is constantly replay things in my head—even if I am doing something else it is playing in my head. To the point [that] I want to yank them out of my head. I didn’t use to wake up in the morning and my head is racing—I mean my thoughts are racing – and it is hard to separate that—so hard...

Four Months after Becoming the Principal

The new school year has started and Mr. Allen is feeling good about staffing though he realizes he still has a long way to go. “I don’t have that core quite developed yet but I think I am—I think it is developing. I think people are starting to jell.” He is becoming more familiar with the budget. “I am starting to spend some money!” It is obvious that Mr. Allen is feeling more comfortable with his role as the principal every day. He stated:

I am so proud to walk through this building and to think that from April to June I just held on and to bring in the people, my staffing is pretty much complete, I am in a

good place. Maybe this is where I live in a bubble. Most seem happy and I keep asking. I had a kindergarten teacher tell me the other day, ‘Mr. A, I want to thank you for how clean the school is and how hard you have worked to get this done. It has never looked like this before.’ She has been here for 18 years. It made me feel like all of the hours I spend doing all of that was worth it.

Six Months after Becoming the Principal

Mr. Allen has hit several roadblocks. He experienced several unexpected resignations and is in the process of hiring staff. It is not where he expected to be several months into the school year. Another dilemma is implementing change and raising achievement standards, “Rigor and relevance –I am missing the rigor and have about half the relevance. I still see a lot of whole group stuff, a lot of work sheets—I see stuff that they say is aligned to the standard course of study but it is a far stretch. I just don’t feel like we have identified that essential curriculum clearly—and the expectations between grade levels—that is huge.” He reflected on the progress they were making towards his goals:

My third grade said that they used part of their PLT time to figure out their smart boards, that drive me crazy, but I held it together. I thought there was a good conversation about data but we have a long way to go—but I think we are on the right track. I want them to physically create some data walls. I want them to take their students and physically track them, at least for literacy or math...they are seeing that individually, but I want them to see it at their grade level. I mean, take their individual spread sheet and put them together so that they can visually see—oh my gosh these are all of our kids—all 125 of them and what are we going to do. But I want to move them from that conversation of looking at their interventions to looking at it as a team—how can we do this smarter rather than every teacher trying to come up with these interventions. But I feel like they are looking at data, I feel like they are using data—I want to now do something with data. ...I want to model some things for them that they can use in their rooms.

He also continued to struggle with relationships. After six months on the job, the relationship piece has taken a new twist. “And what I have to be careful of is I don’t want

them to get too comfortable with me. I have that line [and] I wonder, are they too comfortable with me, or is this a good place to be? You have to be where they don't take advantage of you—that is an art. I don't know if that comes naturally to people, I don't think, I guess trust and all of that is built into it.” He moved from wanting them to trust him, to again, wondering if he can trust the members of his staff. “Do they have another agenda, are they manipulating the situation, are they trying to get away with something? Maybe my thought process will change over time.” He compared his current situation to the relationships with staff in his previous school in which he was an assistant principal.

Being there for so long, I still have personal relationships with those people and I will never have that again. I am having to look at this with a different set of lenses. I grieved over that and I think I am just figuring it out. I love my new school, but there is a little place in your heart that is empty. Everyone has a magical place and I don't think it can be at the school where you are the principal. I think my grief is subsiding, but maybe that is my own skepticism of people. There is fear wrapped up in that—fear of doing a good job, fear of doing the wrong thing. I didn't feel fear when I started as an AP.

Eight Months after Becoming the Principal

Mr. Allen is feeling comfortable in the school and in his position. He has been able to get the grade levels to focus more on student achievement, including building a data wall that includes every child in kindergarten. He uses it as an example for the other grade levels. Each grade level chair is getting more comfortable in reporting results of SMART (specific, measureable, attainable, realistic, and timely) goals, universal screenings, and interventions. At the monthly leadership meeting in February, the meeting began with each department chair reporting on SMART goal progress. The faculty reported a comfort level with data that

had not been present at the beginning of the year. All grade level chairs reported progress. “We moved several students from red to yellow.” First grade noted that letter naming increased from 58% to 98%. “We applied some interventions, but part of that is just their growing.”

Mr. Allen is quick to praise and celebrate these successes. “I can’t say enough wonderful things about the PLTs and the successes that are happening.” “These are great observations—we need to keep digging deeper.” Likewise, at the next staff meeting, Mr. Allen spent most of the time celebrating increases in grade-level common formative assessment data and universal screenings.

Despite these successes and celebrations, Mr. Allen continues to confront problems and challenges. After eight months, Mr. Allen received four unexpected resignations and is in the process of hiring new staff members. He continues to struggle to understand the budget and to ensure there is money to operate the school for the entire year. His staff is still attempting to locate math workbooks and consumables that should have been at the school at the beginning of the year. He is beginning to look towards the next school year and anticipate needs. “We need to be proactive.” He is starting conversations about end-of-grade testing.

Mr. Allen is starting to see more gray areas in the job as a school principal. He has encountered several extraordinary personnel problems that consumed his time and energy. One teacher, a recent hire, buckles under the pressure of teaching and significant personal problems and quits his job. Mr. Allen discovers another teacher, who divides their time between two schools is not being honest with reporting hours worked. A parent of a special

needs child is being relentless in their demands and complaining to Central Services regularly; another parent accuses a staff member of physically restraining their child. Mr. Allen, after a contentious conversation with a parent and a teacher, moved a student to another teacher's room. "People just want to tell their story. After talking to the teacher assistant, the teacher, and the parent, I finally just moved the student to another room. I understand. If I was the teacher I would be mad if you moved a kid out of my room this late in the year, but at some point, you just want it to end—I have to work with this parent for five more years." He reflected, "This is where I am—it was really hard—that was a hard time—I didn't enjoy the job—but I am going to be okay. I want to stay—what else am I going to do? I looked back and realized that even though all that was happening, we accomplished this and that—they haven't run over me yet. I am behind on my observations, but I will catch up, and we got the supply order in and people are starting to get some goodies—it will work out."

Twelve Months after Becoming the Principal

"Twelve months and still standing," Mr. Allen remarked on the one-year anniversary of his tenure as a principal. He reflected, "It kind of goes up and down but mostly I feel pretty comfortable, maybe a bit more stressed this week because a lot of stuff is due to Central Services. I am getting used to it—it kind of goes pop, pop, pop—there is something always happening."

Mr. Allen is much more comfortable in the role as the principal of a school. "I don't wake up worrying like I used to every morning. I have realized that I can do it." He believes

that he has weathered the storms of his first year and has learned a great deal. “You know, it’s funny, I am still dealing with the same problems I had twelve months ago—staffing, the budget crisis, custodial problems—but I can take them in stride now. I can handle the drama—you know—there is drama in every building. We are no different.”

Building relationships and trust were two key issues for Mr. Allen throughout the year. Recently, he had had separate conversations with two of his key staff. One person had thanked him for including him on key conversations and decisions. The other told him that he had created a good environment—put things in place and how much she appreciated it. She said he was good for the school—he never meets a stranger and always makes the parents feel welcome and appreciated. Both conversations made an impression on Mr. Allen.

At the one year mark, his reflections were more forward looking. He had stopped second-guessing every decision he made. “I realize that I can do it.” He was more confident in his relationships with his staff. Ms. Edwards, the Data Manager remarked, “Things are good. [Mr. Allen has] really put things in place and it is a good environment.” Mr. Allen remarked, “I am looking forward to the end of the year and am already working on next year in my mind.” However, even as he discussed his plans for the following year, relationships and trust were large parts of the conversation. “At the beginning of this year, I didn’t have the relationships established [with the staff]—but now I do. I really want to minimize transitions for teachers. I feel like the last several years have brought upheaval every year so I want the teams to be stable and really begin to gel as a team.” Regarding professional development he reflected, “This year I felt I had to do everything because I didn’t know

anyone. Next year, I can use the expertise of the staff to plan and deliver some of the professional development. I already know what our focus is going to be—I have heard it from the staff throughout the year that we really need to work on technology. I want to get the leadership team to help me with it—I need their input.”

Growth

Throughout the year, Mr. Allen matured as a principal. He certainly was not done learning or maturing in the role, but his first year had presented significant personal and professional challenges which he had skillfully worked his way through. The most surprising thing was his lack of insight as to his growth and successes. His work and struggles with relationship building had paid off. He remarked, “These teachers are not as needy as they were at the beginning of the year. They used to ask me everything—now they really don’t.” He could not see that possibly his confidence in them had empowered them to take risks and do their jobs without fear. His positive and celebratory demeanor had helped them be better teachers.

His continual focus on data and student achievement had paid off. His leadership team, of whom he had remarked at the beginning of his tenure as principal, “I wish they were more inquisitive—that they wanted to dig deeper—and not be so concerned with the nuts and bolts” had turned into the group that he relied on for information. “My K-2 teams had a common meeting to work on the data wall and it really turned into a conversation about vertical alignment. I didn’t prompt them—it just happened.”

Mr. Allen reflected after one year, “I love my job. I love working with people. I love working with kids. I don’t love the problems and the paperwork, but, do I see myself doing anything else? No—I get to work with people, I have good relationships, and I want to build a good reputation over the next few years—it will take time.”

Table Six graphically depicts some major issues and challenges that Mr. Allen faced during his first year. As the information indicates, several problems reoccurred throughout the first year, some were sporadic, and some resolved early in his tenure but did require Mr. Allen’s additional time and energy.

Table 6

Issues and Challenges Facing a New principal

	1 st Quarter	2 nd Quarter	3 rd Quarter	4 th Quarter
Staffing	<p>Lost staff due to transfers, attrition</p> <p>Hired secretary, head custodian, receptionist, IRT</p> <p>Had to create another 4th grade class after first 10 days of school and hire teacher</p> <p>Continuing issues with custodial staff</p>	<p>New 4th grade teacher resigns and replaced</p> <p>ESL teacher resigns</p> <p>Issues with kindergarten teacher that requires HR intervention</p> <p>Continuing issues with custodial staff</p>	<p>Needs to create a new 3rd grade class and hire a new teacher</p> <p>Pre-K teacher resigns and replaced</p> <p>Continuing issues with custodial staff</p>	<p>Due to economic situation in the county, a hiring freeze is put in place so hiring for the following year is not possible</p> <p>Continuing issues with custodial staff and head custodian resigns</p>

Table 6 Continued				
Budget	<p>Schools are not fully funded due to countywide economic crisis</p> <p>Steep learning curve to understand budgeting, forms, reports, orders, credit cards</p> <p>Needing math resources without having textbook money</p>	<p>Continuing concern regarding needing supplies and having limited funds</p> <p>Learning to move money to various accounts to pay school bills</p>	<p>Continuing concern regarding needing supplies and having limited funds</p> <p>Meeting spending deadlines</p>	<p>Preparing for the next school year by anticipating supplies needed to open the school</p> <p>Meeting spending deadlines</p>
Instruction	<p>Setting and communication new expectations to staff</p> <p>Developing and presenting professional development using role modeling (kid talk)</p>	<p>Reinforcing the teaching of only the essential curriculum with specific grade levels</p> <p>Completing teacher observations</p>	<p>Reinforcing the teaching of only the essential curriculum with specific grade levels</p> <p>Completing teacher observations</p>	<p>Completing teacher observations</p>
Using data	<p>Determining student performance trajectories</p> <p>Setting and reporting SMART goals by grade</p>	<p>Monitoring student performance and growth</p> <p>Setting and reporting SMART</p>	<p>Monitoring student performance and growth</p> <p>Setting and reporting SMART</p>	<p>Monitoring student performance and growth</p> <p>Setting and reporting SMART</p>

Table 6 continued				
	level/department	goals by grade level/department	goals by grade level/department	goals by grade level/department
	Developing and presenting professional development on data collection processes	Establishing K-2 data wall	Updating K-2 data wall	Updating K-2 data wall
	Quarterly celebrations of student data based on common formative assessments	Developing and implementing additional interventions	Developing and implementing additional interventions	Developing and implementing additional interventions
		Quarterly celebrations of student data based on common formative assessments	Quarterly celebrations of student data based on common formative assessments	Year-end celebration of EOG assessment data

From information gathered during observations and conversations with Mr. Allen

Summary

Chapter Five highlighted the struggles and the aspirations of the new principal throughout the year. As Mr. Allen continued to gain experience with new situations, his confidence level rose. “It has been a good year and I have learned a lot. The little things don’t stress me as much as they did—I know I can do the job.” He was able to move from a singular focus on being new to a focus on what he considered the most important—building relationships and student achievement. The next chapter takes a closer look at relationship building, trust, and transparency as integral parts of the principalship.

*The bottom line is he had to trust us and we had to learn to trust him.
A Teacher, 2010*

CHAPTER SIX

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

Building relationships with a new staff is one of the most difficult but essential tasks of a new principal (Cosner, 2009, Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Regardless of what the staff thought of the previous administrator, the known is always more comfortable than the unknown. At Fern Valley Elementary School, the staff members truly liked the previous administrator and were very sad to see him move to another school. As one teacher said, “There were tears when he left. We knew he would leave eventually because he was smart, we knew he would move on to something else but we didn’t expect it to be so soon.”

Following a well-liked administrator is difficult (Cosner, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Wahlstrom & Seashore-Louis, 2008). Mr. Allen knew it would take time to build relationships with the staff, however, he believed this was one of his strengths. He commented:

I feel like building relationships is one of my strengths. Being able to do that is important before I can do anything. It has been a long time since I worked in a school that was really connected to the community—so that is something I have to think about. I realized just yesterday that I talked to some one and I thought this is probably what the teachers are thinking, can I trust you not to say anything? It is just that sense of developing a relationship. Right now, that takes a lot of energy and it takes time to build that trust with folks. That is a challenge. It is not that they won’t come with me, but I had one teacher make the comment, ‘I don’t know you well enough yet.’ I tried to understand that comment, but that trust is huge with them because it is their community and here is this guy coming in. What is he going to do? One of the teachers came in this morning—she doesn’t trust anybody. She told me that the day I started. Her trust starts at zero and you have to earn it.

One analogy he used often was the emotional bank account. He kept this in mind when he was making difficult decisions. It was a story often told by his previous administrator. He commented:

I've already done the emotional bank account. She always did that—you hear it quite often, but I always think that sticks with people—the deposits and withdrawals. I know that coming in as the new principal, you are going to feel like there are a lot of withdrawals, but what I am going to do is to make as many deposits as I can. We need to do that as a staff with each other because just like in our own bank account we are going to have withdrawals, it's inevitable but the bottom line is you have to make more deposits than withdrawals otherwise you will be overdrawn. She always did that so I held on to that. Maybe that's how I learned from her.

One thing that Mr. Allen realized was that it takes time to develop the relationships and to build trust within the staff. "I still feel a lot of times like an outsider. It is going to take awhile. I think I have twelve months to play that card [being new]. That is what I am counting on, but it is a scary feeling—I mean kids would say so and so and I would have no idea [how to answer the question] so I would say, ask her."

One situation about three-quarters through his first year reminded him of how fragile relationships and trust can be. Mr. Allen had brought in a reading specialist to work with one of the grade levels to improve their guided reading skills. The professional development was spaced over a period of time, and while he attended some of the sessions, he wasn't really attentive to what was going on. This particular grade level had established methods of keeping records that worked well and with which they were comfortable. However, the guest specialist had recommended a drastic change to their methods and since this person was brought in by the principal, the team felt obligated to follow her methods. Rather than ask

Mr. Allen about it, they changed all of their procedures, getting increasingly aggravated by the entire process until the entire situation blew up, and Mr. Allen received visits and emails from the angry teachers. He was stunned that they felt obligated to change their procedures. He reflected, “It really made me think about position power. Because I brought in this person, it was the weight of my position and authority they [the team] felt. That was never my intention. I really had to work on that one because they really felt betrayed.”

Transparency

One thing that continually concerned Mr. Allen was transparency. He felt a real need to make sure that the staff knew he was truthful because he believed it was a direct reflection on his leadership style, trustworthiness, and relationship building. He also wanted that relationship to be two-way. He wanted them to understand he was not hiding anything and to make sure that they felt they could be honest with him.

After one leadership team meeting, he remembered he did not tell them about some new furniture delivered to the school. In reality, the furniture was at no cost. He had gone to the warehouse and located surplus pieces. He was stricken to think that they might think that he was ordering furniture during a significant budget crisis. He said:

I felt good about the meeting. It is interesting to get people’s perspectives and I think they are appreciative. I forgot to tell them we got the furniture just so they didn’t think I went out and bought it. Transparency—that is the thing—I never get feedback and I want to know how they are thinking. I want to know. Do they understand that I am telling them everything up front? Do they understand that my intent is to be transparent? I am trying to help. I have nothing to hide and I want them to know the kind of leader I am. Does that come with time? Does that come with me keeping it swirling in my head all of the time about how I try to do stuff? I mean literally telling them about the furniture—that is what I am thinking about because I wonder if they

are thinking—did he go out and buy the furniture when he is telling us there is no money?

This is a small and seemingly minor example of transparency, yet it highlights the importance that Mr. Allen placed on guaranteeing that his staff understood his motives and intentions. It underscores how fragile relationships and transparency are and how they need continual monitoring and nurturing.

The End of Year Staff Survey

At the end of every other year, the state administers an extensive questionnaire to all staff in all schools regarding a variety of topics that affect each school, the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWC). The NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) makes the results public information through their web site. Within the survey, there are specific questions regarding school leadership and trust. In 2010, Mr. Allen's first year as a principal, the Fern Valley faculty gave the following ratings:

Table 7

Summary of Year-End Staff Survey

Item	% Agree
1. The faculty and leadership have a shared vision	94.4%
2. There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school	80.0%
3. Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them	77.8%
4. The school leadership consistently supports teachers	91.1%

Table 7 Continued

5. Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction	98.2%
6. The school leadership facilitates using data to improve instruction	100.0%
7. Teacher performance is assessed objectively	98.2%
8. Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching	94.7%
9. The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent	96.4%
10. The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school	86.8%
11. The faculty are recognized for their accomplishments	91.1%
12. Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making at this school	72.7%
13. Teachers have the autonomy to make decisions about instruction	74.0%

NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2010

Based on this data, it appears that Mr. Allen succeeded in focusing on data to drive instruction. Of the respondents, 100% indicated that the school leadership facilitates using data to drive instruction and 94.4% indicated that the faculty and leadership have a shared vision for the school. On the other hand, his focus on the essential curriculum and expecting teachers to eliminate their pet projects and activities that did not align with the curriculum possibly resulted in a 74% rating on teachers having autonomy to make instructional decisions.

The scores that were lower were in the area of teachers feeling comfortable raising issues that are important to them (77.8%), there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect (80%), and teachers have influence on decision-making (72.7%).

In one of our last sessions together, I asked Mr. Allen about these results. While overall, he was very pleased with them, he mentioned the scores relating to trust and decision-making as being unsettling for him. I reflected back some of my observations and Mr. Allen provided information that he thought led to these lower scores.

Regarding the question about teachers feeling comfortable raising issues that are important to them (77.8%) and teachers having an influence on decision-making (72.8%). Mr. Allen stated, and I determined from examining leadership team documents, that most of his meetings were primarily downloads of information. Even during his leadership meetings, Mr. Allen was the conveyor of information he wanted to back to the grade level teachers. His leadership team never made decisions about the school. Instead, their primary purpose was to report information to him or disseminate information from him. He rarely asked for opinions or ideas and did not provide a venue for questions and comments.

The other area on the survey that was considerably lower than the majority of responses was the area of trust and mutual respect within the building (77.8%). I mentioned that I often found his office door closed when I arrived at the school and perhaps teachers felt this as distancing. Mr. Allen was surprised by my observation and felt it was inaccurate. I later asked Ms. Winters, the school secretary, and she also believed that his door was usually open unless he was on the phone or eating lunch. Mr. Allen believed that this score on trust and mutual respect was not a reflection of him, but a sense that the staff did not trust each other. He mentioned a few staff members that are known for gossiping and relaying confidential information. He reminded me that the school is a close knit community with a

recent story. He hired a teacher in April (to replace a teacher who resigned) on a Friday afternoon. He said, “When I got to work Monday morning, a teacher was standing in the office waiting for me. She said, I heard you hired someone Friday afternoon. I thought, how did you know that? Now, they did know I was interviewing for the position, but she told me that she sat with her neighbor at a soccer game over the week-end who was a friend of the husband of the person I had just hired! That is how much they talk and I think that is why they really don’t trust each other.”

The third observation that I mentioned to Mr. Allen during our last meeting was his practice to taking phone calls even when he was involved in a conversation with a staff member. He would always ask them to step outside and close the door. It always appeared to me to devalue the person and the conversation. More than once, I saw him finish the phone conversation but never return to his face-to-face conversation. Eventually, the person waiting outside the office would walk away. My observation of this behavior was a surprise to him. He indicated that he was unaware that he did this to his staff and I believe he will continue to reflect on it.

My observation of the trust within the building was that Mr. Allen spoke about building trust and developing relationships, but that he was reserved, reticent, and did not trust easily. He is friendly and outgoing, but he did not relinquish power easily, and therefore, did not build the capacity of his staff. During his first year he did not stretch anyone. He named all chairs of committees such as the Student Support Team and the School Improvement Committee rather than letting them name their own chair. He ran all meetings

and created all agendas. Through document analysis, I determined that all meetings were reports by Mr. Allen and report-outs by groups of teachers. Throughout my observations, I never saw a teacher come into his office with a suggestion or an idea of how to do things different or better. He did not invite this type of conversation with his leadership style.

Implementing Change

Implementing change is the most difficult thing to accomplish as a new administrator (Barth, 2001; Crowe, 2006). It causes anxiety because the new administrator has limited credibility with the staff, no base of relationships to rely on, no clear method or path to articulate a vision, and just feeling newness in strange surroundings. Mr. Allen commented:

You just don't walk in—you have to build relationships and I recognize that. But when I walk out here and see everybody doing what they need to be doing—what I have worked hard to do is not to come in and change something. [Instead I] want to try to get everyone to understand why we are going to do things. The great thing is the building was in great shape, there is great morale, the scores were good—there were so many good things. It's just that you just want to make it yours—that is why we do what we do. As a new principal you go in and look for the things that you can change—what do I want to, what do I value, what do I not value—or what's a priority or essential.

In a conversation with Ms. Northwoods, Mr. Allen voiced his concerns about how to begin articulating his expectations. The following conversation describes her responses to his concerns.

Ms. Northwoods: This is your school now and yes, they've been doing it this way—but but it's your school.

Mr. Allen: Yes, but it is still scary. You're trying to figure it out and you know that all eyes are on you

Ms. Northwoods: Most people are waiting, you're different, a different principal.

Mr. Allen: Yeah, here he comes. What pushes his buttons and what does not?

Ms. Northwoods: So let them know. I think my feeling is, when your new and you want to make changes—it's like in your classroom—sometimes you have to let things go but maybe things you feel really strongly about, even if they've been doing them here forever, what you want to change, you have to let them know.

Mr. Allen: Well, it is going to be a process and I am going to roll it out. It is my expectation—I can say it and mandate it or I can set an expectation and I think that with time it will solidify more.

Mr. Allen continued to grapple with the balance between initiating change and building relationships. He realized that true change would not be possible without a foundation of trust, transparency, and solid relationships. Six months after becoming principal he stated:

Well, I am, and I hope I am on the right track with that, I am trying to keep it simple. I've really gone back to that keep it simple stupid, because really and truly, there is power in that. Particularly right now in just trying to set up and build relationships. And all of this piece, it is wearing me out, but what I know about myself is that it really gives me energy. This is what I love to do. What I have worked hard to do is not to come in and change something but instead, come in to try to get everyone to understand why we are going to do things. I wake up in the morning and think—I want to do this, this and this and as I sit here and talk about it, we are just going to have to play some of it out and develop relationships—because we are all new.

Mr. Allen began his career as a principal at a school that was steeped in tradition and history. Many of the staff had been at the school for over twenty years and as Barth (2001) claims, they believed, “This is the way we do things around here.” Finding the right path that combined honoring the past and setting a new course for the future while modeling open relationships and building trust consumed a great deal of his emotional time and energy.

Unknowingly, however, he was following the advice of Shipman, Queen, and Peel (2007).

They suggested a novice principal respect the past and pick their battles.

Biggest Challenges

While Mr. Allen grappled with developing relationships, locating the teacher-leaders within the school, building leadership capacity, and articulating a vision, by far the biggest challenge he faced was staffing:

I think the biggest piece was staffing. The staffing plan was due the first week I was there—not knowing people, just putting names down on paper. Just trying to figure out who was going to be where and I lost 33-34 staff members due to transfers, leaving, terminating contracts, and some just choosing to stay home with their kids. I had experiences across the board [at my previous school.] I knew about staffing and budgets but that was still way over my head – that is so overwhelming for me. I would say the staffing and budget, as number one and two, have just been the most overwhelming.

The budgeting process was the second biggest challenge Mr. Allen faced during his first year. The national budget crisis, which had trickled down to affect both the state and local school budgets, compounded Mr. Allen's learning curve. The district had not fully funded each school based on previous dollar allocations at the beginning of the school year. In addition, his secretary was also new and did not understand all of the state and local regulations surrounding the budget. Additionally, he had multiple budgets to manage. Besides the normal school budget with multiple funding sources, he had a before-school budget, an after-school budget, and a Title I budget. He commented:

[This is] overwhelming me. I don't quite understand it. I am going to rely on people. The former AP did the budget last year and she is going to come over and help me on Thursday try to figure out. I am going to have to know how many employees I am going to have to have and I have to go in and put it into a form that calculates all of

their costs for the year. The budget for the before and after school is flexible—granted—but—it is causing me some stress. I don't know the process. I have never worked with before and after school—it's all brand new. I am also a little concerned about understanding which of my teachers—I can get through this process but it is something that is on my head—is highly qualified. Because I am Title I, I have to communicate to all of the parents if I have a non-HQ teacher. I have to send a letter to all of my parents saying this teacher is not HQ and then I have to offer them the credentials of every staff member in the building. They do offer a pre-form letter but it opens a can of worms and I just want to communicate that in an effective way so I don't open a can of worms. So all of that is going through my head.

The myriad of reports and directives that flowed from Central Office was another hurdle for Mr. Allen. As an assistant principal, he had been shielded from this continual onslaught of requirements and emails. He had difficulty understanding staffing reports and had to learn to juggle months of employment. He was expected to make staffing predictions with limited or no background knowledge of either this task or the school.

Class size and waivers were another challenge for Mr. Allen. As students enrolled at the beginning of the year, they inflated class sizes beyond the state-prescribed limit. However, with additional students, often schools receive additional teacher allotments. Learning to balance this was another learning situation for Mr. Allen. During the first week of school, he commented:

Waivers—the waivers—I am going to have to do waivers for every grade level but I think I will be able to hire two more teachers—fourth and I am not sure where to put the other. Right now, I have five classes per grade level. I hired the extra fifth grade person four days before school started. You know, they say you are not supposed to let anyone on your property until they are processed and I kept calling Human Resources. They would tell me, I don't know why she isn't showing up, she is showing up as processed on my stuff. So I said come on to work. She came that Monday and she was here the whole time.

Finally, Mr. Allen talked about all the miscellaneous jobs that he did not expect, but he became involved in nevertheless. “I have brought my personal power washer up here to get the building ready. I have been working with the custodians—they are getting down to the details.” He often found the intensity of the work and the need to multi-task to be a challenge. “This is me sitting here trying to write these cards for these gift bags with this one simple statement, is indicative of the job of the principal—like the perfect analogy. I have been trying to write these cards for thirty minutes and that is how your day is, from sunup to sundown—you start—you stop... You can’t do this job if you can’t multi-task, if you are not half crazy—because as I am on the phone, I am thinking I have to do this and that.”

Summary

This chapter highlights the variety of challenges articulated by the new principal. Throughout the first year, he continually worked on building relationships, trust, and transparency. The next chapter is devoted to a discussion of Mr. Allen’s challenge to understand and navigate through the existing school culture through the eyes of the new principal, the teachers, and his immediate supervisor.

*It's the place—the place is new—it's the culture—that culture is so big—it's huge—it can make you or break you.
New Principal, 2009*

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SCHOOL CULTURE

The Perspective of the New Principal

A school culture is probably the hardest thing to categorize or conceptualize, yet it is the most powerful force within a school (Barth, 2001). Therefore, it is no surprise that the culture of the school was a major concern to Mr. Allen. He stated:

It's the place—the place is new—it's the culture—that culture is so big—it's huge—it can make you or break you. This [the new school and the position] is a little bit overwhelming. I had been at the same place for so many years and I am coming to a new place and I am a little bit scared, and I understand all of those feelings. I remember I was here for two days and was walking down the hall and thought I have no idea how they do car pool—I don't even know what door they go out of! I was the person in the building who knew the least.

One important thing that Mr. Allen needed to do as the new principal was to understand the staff's motivations behind their actions—while at the same time, attempt to convey his philosophy. Mr. Allen related this story about discovering the existing culture:

I had an interesting experience one day. I was coming back from a meeting about 2:00 and there was one of my kindergarten teachers getting in her car. I was wondering where she was going. Now we do have a policy that they can sign in and out and in my mind—that is kind of a permission—so I said, 'Did you sign out?' And she said, 'Oh no, I forgot, but I am going to Starbucks—do you want a cup of coffee?' A teacher—asking the principal after I had only been there for three weeks—when she is supposed to be in the classroom—when there are children in her room. I was so floored, I didn't do anything, I didn't know how to react. But I think I made my point—I asked her if she signed out. But I thought to myself, why would she think this is an okay thing to do? These are the things I will have to monitor and figure out because they are culture pieces.

Learning who the key players are within a school is one of the lessons that Mr. Allen learned. Mr. Allen reflected, "...you have to be mindful because the smallest little thing. I have these four or five folks that are watching me and it only takes one thing." Mr. Allen realized this early in his tenure at Fern Valley Elementary School. During a teacher interview, a veteran teacher stated:

The culture—this school has been at this location for 22 years [and has] a very established culture and we would like to think it is a good one and we try to keep that, you know. This was the original Fern Valley Elementary School that we started over at the old school and [it still has] a lot of old home town feeling. Even though we have [names several schools in the immediate vicinity] this is the one with that was pretty established and I think he recognized that and appreciated that because and the fact that we have a lot of connections to the public in the community. I think he has decided to build on that and not break that apart, which is a good thing.

This sentiment was echoed by a teacher new to the school:

"Since he is a first year principal he just isn't coming in and barking orders. He does ask for people's input and I think he is taking it slow. I see that he does want to make some changes as far as curriculum and best practices. I haven't seen where he has mandated a bunch of changes. I think for this school that may be the best position to take because from what I have heard, it is very traditional [and] change is hard—it is just a different culture. I kind of feel like I have stepped back to when I was in school and, not that that's bad, people come and they stay here for a long time it seems.

Mr. Allen understands this culture and history. He stated:

Several of the teachers have spent their entire careers at this school. One teacher is considered the matriarch of the building—really she is—Fern Valley women's club, sells lunches from the women's club, makes sure we all have BBQ plates from the Methodist Church—you know—that is where that comes from – it's the culture of the school. And they are all very connected to each other and the community. They all go to church together and there are some who are very beloved in the community. But it is also a sense of entitlement that I feel when I talk to them—this is their school, it belongs to them.

As a new administrator, Mr. Allen found that he had to tread lightly around these relationships, to sit back and watch them unfold and interplay. Even as he discovered routines and beliefs, such as the coffee incident that he wanted to change, he felt compelled to move slowly and cautiously. Mr. Allen was thoughtful and reflective:

I think that is interesting because it makes me reflect—I think back because I was at my previous school for eleven years—that is a good while—not 20 or 25 years, but I wonder if I brought any of that business. Because I think it is a sense of honor that you bring to a school—traditions and cultures—sometimes it becomes a part of you and you can't see the forest for the trees. I look and think about that—it's not that they don't want to come along with me, it's a fear of who am I and what am I going to do. They think—I love this place so much that I don't want you to come in and tear it up. And I know there are some things I am going to do where I will meet some resistance.

You just don't walk in – you have to build relationships – but when I walk out here and see everybody doing what they need to be doing – what I have worked hard to do is not to come in and change something. Instead I want to try to get everyone to understand why we are going to do things. And the great thing is the building was in great shape, there is great morale, the scores were good—there were so many good things—it's just that you just want to make it yours—that is why we do what we do.

Mr. Allen was realistic about the staff and his vision for the school. After the opening leadership meeting, he commented:

“I envision that the leadership team—my goal would be that this time next year when we do this it will look totally different—maybe not totally but I think I would like the conversation to be different. It will be interesting. I would like them to have more conversation and do more problem solving and more higher, deeper—digging a little deeper—especially in the data. I want them to see themselves as learners—to help them understand that piece.

Mr. Allen employed the use of metaphors at his opening faculty meeting to convey his ideas of collaboration, unity, and culture. He used a rubber band to represent team building and working together. At his opening faculty meeting he placed an assortment of

rubber bands on each table. He had other items on the table as well – ribbon, paper clips and a pile of sticks. He asked, “What is the best thing to hold these sticks together?” When they agreed it was the rubber band, he continued, “For diversity – it takes all types of rubber bands to do different jobs. Big rubber bands, small rubber bands fat rubber bands, skinny rubber bands, different color rubber bands.” He talked about the pros and cons of rubber bands. “They can hurt you, they can cause injury, they can get old and break or they bundle things together, they are tight and bring cohesiveness.” He asked them to bring the discussion to the team level. “What kind of rubber bands do they need? Did they need other ones to get the job done? Do they always need a rubber band or do they need other tools? What about positive tension – is that a good thing?” He described putting tension on the rubber band. “You have to do something with it to get it to work like hold papers. If it just lies there – it does nothing. But if you put too much tension on it, it will break. If you ever hear the phrase from me or anyone – my rubber band is stretched as tight as it will stretch today – that means, hmmm, you better back off.” The rubber band metaphor was his symbolic method of conveying his beliefs about school culture in a positive way. As much energy as I watched him put into locating the rubber band metaphor and planning the meeting, I never heard him or any of the staff refer to it throughout the remainder of the year.

The Perspective of the Teachers at the Beginning of the Year

While Mr. Allen was attempting to navigate the culture, the teachers were keenly aware of the new principal and their expectations. In a focus group at the beginning of the year (see Appendix A for the focus group protocol), a group of teachers with varied years of

teaching experience and varied years of experience at Fern Valley elementary School commented on their expectations:

I want someone who is fair.

And someone who is not going to do too many changes right away. You know, I have been through a lot of principals—and you know, it is easier if you slide the faculty and staff into your wishes, as opposed to bam! Hitting them with it. And it does make a difference—it makes a big difference, because I have had it both ways. Makes it a heck of a lot easier.

That is what I like about principals coming in—in January, February. The school can maintain very often on its own and the principals have an opportunity to walk around, get a feel for the atmosphere of the school, get to know teachers individually just like we get to know the children in our rooms as individuals. It is nice for the principals to get to know the teachers as individuals.

Someone who will listen to the staff's suggestions—not necessarily follows them—but at least listen to them.

Yes, and he has asked me—several times for suggestions.

He has. He has come around and you know, said what do you think...and I think I appreciate that, having been here the longest – there are only three other teachers who have been here about the same time.

I think it is the same philosophy kind of back within our classroom. When you build a rapport with those children and they learn to trust you, they will do anything for you and I think having an administrator approach it the same way. As long as we know that we are being listened to, we can trust him and he has come in and built a rapport first, you know, with his staff. Then you have people very willing to do what he would like.

This conversation with the staff indicated that they were willing to give Mr. Allen a chance to prove himself as a principal. They definitely gave me the impression that they knew the school and its culture and were appreciative that he was asking questions and looking to them for guidance. They wanted him to learn their way of doing things. .

In response to a question regarding changes that Mr. Allen made and if he honored the existing culture, the teachers responded:

To a point, I think he has honored what was here—but he does have his own ideas of how he wants things—like everybody does—and we have seen some changes. But I am one of those people who well, we'll go with it—we're flexible.

I kind of feel like the major issues as far as expectations for curriculum and following the curriculum, that hasn't changed a lot, that was already in place. We had those high expectations.

He did make some changes – like order—like in the hallway, walking on the third block, single file—changing the route of car pool in the morning, kids coming this way rather than down the main hall, kids taking breakfast back to the rooms in the morning.

Yes—but just being able to see [understand] as an administrator some of these small changes have a significant impact [on the staff and the school].

And I think some of these changes have been because of the budget—we don't have as many T.A.s who can cover the morning breakfast duty area so they are being sent to their rooms. Last year we had two staff down there supervising breakfast.

We are the 5th grade, we are right on that hall, so I'd prefer they come back to the classroom because a lot of times they can bring it back to the rooms, work on their morning work, get checked in—and things of that sort. Many times in the past we have had them come back anyhow. My question was—the kindergarteners are the furthest away. Are they taking their breakfast back to their rooms? Kind of scary—never having taught kindergarten, I don't know if they are able to make it down there all of the way.

I think that was the grade level that voiced the loudest—was the kindergarten. And his response was, let's try it and if it doesn't work we will look at it again. So he did acknowledge their concerns and said if it does become an issue or if they can't do it, then we will look at something else.

So the level of change is not curriculum or anything like that but it is those minor details that help things flow smoother—hopefully—with the budget cuts and I don't know about you guys, but it works fine.

And you know, kind of changing a little bit as far as being a new principal goes, I have never had the opportunity to work with a first year principal. All of the principals I have worked with had experience so some of my observations are due to his personality and part to being a new principal.

Now [the previous principal] was a new principal. He had been a principal for a year before I came here. This is my 6th year here, so he had one-year experience, which is still not a lot, but their personalities are different. MR. ALLEN is very much a stickler, from what I have observed, for rules and rule following and he wants X, Y, and Z and it needs to be in that order and I see him very, and again, it is his personality or is it being a first year principal wanting to be top of everything all of the time. I see him as micro-managing a lot of stuff that I think as the years go, he will start to let go of some or relax a little bit more. I don't know that might just be his personality—so I am not sure.

We had a principal at the old school that came to this school with us. He was the same way. He was by-the-book. He was a fantastic principal and to this day I think the world of him, but he was—everything was by-the-book, there was no leeway, but that was his personality—so we shall see. And you are right. I think it is his way, from what I have seen of Mr. Allen, of making sure he knows what is going on.

And being aware of everything so he doesn't miss something.

And I would think as a first year principal, you would want your hand in every single thing that is going on so you know. And I also go back to learning teachers as individuals. You know, he doesn't know who is and who isn't performing at the level they should be and the only way he can know is to constantly be in to everything.

By far this was one of the most interesting interactions I had with the teachers. I was amazed by their definition of change and the amount of time they devoted to discussing the changes in how the students walked in the hall and how they ate breakfast in the morning. In observing and listening to Mr. Allen, he was concerned and focused on changes to the delivery of the curriculum and the minor changes of hallway behavior and breakfast delivery were not even on his radar. It reinforced to me that if the teachers were stuck on these

perceived minor procedural changes, then truly implementing significant curricular changes is very difficult.

Concerning Mr. Allen's knowledge regarding specific program areas, the teachers responded:

He is not real knowledgeable about [specific program area] but is totally eager to learn. He comes to us for advice and he comes to us for information. He is very involved and there is a lot of two-way conversation so I am actually learning more about [specific program area]. The previous principal took care of a lot of things for us. He handled the budget and he handled the some of the county stuff. We are handling that now, with Mr. Allen's input. He is very hands on and supportive, so I personally really like that.

He is very knowledgeable in technology but he will come to me and ask me what do you think we should do in this situation or what is the best way to distribute these laptops, or kind of software should we purchase. He is constantly asking what do you think we should do or what do you think we need?

Being the newest member of the staff, yet being responsible for everything that happens in the building is a common experience for a new principal (Crow, 2006). This conversation with the teachers reinforced their feeling that he was willing to listen and to ask questions. He was also willing to disperse some responsibilities of program management to the teachers, for which they were pleased and felt he trusted them as professionals. In reality, Mr. Allen mentioned that the teachers at this previous school handled that task and he did not have the time to do it. Relating to this notion of building trust, the teachers responded:

I feel very comfortable [talking to him]. If there is anything I want to discuss or ask or question, I wouldn't hesitate to knock on his door and have a conversation.

I think in a principal, you were talking about qualities or expectations, that one is that they be knowledgeable in all areas of administration and the county and county expectations. We talked about him being a rule follower, so we know as a staff, that

when he does make a decision that it is an educated, well-informed decision that has been made in the best interest of us and our school and he has checked out all of the options and he knows everything necessary to make that decision and I think we need that trust in an administrator.

Well, I think I think they earn trust by going around and talking to people and asking their advice.

But it is not like he will always take your advice. He wants your advice, but he may think there is something else and he will do that. I think he really welcomes your advice, he really considers it, and he is going to make his best decision.

I think part of the problem is we see our needs and our wants and stuff and he sees the whole picture.

Also, like in staff meetings, when he stands up and when he shares information and he talks about his principal meetings and this is coming from the county and these are the policies and he does exhibit his knowledge that way and he know what he is talking about.

I found the most fascinating thing about the teacher conversation regarding trust was that they never talked about interpersonal trust. They discussed trust in terms of Mr. Allen knowing district wide policies and procedures and trusting him to do the right thing for the whole school. Mr. Allen, however, when talking about trust, was concerned about trusting interpersonal relationships. I could not determine if it was my questioning that led them to this discussion or just a significant divide in opinions and viewpoints. I attempted to move the conversation from trust to transparency for greater clarification. Concerning transparency, the teachers responded:

I think he is very transparent. I think he is what we think he is—what he presents himself to be. He is a very friendly, talkative, and outgoing.

But he is very intelligent and that also comes through. I think he is a very smart man. He is really into the data. I think he knows what it really says about our school. He

kind of has the best of both worlds. He can relate on a personal level but I think he is very smart.

And I don't think that is something you find in most principals. You might find someone who is an amazing administrator in the intellectual part but really lacks people skills or you have somebody who everyone dearly loves, is a great person but there not sure what is going on in the county.

I know there were some upset people at the beginning of the year—with him—for not getting information out soon enough and quick enough about job placement. But when you look at what he had to overcome, being a first year principal, having a staff that has been stripped and having to replace all of these key people and he had some much on him, he has done a great job.

I think for his first year as a principal he really had some obstacles to overcome. I think it has been more challenging than some other first year principal's experience. You know, when [the previous principal] first came in, it was to a well-run school. He just slipped right in to an experienced staff and an experienced office—because our principal retired so she didn't take anyone with her.

As this conversation unfolded, I again felt that Mr. Allen's desire for transparency was different than the teachers' perceptions of his transparency. I can only speculate on the reasons for this. Possibly since this was a conversation with the teachers at the beginning of his tenure as principal, he had not had time to articulate his vision and desires. Or perhaps, they were unfamiliar with this type of leadership style from their experiences with previous principals. Another reason might have been my questioning and/or lack of clarity concerning the question. Regardless, their responses were more global (whole school) rather than focused on transparency in developing and maintaining personal relationships. When I transitioned the conversation to the school climate, they had very few comments.

I think it is getting better. I think the dust is settling from the upheaval of the move and all of that stuff. I think people are still holding back a little, they are still a little

reserved about having an opinion but I think it is getting back to more of the feeling of a smaller school and more of closeness.

Again, interestingly, the one comment regarding school climate that I was able to get concerned the upheaval of so many staff leaving the school with the former principal. They expressed some initial cautiousness with articulating opinions, which really relates back to a lack of trust and openness, but they were primarily focused on the upheaval caused by the former principal leaving with so many key staff. However, this cautiousness was confirmed by the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey with only 77% agreeing that they feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.

I asked the group of teachers what advice they had for Mr. Allen as he began his journey as their new principal. They responded:

Just to keep in mind that this is a hometown school and that everybody needs to be informed which includes the community because we are part of that in a big way and keep the home town feeling. And remember that we take our jobs seriously, for our students, want the best for our faculty—just keep that in mind that we want the best.

I would probably tell him to keep doing what he is doing, to keep those communication open and I know that principals, you see it more in some than others, form their little cliques of people that they tend to go to and listen to the most. I have kind of seen that in just one situation [already] and probably just need to be real careful and not do that.

I am going along with what she was saying, just keep those lines of communication open and keep listening what the staff wants, not necessarily what we want, but just keep listening.

I do like the fact that the principal is someone who does ask for input but also someone who can and will make decisions and not care about being popular if it is the right decision for kids. Someone who is hands on and you see in the building a lot and knows the teachers and the kids.

The message from the teachers' advice to Mr. Allen was to listen to them, respect them for their knowledge, and to honor the traditions and history of the school. I surmised from their responses that they did not want or believe that significant changes were needed. An additional observation from their discussion was that their comments were in direct relation to the culture created by and actions of the previous principal. While it is not my intent in this study to analyze or critique these behaviors, it is important for a new principal to understand the culture created by the former principal (Lewis & Murphy, 2008; Walker & Qian, 2006).

Consistently, their conversations revolved around policies and procedures. There was no conversation about student achievement, curriculum, or learning. This confirmed comments that Mr. Allen had made regarding the teaching within the school. He said, "We need to begin focusing on response to interventions and research-based instruction. This will be a new conversation for the teachers. I think some [teachers] will eat it up and some will meet it with resistance. It is the same ones who are baking plaster-of-paris dinosaurs in the oven."

The Perspectives of the Teachers at the End of the Year

In the final teacher focus group at the end of the year, the teachers responded that they thought over all it was a great year. In retrospect, I thought this was interesting since the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey indicated lower teacher agreement in the areas of trust (80%) and teacher-leadership (72.7%). However, these results were not available when I met with the teachers so I was not able to question them about the survey results. However,

as a researcher, I can make some suggestions as to this discrepancy. First, at the end of the year, teachers typically judge their success by their individual classroom end-of-grade assessment results. The results for Fern Valley were good, with the school achieving high growth. This often overshadows other problems encountered throughout the year. Second, throughout the year, the staff encountered several issues of interpersonal relationships between teachers which had nothing to do with Mr. Allen or his leadership of the school. It really had more to do with perceived teacher competency and the relationships among staff members, so these issues might not reflect back on Mr. Allen. Third, Mr. Allen honored the current culture of the school in many respects. He pushed on a few teachers individually, but they were not part of the focus group and the teachers involved in the group were not aware of these situations. Over all, the teachers were happy and enthusiastic about talking about their year with Mr. Allen. When asked about the highlights of the year, the first topic mentioned by the teachers was Mr. Allen's continual focus on student achievement:

He put a tremendous effort into refocusing and tweaking us on our standard course of study—which we were doing anyway—but I think he is more research driven and data driven and it was constantly there—not just once in a while—but constantly the topic of discussion.

His unwavering focus on student achievement and the use of data is reflected in the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Ninety four percent of the teachers indicated that the faculty and administration had a shared vision. Ninety eight percent of the faculty indicated that they were held to high standards. It is clear that Mr. Allen was successful in articulating his vision and the teachers internalized it, felt it, and could respond to it. A

follow-up question was the teacher's response to the data wall that Mr. Allen asked the teachers to create.

I like it because I am a visual person—I can see the growth and it makes me more aware of children than need help.

It is one thing to see it on paper, but it is another thing to see it visually. You see those children who are not making the benchmarks—you aren't guessing. Still another point of view, I know some of the teachers were opposed to it—it was not welcomed wholeheartedly by everyone. But we knew that he really wanted it. He took us to another school to look at their data wall, so we knew we were going to do it.

I was particularly intrigued about the data board conversation, because there was stronger opposition to the board than what was reflected in their comments. During my observations when Mr. Allen was introducing it, many teachers were not in favor of it. Snippets of conversations among teachers that I was able to hear included comments such as: “This is just extra work.” “Parents are going to be able to identify their children and not understand it—there will be too many questions.” “I really don't want my data plastered up for everyone else to see it.” Ultimately, Mr. Allen's desire for a data wall prevailed. The teachers were taken to a neighboring school to look at a data wall before creating their own. The teacher field trip allayed many concerns and when the wall finally went up, there was enthusiasm and honest conversation about student achievement.

I asked the teacher group what they thought were Mr. Allen's biggest challenges throughout the year. They responded:

I think his biggest challenge is the quality. He wants to be a really quality principal in all aspects of his job—so he tries to do it all and tries to know all and be a part of all and I think that has been hard—I think part of it has taken him out of the classroom. I

noticed at the beginning of the year he was in our room almost every morning—or every other morning—just passing through—just to say hi and now, he popped in the other day for the first time in at least two months. So it has really taken him out of the classroom which I would like to see more of next year—hopefully he has gotten through that first year and I would like to see him just pop in more in the classroom.

At the beginning of the year he said, I will do the prior approvals for Title 1—and I said, Really? Because other principals don't do all that and then later he was like—I am going to have to trust you with that—so he kind of evolved into knowing what he could let go of—he could trust some other people and that we wouldn't let him down.

So I guess that would have been his biggest challenge that year—getting to know the people and trust that they are going to do their job up to those standards that he expects.

And trust is a huge thing. All it takes is to run into one or two teachers that do not have the same standards and expectations that you do kind of puts in the back of your head—are they all like that? He really needs to get to know teachers as individuals.

In digesting their comments, I find it interesting that the biggest challenges had nothing to do with the teachers themselves. The teacher comments revolved around learning district policies and procedures and all the parts of the job within the school. Two teachers brought up trust and relationships as being a challenge. In retrospect, I did not ask if he was successful in meeting these challenges, but the upbeat and positive tone of the entire meeting led me to believe that they thought he was. It wasn't until I reviewed the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey results concerning building trust (80%) that I became less confident in their responses. However, the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey does not specify trust between administration and the staff versus trust among the staff. It can be interpreted in multiple ways which leaves me to want additional information about this important aspect of a school.

When asked about the climate at the school, the teachers responded:

I think it has gotten a lot better. I think at the beginning, everyone was really hesitant with a new principal coming in and he really did change quite a few things—very different from the previous principal—so I think there were a lot of people who were not as accepting at the beginning—but he has earned some trust from a lot of teachers and it has gotten a lot better.

He didn't make big changes, just small ones. He changed small rules—like playground rules—like where the teachers need to be circulating—things that [the previous principal] had not put into place.

Because he did step into a school with high academic standards so he didn't have to make big changes.

And sometimes I think, with a new principal coming in—some of those changes right or wrong—or for the safety of the school—they are perceived as someone trying to be in control. It is not, those chairs should not been out on the playground to begin with and so he is coming in and reinstating what should have been going on anyway in our school—it is he is coming in and trying to control everything.

But now, overall, things are better. With him, with the academic push, it is constantly there all of the time—it did raise the level of stress—a lot. Now, if that is what needs to happen to achieve the goals that you need—that maybe what happens—but it has been extremely stressful.

I don't think it helped that like SST changed this year with all of the progress monitoring and our PLCs have changed—it is all kid talk and data driven—it all just came with him at the same time.

But now SST meetings run much smoother—it has been a good change.

And kid talk, we had gotten away from that—we had gotten away from kid talk because we had no time. Now we have gone back to it and the PLTs have given us time to talk. We have needed each other—we have to have that support of our peers—and that is one thing that Mr. Allen has been very supportive of and very understanding—the pressures that we are under or the pressure that we have had—and he offers those words of encouragement.

I feel very comfortable talking to him. He has been there—in the classroom. He knows the stress level that can come and he is very open minded and willing to listen.

He does a really nice job of celebrating. He took cookies to rooms that scored the highest on their common assessments.

The bottom line is he had to trust us and we had to learn to trust him.

My understanding of the challenges facing a novice principal was expanded by talking to the teachers and listening to their conversations. However, it became clearer to me during our conversations, that the teachers have one perspective of the position and that they filter everything through their lens of their classroom and their personal interactions. They definitely want to stay in their comfort zone and procedural changes are difficult for them. They mentioned Mr. Allen's focus on curriculum, student learning, and data and how it created additional stress throughout the year. They framed this conversation about always having high standards and did not equate his focus as a change in focus or vision like they did in their conversation about how students walked through the halls. Finally, immediately following the teacher comment about additional stress relating to student achievement, another teacher commented on the nice job Mr. Allen did in celebrating their achievements.

The Perspective of the Area Superintendent

The Area Superintendent is responsible for hiring and supporting all the principals within a specific region of the county. The Area Superintendent responsible for Mr. Allen, Mr. George Leonard, has extensive experience as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. He was named principal of the year for the entire county shortly before his promotion to area superintendent. Mr. Leonard has a reputation in the county for being very attentive to the needs of his principals, parents, and the community.

Our conversation occurred about midway through the school year (see Appendix B for the area superintendent interview protocol and questions). By then, Mr. Allen had encountered some significant problems which the area superintendent had helped him navigate. Mr. Leonard explained that he was extremely pleased with Mr. Allen and his enthusiasm for the position and the school. He realized that Mr. Allen faced a steep learning curve, but so far, he had proven to be a thoughtful, resourceful, and an excellent leader.

He explained that the process of choosing a new principal for a particular school is an extensive process. Once an opening occurs, Mr. Leonard posts it on the district web site so that applicants can apply for the position. Mr. Leonard makes several visits to the school to meet with staff as a group and then the parents as a group to determine the characteristics they desire of the new principal. He then reviews potential applications and interviews candidates that possess these characteristics. He pays special attention to the desires of the school and specifically frames his interview questions to gauge the potential match of applicant and the school community.

The responses of the sessions from the school community input sessions indicated that they were looking for someone who could excel at developing relationships and honor the current school culture. This was a very strong requirement since the staff and parents felt very passionate about their existing school culture. They wanted someone who would fit in and continue the good work they believed they had accomplished. Mr. Leonard did not anticipate any extraordinary problems at the school for the new principal. He believed the

former principal had done an excellent job and the new principal would be able to continue and extend the work.

Mr. Leonard discussed his desire to find the right match between the new principal and the school. While he was concerned that they were a fit, he never wanted to put a new principal in place who would be the same as the previous principal. He thought it was important for the school community to stretch and grow and having a new principal was an opportunity for this to happen.

He felt that Mr. Allen was a good match for Fern Valley Elementary School. He was very gregarious and friendly. He was well spoken and knowledgeable about using data to inform instruction and very thoughtful in his approach to challenges. Mr. Allen had distinguished himself as an assistant principal in his knowledge of curriculum and his ability to work with people. He was very well respected and genuinely liked by his school staff and the community.

He was aware that Mr. Allen had confronted an array of problems, not usual for a first year principal. He thought that Mr. Allen had done an excellent job of navigating through some very difficult waters and had done everything possible to support him. The school system requires that he appoint an unpaid coach to work with all new principals and he had chosen a principal from a nearby school who is an excellent administrator. Her outward demeanor is reserved, but she is known to be helpful and collegial. To support Mr. Allen, he often employed the coach to visit Mr. Allen during some of those extremely difficult times.

He has knowledge of Mr. Allen's effectiveness as a new principal both through anecdotal stories from parents and staff and from working closely with Mr. Allen during the first year. Additionally, he has common assessment data from the school that indicates the students are achieving at a higher than average rate. Currently, Mr. Leonard believes that Mr. Allen has done an excellent job as a first year administrator. The system requires that he conduct a survey of staff members at the conclusion of Mr. Allen's second year. At that time, he will share this information with Mr. Allen.

The Perspective of the New Principal's Coach

This is the first year that the Wayside School System is using the coaching model to assist a novice principal acclimate to their position. The director of the coaching program did not begin training the coaches until September, several months after Mr. Allen began his principalship. Therefore, Ms. Rabbitt, Mr. Allen's assigned coach, did not visit him until he had been in the position for six months.

During my observations, I was at the school multiple times when Mr. Allen met with his coach, Ms. Rabbitt. I also made an appointment with her and visited her at her school to talk to her about her role as a coach. Ms. Rabbitt, indicated that they met monthly, but talked on the phone more often. She said they talked about everything, from the simplest of things to the more complex. At their first meeting, Mr. Allen's first question was how to limit sidebar conversations during faculty meetings. As they continued to meet, his questions deepened and began to revolve around budgeting, staffing, student data, and human resource issues.

Ms. Rabbitt believes that it has been helpful for Mr. Allen and good for her. She said, "I think as a principal, you seek out your coach and then people you worked with or people you have a good relationships with—he gets a different [perspective] from different angles – I think it is what we do naturally. Our relationship has given him the freedom to pick up the phone and call—we don't have the answers; we just have to guide with questions."

Ms. Rabbitt reiterated that the first issue he faced was the loneliness of the position. She commented, "He doesn't have a strong group at the school to rely on. Many of the teachers are really entrenched—you know, dealing with staff who have been [at the school] for years—and could cause some dissention if they decided to do that." She thought his other challenge was his tendency to want things fixed right now. "He wants everything fixed and perfect and in this job, that just doesn't happen. He has had to learn to reflect and be patient. It has been hard for him."

I have known Mr. Allen's coach as a principal colleague for several years. My impression of her is that she is an excellent principal and well-liked by her staff and parents. She is a quiet person who is thoughtful, detail oriented, and asks good questions. However I did not observe a committed relationship develop between Ms. Rabbitt and Mr. Allen.

I do not think this was the fault of either Ms. Rabbitt or Mr. Allen. They were friends before she was named his coach and they remain friends today. I believe it was the fault of this particular coaching model. The first problem was that Mr. Allen did not have a coach for the first six months. I have observed that, in order to be effective, the coach should

practically walk into the building with the novice principal on the first day. The contact needs to be more intensive throughout the year. Arbitrarily determining a once-a-month contact (either in person, through email, or by phone) does not develop the relationship necessary to support the new principal. During my observations of Mr. Allen, when he confronted a problem, he never said “I think I will call Mr. Rabbitt and ask her what I should do.” In fact, the only enduring relationship that I witnessed was between Mr. Allen’s and Ms. Rabbitt’s secretaries. They were introduced to each other during Mr. Allen’s and Ms. Rabbitt’s first meeting because Mr. Allen had questions about the budget. Their relationship grew into frequent phone calls and visits as Mr. Allen’s secretary learned her job.

Summary

Chapter Seven highlighted the views of the school culture from the perspective of the new principal, the teachers, the area superintendent, and the assigned principal’s coach. Within their comments it is easy to discern the overt and the covert aspects of a school culture and why understanding, assimilating into it, and attempting to change it is treacherous terrain for a new principal. Chapter Eight highlights several days at Fern Valley Elementary School throughout Mr. Allen’s first year as principal.

*I guess it is all a journey and we are all on it.
A New Principal, 2009*

CHAPTER EIGHT

DAYS IN THE LIFE OF A NEW PRINCIPAL

Introduction

In this chapter, I present snapshots of several days in the life of a novice principal throughout their first year. These snapshots highlight the variety of challenges that confront a new principal and how there is often no preparation that can groom a novice principal for the variety and intensity of tasks they confront.

The Middle of the Summer

The day begins with Mr. Allen working on class lists with his data manager, Ms. Edwards. They are going through each grade level student by student and placing them with various teachers. He is considering the needs of each child and requests from parents. Additionally, he is attempting to balance each class by gender and ethnicity. “What I did was ask the teachers for a starting point and now I am shuffling—trying to balance. This is complicated.” Ms. Edwards needs to leave school early afternoon because her son is sick. They have finished two grade levels.

At 11:00 am he starts working on staffing and the budget. He asks Ms. Winters, his secretary, to join him in his office. He reviews the open positions, his recent hires, and then talks about the extra furniture he has sent back to the warehouse. “They came and got it yesterday. We only have a little load left.”

Ms. Winters sits down and they begin reviewing the budget. She tells him that she is working on keying in the supply order. The first thing they discuss is the bill for the copiers. “We have some money in contract services but we will need to add to that so we have to move money to pay for the rest of the copier bill.” Mr. Allen mentions that he thinks he is still being charged for the previous principal’s phone. “It is a mess that I still have to figure out.” They discuss a paper order and the remaining money. “I don’t know what I am going to do about paper. I will be able to order one more time and then we can make the copies – we just won’t have paper. I still need to figure that out.”

Ms. Edwards returns with more information about several students. She has looked up their folders to determine background information so they can be placed correctly. Ms. Winters leaves and Mr. Allen resumes working on class lists with the data manager. Mr. Allen reminds Ms. Edwards that she needs to give the rosters to the Special Education teachers for their review. “When I move the kids around, I don’t really know who they are so they will look at them. The process is really several layers of review.”

The conversation continues until 12:30 pm. Mr. Allen tells Ms Edwards that he will continue to work on the lists while she is on vacation the following week. However, he assures her he will do everything in pencil so that she can look at it when she returns.

At 12:30 pm Mr. Allen and Ms. Winters talk about lunch and Mr. Allen begins to check his email. He is concerned about staffing, the current countywide hiring freeze, and how it will affect his teacher assistants. “That email sent me into a tizzy, the one where they were eliminating the third grade teacher assistants. I was planning on going on vacation – I

called everyone! I called Human Resources (HR), I called my supervisor and my processor. Finally, my processor called me back and said that was okay, they would work with these people to place them at year round schools. I worked until 10 pm that night!” After checking email, he has lunch, works on his letter to staff, the staff handbook, and his opening staff meeting.

At 2:00 pm he meets with the custodians to talk about tension between the custodial staff and the new head custodian who has only been in the position for a few weeks. The tension came to a head a few days earlier when several of the custodians participated in an intense argument in the main hallway. It included loud shouting and attracted the attention of everyone in the building. While he is waiting for the custodians to arrive, Mr. Allen is in the outer office working on the sound system. “There is a CD player hooked to the sound system and I want to get it to work. This is the technology in me – if it is there, I want to get it to work. I need to call the man.” He has a brief discussion with Ms. Winters about who to call and how to reach the man who repairs these types of systems. “Originally, the intercom didn’t work so he came out and adjusted our volume and turned it way up.” He makes a phone call requesting service on the sound system.

Two of the custodians come in the room and there is some small talk before the principal begins the conversation. Mr. Allen explains the schedule he wants them to work when school opens and their relationship with the new head custodian. While he is reassuring and really listens to their concerns, there is no doubt during his conversation of his expectations for their behavior. “We are going to talk about the schedule a little bit. What I

wanted to do, I know I talked to you about the schedule and now I want to get your thoughts for the beginning of the year. But starting the week of the 17th, we will begin the regular schedule.”

They also talk about their hours when school begins. “Now I told you, I really want to keep the building open and I am going to keep the building open until 8:30 at night because there are just things going on. I talked to the district folks and it is the expectation of the district that most cleaning needs to happen after the kids leave—and that’s between 4:30 pm and 8:30 pm. So, what I really would like to do is for you all to come in midday—come in at 12:00 noon and work until 8:30 pm.” This is a relief to the custodians who expected him to tell them they had to stay until 9:30 pm every night. He then goes through the cleaning procedures. “Between 12:00 pm and 4:00 pm, that is when you should do the cafeteria, student bathrooms, and start pulling some trash. When the others come in at 4:30 pm, you can get into the classrooms. Finally, I need for all of you to lock-up. I would need to know that that this is the team that locks up.” He reminds them of reporting their hours, pre-arranging vacation time, and working with the new head custodian. He explains that they are a valuable member of the staff and he appreciates their hard work. The meeting ends around 4:00 pm.

Mr. Allen checks his phone messages. One call is to a community member who wants to donate money to the school. However, before he can begin returning the calls, Ms. Winters walks into his office with samples of shirts with the school logo on them. They have a discussion about the color of the shirt. The principal wants grey but the secretary and the data

manager think that grey is a poor choice. “It washes you out.” There is another conversation about collared versus T-shirts. No decision is made.

At 4:15 pm Mr. Allen begins to return the phone calls. He agrees to meet the community member the following week. He calls Mr. Hightower, the principal of a neighboring school, to tell him about the phone call and the possibility of inviting this community member to an educational summit. “I am thinking if I can plug in I can help Mr. Hightower because he has been doing a lot of the spearheading for the summit. We could get this group aligned with the thinking [about] the summit—that would be good. It is important to have these folks supporting schools because we just cannot do it alone.”

At 4:50 pm he returns to working on the staff handbook and decides he is going to give the job to his assistant principal. “This is tedious and I just starting to look at it yesterday. I am thinking about going through it and circling the things that need input and giving it to Mr. Miller, the assistant principal. He is good at detail and there is not a whole lot to change except just tweaking it—like names and dates. I don’t understand this inclement weather.” He returns a few more phone calls and decides he needs to talk to the final custodian. At 5:30 pm he returns to the office after speaking to the custodian about the new hours and begins working on the handbook again. “I still don’t get inclement weather. Delay of school. This is too tedious.” He decides to work on the school Blackboard site.

It is nearing 5:30 pm and Ms. Winter yells at him from across the hall asking if he is all right. He explains to that he is going to take care of a few personal matters before he leaves for the night. The staff leaves for the day and Mr. Allen is alone in the building. He

works on his email, makes a few personal phone calls, and leaves the building about 7:00 pm.

The Leadership Team Retreat

Prior to the start of school, Mr. Allen arranged a daylong meeting of his leadership team. The team consists of the grade level chairs, the IRT, the Technology Coordinator, the Special Education Department Chair, the SIOP Coordinator, the Teacher Assistant representative, and the Assistant Principal. This was the first group meeting Mr. Allen had with his staff. He had worked hard preparing for it. He had an agenda, a PowerPoint presentation, and he hoped the right mix of information and conversation.

The meeting took place in the cafeteria. The tables were in a u-shape configuration. The principal provided a light breakfast and lunch. As the group gathered, there was conversation about their summer.

The principal began the meeting at 9:15 am. He welcomed everyone and thanked everyone for coming. He introduced the new head custodian and thanked him for all his hard work in getting the building ready for the new school year. He reviewed the agenda and asked if anyone wanted to add any items. He asked the participants to introduce themselves and state their position.

The first item on the agenda was to discuss what makes a strong leadership team. He asked the members to write their thoughts on post-it notes and then to gather in small groups to create an affinity diagram. He asked one person from each team to list their answers. The consensus included organization, communication, on-task behavior, cooperation, attitude,

flexibility, lead by example, professional development, encourager, open, good listener, and reporter/messenger. One teacher stated, “Sometimes we have to deal with stuff that is uncomfortable, but we need to be the cheerleaders and support decisions and the school.”

Mr. Allen posed the next question—what do you want to leave with today? The teacher generated answers included: Schedules, faculty/staff list, information about the budget, changes due to Title I, teacher assistant placement, extra duty assignments, PLTs, training in best practices, final EOG results, and who would hold the children during Wednesday PLT time.

Mr. Allen segued this conversation into one about his personal style. He told them he was very open and interactive. He used the PowerPoint presentation to present several statistics from the following year including Title I information, AYP, high growth, and the difference between ESL and LEP. During this presentation, one teacher interrupted to ask if he was providing lunch or they needed to arrange to go out. He replied, “No, I am bringing it in. Stay with me and you will eat!” The teachers applauded. As he returned to the topic of student achievement, one teacher made a correlation between high growth in fifth grade and the use of common formative assessments. Another teacher asked if he was planning to share this information with the entire staff. He replied, “Yes, but not in this detail, only the big picture. I want you to share this with your team.” Another teacher raised a question about the low science scores. Mr. Allen replied that science spirals. “The test is cumulative for all grades so perhaps this would be a good vertical conversation.”

Mr. Allen moved to the next agenda item. He asked the teachers to form pairs and discuss what factors (data) they should explore next year. The responses included: Students with disabilities—too much pull-out, why are fourth grade EOG scores always low, looking at district trends, investigating what each grade level values, vertical alignment for all subjects, and discussing vocabulary commonality through all grade levels.

Mr. Allen posed the question: “Do you know what I mean when I say essential curriculum—or intended versus actual curriculum?” He used this question to explain the use of the grade books to record the universal screening information.

After the morning break, Mr. Miller, the assistant principal, explained the daily schedule and several of the school’s procedures including the use of the laminator, the paper supply, copiers, and the duty schedule. Mr. Allen and Mr. Miller responded to all staff questions.

Mr. Allen outlined his staff expectations. Since Mr. Allen had assumed his position in April, he had time to observe teacher behavior and his expectations for teachers were based on his observations. “The expectation is that instruction starts at 9:05 am and all transportation changes are on Blackboard.” Mr. Allen explained that student supervision was non-negotiable. “Each teacher is responsible for their own kids and the monitoring that all students have left the building.” And the item that he thought would receive the most push-back—“stand and rotate during outside supervision. It’s for safety—it is part of your instructional responsibilities. You cannot bring a chair out to the field when your children are on the playground.” Several of these items generated substantial conversation, but Mr.

Allen kept reminding the teachers—“This rule has been on the books, we just haven’t really enforced it.” After a quick discussion of field trip policy and procedures, the teachers adjourned for lunch.

After lunch, Mr. Allen continued with a handout of expectations. “This is stuff in the handbook, but I pulled it out because I wanted to highlight it.” Topics included professional leave, the new substitute reporting system, classroom supplies, gradebook, and profile cards. Ms. Northwoods, the IRT, made a presentation about interventions, SST, and her role in helping teachers. Mr. Allen reemphasized essential curriculum. There was unrelated conversation about preprinted school folders and the group decided it should be a whole school initiative. There was a brief discussion about the sharing of teacher assistants from kindergarten to third grade for one hour each week. This prompted a question from a third grade teacher. “So we have none (TAs) right now.” Mr. Allen replied, “Yes, but I protected common planning.”

Throughout the day, Mr. Allen used language that encouraged discussion. “I am looking for input on this.” “I need your feedback on that.” “I am interested in hearing your thoughts about...” The session concluded with a brief overview of the Marzano book, *Classroom Instruction that Works* and ended at 3:30.

After the meeting, Mr. Allen reflected on the meeting:

Right now I am over my head...but at least it is affirming that I might be thinking about the right things. I was in the car a lot yesterday so I really thought through some things. There were some things today that I wish that gone a little differently. I wanted to have a little more time with the book. I had a little activity that I wanted to do but time got away from me on a lot of the other things. It surprised me when I

asked them what they wanted to leave with that it was the nuts and bolts. I would like to have a little more depth with that piece and that is kind of my thought with trying to start some book studies and some discussion. Granted the setting and the time wasn't great to make a lot of decisions. It was a lot of down load, but if there was ever a time that you wanted to go in and set the guidelines—the transition time was now. It was the beginning. We lost a couple of hundred kids so it was a good transition time and I wanted to go ahead and do that from the beginning.

I think they are just used to getting the nuts and bolts. That is how they see their role.

There are many little things that keep rolling through my head like there is some high absenteeism from some folks and I don't know what do to about that. I will have individual conversations. I wanted to say today and I hope that they heard that when there is a problem I will go to the person because I don't want think you should penalize the whole group, you know, talk to the source. [Otherwise] that is not fair to the folks who are doing the right thing. If the same person is not dressing appropriately that is when I have to have that conversation or find someone who can have that conversation with me. It may be different for each person because it needs to be someone has kind of a relationship with them. And I don't have that core quite developed yet but I think it is developing.

I felt really good. I was exhausted. I didn't realize how exhausted I was. I just checked my email and sent out a voice message to all the staff to tell them the schedule next week.

Until I can get through a year, I have just decided that I am going to be scared to death. My secretary stayed with me until 7:00 pm several nights last week trying to get things done and ready.

Next week is going to be tiring (the teacher's come back). I will meet with each grade level—I will probably email them and ask what time I should come. I don't know if they are accustomed to that, I think it is a little different. I envision next week being running around. Monday they are coming in, Tuesday is my big thing, Wednesday is grade level meetings, Thursday is universal screening at my school and Friday is not required. Monday we will make sure we are ready for meet the teacher so I have a lot of irons in the fire and I don't want to do too many conversations. I wondered how they reacted today. I couldn't read it.

As I observed this meeting, it was obvious to me that they teachers were on their best behavior. They were attentive and engaged throughout the meeting. They are the designated

teacher-leaders within the school and they recognized their status. It was also the first leadership activity that Mr. Allen had organized since becoming the principal, so he was very nervous and wanted everything to go well. I was intrigued by his inclusive conversation: “I want to hear your thoughts.” “I need your feedback on this.” The teachers participated in a variety of activities in which they commented on various topics, but the majority of the meeting was an information download and an explanation of Mr. Allen’s vision. Ultimately, they had no input into the school vision or professional development activities. In fact, Mr. Allen told them their job was to take this information back to their grade levels or departments.

Fall

This day started more hectic than usual. Mr. Allen greeted the students in the car pool area and then went directly to his office. He began listening to his voice messages and working on his email. A student had contracted the H1N1 virus and the family had been featured on a local television news story that morning. During the brief news story, the name of the school had been mentioned. Mr. Allen was working with his receptionist to develop a response to the parent phone calls. He had information from Central Services and the school nurse. “You need to read this exact statement, if they want more information, give them this number.” Mr. Allen and the receptionist continue the conversation about procedures for notifying parents of the virus. He complimented the receptionist on her handling of the situation and the parent phone calls. “You handled that very well. Your response to her is our district protocol. It is not us making these decisions so I really appreciate your help with

that.” He talks about the high absenteeism he is experiencing—both staff and students. Mr. Allen continued to investigate the school’s potential response to the H1N1 virus. He calls the superintendent’s office and the school system nurse for clarification and updates.

Mr. Allen decides there is nothing else he can do about the virus, the news story, and its effect on the school. He has researched and provided information to his staff so he moves on to his next task. He is working on a letter that needs to be sent home to parents and writing thank you cards for the custodians for Custodian Appreciation Week. Ms. Northwoods enters the office and they review the School Improvement Meeting from the previous day.

Mr. Allen: I feel good about the SIP. I am glad that we voted on the committee. We have a seven member SIT and I feel very good about that. I think we will have our first meeting next week.

Ms. Northwoods: I will review their sections and then they will be able to pull their committees together. We will have to rewrite some parts, like reading. I think we should eliminate the writing goal all together. Right now, I am thinking we will have safe schools, community involvement, and the reading, math and science—those will be our goals.

The secretary walks in his office.

Ms. Winters: When I did my asset transfer out of Fund 6, I transposed two numbers. I fixed it. I just need you to sign it.

The assistant principal enters the office.

Mr. Miller: I have someone on the phone – are you still open to interview?

Mr. Allen: Hold on – I need to look at my calendar.

Mr. Miller: Okay—I don’t want her to hang up.

Mr. Allen: Wait, I am looking. Anytime is okay.

Ms. Winters: Just sign here.

Mr. Allen: When I finish these (custodian bags) can you deliver?

Ms. Winters: Mr. Richards (head custodian) and the custodians are all upset. I told Mr. Richards that he should have a meeting and talk to them about expectations. I told Mr. Richards that expectation is a good word. I expect you to work your hours, I expect you to work the entire time you are here, so when he gets here I am going to talk to him. He is frustrated. He said things are not getting done.

Mr. Allen decides that he will have the assistant principal look into the situation.

Ms. Winters: I want to give a kudo to the new substitute system. I posted a job at 8:50 this morning, by 8:53 she had picked it up and by 9:15 she was here.

Mr. Allen: Then you need to call and tell someone—who is in charge of that system? Who am I missing? He names all of the custodians.

Ms. Winters: I am going to close out that account at BB&T, so I need that check.

Mr. Allen: This—me sitting here trying to write these cards for these gift bags with this one simple statement is indicative of the job of the principal. Like the perfect analogy because I have been trying to write these cards for thirty minutes and that is how your day is, from sunup to sundown—you start, you stop. My problem is that I have to engage in conversation—but that is who I am so I make no apologies.

If you want to be a principal, you have to move into the conversation—be comfortable with it.....

Mr. Allen steps out of the office and has a conversation with two visitors to the school. He puts the custodian bags in front of the secretary's office door.

Mr. Allen returns and works on his email. The assistant principal enters the office to meet with Mr. Allen.

They discuss the morning news story, issues concerning the morning car pool, and several letters to parents that need to be sent about a variety of current activities. Mr. Miller tells the principal the times and dates for the interviews and they discuss the candidates. They talk about the possibility of hiring a retired person or two people job sharing. They move on to discussing the number of open positions, class sizes, and waivers. This conversation leads to furniture—both teacher and student desks for the newly created classes, and how to fill them. They decide which teachers should be on the interview team and how they will cover classes so these teachers have time to participate in the interview.

The secretary comes in the office.

Ms. Winters: I didn't say a word, I just made a noise. Oh, these are big checks. I am going to get the gift certificates at Sheets (gas station). I am going to the bank to close out that account. If they say that two people have to sign that check I will have to wait until next week.

Mr. Allen: We are changing banks. They don't play well with the school system. Just keep all your receipts.

The secretary leaves.

Mr. Allen and Mr. Miller resume their conversation. They have moved on to discussing a textbook order. Due to the budget crisis, Mr. Allen has no money for additional textbooks, and needs to order additional math books. "It really depends if I have to fork out \$5,000 for these textbooks. I am waiting to hear but I haven't gotten an answer yet." The conversation moves to the United Way campaign. In previous years, the school has solicited donations to give to the teachers who participate. The assistant principal wants to know if he

should work on this. “I don’t mind doing it but it is very time consuming.” They decide not to do it this year. There is a brief discussion about the internet access policy for students and what information needs to be sent home.

Mr. Allen: Are their flags in the gym? There should be. I found two flags in the book room yesterday, nice ones, brand new with poles. Can you follow-up on that? Do we have flags? Like for PTA and assemblies. I want flags out. Can you investigate and solve the flag dilemma? I think that flags should be up in the school—it is my nostalgia and patriotism. We really need to get that book room cleaned. We can gain a lot of room—we just have to get rid of some of that stuff. I am going to put you in charge of holding onto these resumes and for making copies when we have the interviews.

Mr. Allen goes through his notes and his ‘to-do’ list. He indicates that he has researched the question of Wal-Mart gift cards for the faculty. Wal-Mart wants to donate gift cards to each teacher. He explains the procedures to the Mr. Miller. They discuss a few personnel issues, possible resolutions, and then review their pending teacher observations.

Mr. Allen begins working on his email. He has received an email from the head custodian about the incident from the previous night. He reviews minutes from several PLC meetings. He checks his to-do list for the remainder of the day. He has an interview in the afternoon and a meeting with a teacher that she requested. He indicates that he needs to complete his intervention plan.

At 11:00 am he walks around the building. It is evident that this is what Mr. Allen enjoys the most. He speaks to each staff member in the hall and often asks personal questions about their families. He enters several classrooms, greets the entire class, and asks each teacher about the current lesson. He crouches down by student desks and speaks to several

students individually in each room. On his way back to the office, he stops by the cafeteria to pick-up his lunch.

The remainder of the day is spent interviewing fourth grade teacher candidates. He is a thorough interviewer and each interview takes at least 45 minutes. He also continues to work on his email. At 3:00 pm he meets with a teacher who requested to meet with him. He discovers she is resigning for personal reasons. At the end of the school day he goes out to handle the car pool line. It is an opportunity to speak to students and parents. He returns to his office to work on his intervention plan and prepare for the evening PTA meeting.

This is one of my first observations where Mr. Allen appears capable and in charge. He is confident in his conversations and decisions. His staff is asking questions and he is giving clear and direct answers to their questions.

Winter

Mr. Allen arrives at school at about 8:15 am in the morning. The school is bustling. Several parents are in the office and Mr. Allen goes directly to car pool which is about to start. Shortly after 9:00 am he makes a tour of the school to greet students and teachers. He stops in the cafeteria to speak to all of the cafeteria workers and find out what is for lunch that day. He has a 10:00 am meeting with his coach. The school system implemented a new coaching plan this school year. The superintendent assigned the coaches, and Mr. Allen's coach, Ms. Rabbitt, is a principal of a neighboring elementary school. The requirement is that they meet throughout his first year. Mr. Allen has several items that he wants to discuss with her.

They begin by looking at his goals on his Professional Growth Plan. Mr. Allen indicates that things are going well but he would like the faculty to be more invested in student interventions and looking at student data.

Mr. Allen: I think things are going well. I feel like I am building some good relationships with people. The staff is happy, it is a happy place. I have the utmost respect for the previous principal, but our personalities are different. He is quiet and real laid-back and I am Mr. Chatter. That has been different for the staff and I think there are some things that I get my feathers ruffled over and they probably have not been ruffled before. That has been a challenge—you know, my expectations of them. We are working with the pyramid of interventions and that has been a real challenge.

It is almost like stepping back 10 years, there are positives to that, but then I want to ramp it up. It is hard for them to see the value of their own learning, but this is what we do if we are teachers. One teacher wanted to challenge me when I first came here. She wanted quick answers—with all of that said, I have tried to build some relationship with her and then on Monday, she brought me homemade pimento cheese.

Ms. Rabbitt: She had some thought about it outside of school.

Mr. Allen: Yes, I thought it was a big step.

I still hear conversation about technology. I was talking to our technology teacher and she said all of our technology leaders left when we down sized. In her perception, all of the people who were technology leaders are gone. She was talking about how to do professional development in technology. There is some truth to what she said. The ones who left were helping facilitate that in their grade levels. And I thought—that is another challenge.

You know, going down over 300 students, the IRT leaving, the lead secretary leaving, the head custodian leaving, the receptionist leaving—it has just been building that leadership piece—all of those key roles were empty.

- Ms. Rabbitt: Are you looking at people within the school—targeting who you could use as your core?
- Mr. Allen: Yes, and the conversation I had with the previous principal, several times, he helped me build that. He was right on the mark, but it is a great place, scores are good, the school is in such a great place.
- Ms. Rabbitt: Are you seeing the community involved?
- Mr. Allen: Yes. We have a strong PTA. There were 22 people at the board meeting and it lasted three hours. They have a lot of stuff going on, in terms of fundraising; the PTA is the strongest it has ever been. It is a strong group with a budget of \$70,000. I am really investing in them and I am recognizing I need that help.
- I am using the phone caller to keep everyone informed. I sent one to my staff just thanking everyone for their work and for their leadership.
- I have questions. Help me understand, textbooks, positions and staffing, and budgets.
- Ms. Rabbitt: What about the needs of the kids? Class sizes?
- Mr. Allen: It gets confusing (talking about staffing)
- They have a long talk about the budget*
- Mr. Allen: How do you handle supplies? Supply closet? Money to grade levels? How much of this should I reveal? Do you let them use the purchasing card? I don't want to give them the credit card? I am scared to death of the money.
- Ms. Rabbitt: What are your other options?
- Mr. Allen: I have to do what I am comfortable with. I suppose I could let the team leader check it out?
- Ms. Rabbitt: Ask them what they need—stuff and dollar amounts.

Mr. Allen: (*Speaking of the budget*) Our secretary is new so I am owning a lot of this—and the Title I piece is a whole other layer—and then preschool and afterschool—that is a lot of books to keep.

Ms. Rabbitt: (*Looking at the budget data*) I think you have a good handle on this—you are being conservative.

Mr. Allen: But I don't know what I don't know! I have no one to have these conversations with.

Ms. Rabbitt: You can call me or my secretary.

Mr. Allen: The transition could not have been smoother. The previous principal met me here several nights, helped with the staffing plan because it was due the week I started.

Ms. Rabbitt: My first year, the principal I worked with for 13 years would come and work with me. People didn't know I had questions, but she helped me.

Mr. Allen: Ms. K. is my person. I call her all the time.

Ms. Rabbitt: So you have resources.

Mr. Allen and his coach worked until 12:30 pm. She left and Mr. Allen went to the cafeteria for lunch. As usual, he greeted students and staff on his walk. After lunch, he worked with his secretary on developing supply orders. At 2:30 pm, he had a post-observation conference with a teacher. It was a lengthy conference because he had performance concerns that he needed to address with her. He finished the afternoon by supervising car pool and responding to email and voice mail. He turned off his office lights and left school at 6:30 pm.

This is a fairly unremarkable day. Mr. Allen works hard to be visible within the school and purposefully tours the halls and classrooms each morning. This was one of Mr.

Allen's first encounters with his coach. He definitely had a list of questions for her that he had been compiling for this meeting. However, by the time they met, he had developed his own network of support—friends and colleagues from his previous schools—so this coach relationship never developed into a helpful—you're the first person I will call when I need help—relationship.

Spring

As usual, Mr. Allen arrived at school about 8:15 am and immediately went to supervise the car pool area. Shortly after 9:00 am, he went back to his office. He gathered his materials and went to conduct a teacher observation. At 10:00 am, he hurried back to his office to drop off his computer and pick up a shopping bag full of bags of cookies. He was visiting classrooms that had the highest scores on the most recent common formative assessment. At each classroom, he congratulated the students and gave everyone a cookie and a card for a free dessert at a local restaurant. The students and the teachers were enthusiastic and pleased with his visits.

At 11:00 am, Mr. Allen was back in his office checking his voice mail and email. He worked for two hours in his office without interruption except to go to the cafeteria for lunch. At 1:00 pm he met with the assistant principal, Mr. Miller, to make sure all the observation paperwork was completed and ready to submit to Central Services. They discussed an issue raised by another parent of a parent letting her child walk through the parking lot to enter school in the morning. The woman is walking two large dogs so she does not come on the property, but the parent is concerned about the children weaving through the cars. They

decide to both be out in front of the school the next morning to watch for her to figure out who it is and what they will say to her. At 1:30 pm, his secretary came in to explain that there was a new problem with the custodians. Mr. Allen has received some anonymous letters about one of the custodian's behaviors and has to get Human Resources involved in the situation. However, without corroborating evidence, there is little that he can do about the allegations.

At 2:30 pm, he returns to his email. He works on a parent newsletter until it is time to supervise car pool. He stands outside and greets parents and students as they leave school. Today Mr. Allen has a family matter to attend to immediately after school, so he packs up and leaves before 4:00 pm.

Summary

Through these snippets of Mr. Allen's activities, it is obvious that the daily tasks are varied. Often, unexpected events take precedence and consume much of his day. Though he claims he would like to spend the majority of his time on instructional issues, school management concerns often take most of his time. As the year progressed, he spent less time visiting classrooms and more time working on the required paperwork. The final chapter includes a summary, a discussion of the findings, and recommendations for further study.

School administration is not a science, but an art in which each administrator or artist develops their own style on the journey to expertise.
Wagner, 1993

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of this research study, a response to the research questions, a discussion of the findings including relevant literature, and provides conclusions and recommendations for further study.

Summary of the Study

This study involved observing a novice school principal during his first year on the job. I conducted the observations at irregular intervals during the regular school day and at PTA meetings, district-wide principal meetings, and regional principal meetings. I also interviewed the principal's immediate supervisor, his coach, and conducted teacher focus groups at the beginning and end of the observation period. Additionally, I reviewed a variety of school documents including meeting minutes, agendas, memos, newsletters, handbooks, teacher surveys, and the principal's emails. The study was loosely based on Wolcott's *The Man in the Principal's Office* (2003).

The study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the experiences of a first-year principal?

2. How does a new principal begin to reconcile external pressure such as accountability and a focus on data and expectations of the stakeholders with the current school culture?
3. How does a novice principal begin to implement their vision within an existing culture that may or may not align with this vision?

To answer these research questions, I used observations of the new principal in a naturalistic setting as my primary data source. These observations included daily work, interactions with staff, parents, and students. I conducted two teacher focus groups to gain additional insight into their expectations and reactions to the new principal. I interviewed the immediate supervisor of the new principal to understand the process for selecting and supporting new principals. Additionally, relevant school documents were analyzed.

Discussion of Findings

In discussing the findings, it is important to refer to the original research questions. What are the experiences of a first-year principal? How does a new principal begin to reconcile external pressure such as accountability and a focus on data and expectations of the stakeholders with the current school culture? How does a novice principal begin to implement their vision within an existing culture that may or may not align with this vision?

In response to the first research question: *What are the experiences of a first-year principal*, the experiences of this first-year principal were varied and intense. Mr. Allen had seventeen years experience in elementary education in a variety of positions, including an assistant principal. However, he was not prepared for the type of work, the intensity of the

work, and the isolating nature of the work. He readily admitted that the budget and staffing were the most difficult aspects of the work and the areas for which he was least prepared. While he had to learn the budgeting process, the current national economic crisis and continual budgetary restrictions imposed by Central Services compounded his learning curve. Likewise, staffing was difficult. He did not expect that hiring would be a problem throughout the year. He encountered several unexpected resignations and had to hire staff throughout the year. He struggled throughout the year with his custodial staff. He also stated that he was unprepared for the variety of the work. At times I observed that he would be involved in four or five separate and unrelated conversations with different staff members simultaneously. Finally, the isolating nature of the work was a revelation and a difficulty for this new principal. As a self-professed gregarious person, he was unprepared for how isolated he felt throughout the year. During his previous experiences within other schools, he had a variety of friends and people he considered his confidants. As the principal, he was never comfortable sharing his concerns, fears, and problems. Not only did he not share information with staff within the school, initially he was not comfortable sharing information with other principal colleagues. He did, however, share this information with his coach, but their meetings were infrequent. His experience at his previous school of having a variety of close confidants that he trusted versus being in a school where he knew no one and trusted nobody compounded his sense of isolation. While learning the budgeting process, coping with the staffing problems, and even adjusting to the pace and variety of work was daunting, it was all within the capabilities of the new principal. The isolation was pervasive and intense;

however, as the year progressed, he felt less isolated and began sharing more with key staff and other principal colleagues.

Mr. Allen also struggled balancing the managerial aspects of the job while trying to implement his vision for student learning. He believed that the management tasks consumed most of his time and conversations with teachers. It was a surprise to him and he was often discouraged by this situation. An example of this was his continuing problems with his custodial staff. Throughout the year, he met with them to settle disputes, refocus their work, and reprimand them when they did not meet expectations. During one meeting he stated, “There are 750 children in the school that I need to concentrate on and I am spending all of my time with six griping adults.” By the end of the year, he needed the district Human Resource Department to intervene and had received the resignation from the head custodian.

In response to the second research question: *How does a new principal begin to reconcile external pressure such as accountability and a focus on data and expectations of the stakeholders with the current school culture*, was also a challenge for the new principal. After working on this at his previous school for several years, he definitely assumed the position with a preconceived notion of using data to inform teaching, learning, and targeted interventions. He was surprised to find that the use of data to inform instruction was not the norm at his new school. To his credit, he began talking about it early and often, especially to his leadership team and he was intent on having the staff become more data driven in their approach to teaching and learning. This was an interesting situation to observe. Since the teachers were accustomed to a top down leadership style from the previous principal, they

heard his directions and began looking at data, adjusting their lessons, and applying specific interventions. The teachers reported this caused stress and many were not initially willing to create data walls and share their student achievement data. During his monthly leadership meetings, which consisted of all grade level chairs, Mr. Allen expected them to report on their progress on these initiatives. He created the agendas and added these report outs as part of the meetings.

Mr. Allen never felt that these actions became part of the culture and he wanted more. He wanted the teachers to become more naturally inquisitive, to make these initiatives part of their core being. He stated throughout the year that he wanted them to “dig deeper.” This was in continual contrast to the teachers’ perspective. They felt that they were academically focused and had high expectations for all of their students. However, Mr. Allen persevered. He introduced the data wall, the use of SMART goals, and realigned the School Improvement Plan. By the end of the year, the teachers were becoming more accustomed to using data to locate students who needed either interventions or extensions. However, in the final conversation with the teachers, they mentioned that his continual focus on student achievement caused it to be a very stressful year for them. Mr. Allen did not change the culture of the school. The teachers did what they were told. They didn’t embrace the use of data as an instructional tool in their personal toolkits. The initiative was totally top-down in its inception and implementation.

In response to the third research question: *How does a novice principal begin to implement their vision within an existing culture that may or may not align with this vision,*

this was a challenge for Mr. Allen. He took over a school that had a well-defined culture steeped in history and tradition. It is a school well situated in the community with a majority of the staff having been at the school for several years. Three staff members had spent their entire careers at the school. While they professed a welcoming attitude in the initial interview session, it was clear that they were very protective of the school and its procedures and customs. In conversations with the teachers at the beginning of the year, I believe that this deeply ingrained culture was a result of the previous principal leaving and taking so many staff members with him. They were circling the wagons to hold on to what they had left. Mr. Allen attempted to honor the existing culture of the school and verbally professed this often and to a variety of stakeholders. On the other hand, the directives that the teachers felt threatened the culture of the school were relatively minor changes and seemed to have little to do with instruction. At the first interview session, there was extensive conversation about changes in how students walked through the halls, the breakfast routines, and the dismissal routines and no conversation about teaching. During the final conversation with the teachers, they indicated that the changes made by Mr. Allen had caused some dissention with the teachers. While they continually maintained they always had high academic standards, the refocus on using data had caused it to be a stressful year and the challenges they referred to were the same as in our first conversation—students walking in the hallway and playground supervision.

In answer to the research question, Mr. Allen aligned his views by requiring the teachers to have a focus on data, student achievement levels, and interventions. It never

became part of the culture of the school, possibly because it takes longer than one year to affect this type of culture shift. The teachers did what they were told, but continued to hold on to their notions of good teaching and high student expectations. Through conversations with the teachers, these two visions did not align. The teachers had their beliefs and they did what they were told—but Mr. Allen’s expectations did not change their beliefs. Change is hard and real change is real hard. The administration and staff at Fern Valley Elementary School proved this.

Alignment to the Existing Research

Introduction

Research indicates that for contemporary school principals, this is a time of unparalleled challenges. With the accountability movement, increased public scrutiny, new ISLLC and state standards, and a laser focus on data, the role of a school principal is increasingly difficult. For a novice principal, the learning curve is daunting, but critical for the success of the school. “Although the body of research literature related to beginning principals is considerable, little documentation is available on the specific articulation and effect of success experiences and or images in the professional growth of a neophyte principal” (Walker & Carr-Stewart, (2006, p. 17).

The School Culture

Mr. Allen’s concern for and focus on the school culture was well founded. Researchers believe that the culture of a school has a greater influence on the daily operations of a school, the success of the students, the retention of the teachers, and the

attitudes of the stakeholders than any other variable within the school (Barth, 2001; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Rebore & Walmsley, 2009; Wagner, et al., 2006). Mr. Allen knew he would confront an established school culture when he walked into the building the first day. He quickly learned that it truly was the “moral compass for the school that dictated what everyone did and the meaning they subscribed to their actions” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 24).

He often stated that the culture of the school was strong and deeply rooted in the community values and history. “He stated, “They think—I love this place so much that I don’t want you to come in and tear it up. And I know there are some things I am going to do where I will meet some resistance.” Deal and Peterson (1999) refer to this sense of entitlement and ownership of the school as a “complex webs of traditions and rituals that have been built up over time as teachers, students, parents, and administrators work together and deal with crises and accomplishments” (p. 3). Mr. Allen knew that he had several teachers on staff who considered themselves the “keepers of the culture” (p. 27) and that he needed to honor the past as he tried to build a vision for the future.

Within this existing school culture, Mr. Allen attempted to create a vision of school success by encouraging the teachers to look more closely at the curriculum, formative assessment, student data, and their collaborative work. “I want them to see themselves as learners—to dig a little deeper, especially in the data.” In a study of five exemplar principals, Ansbacher (2008) found that these principals looked at traditions and rituals as the basis of establishing a school culture and defining a school vision. This was not the case with Mr.

Allen. He felt that the previous traditions of the school were rooted in curricular practices that did not lead to achievement. He struggled with getting the kindergarten teachers to stop providing naptime for the students and for all grade levels to use data to inform instruction.

The teachers stated in the focus groups that they were instructionally strong. In the first round of teacher interviews, they mentioned that Mr. Allen appreciated their instructional work and the changes he was making were only to the routines of the school. In fact, the change that garnered the most comments was making the children walk single file on the third tile from the wall when walking through the hallways. When talking about change, this seems to be an insignificant alteration to “how we do business around here” (Barth, 2001, p. 8). Therefore, it was surprising that it was significant to the teachers. This very possibly might be an anecdotal story about change and the difficulty in making true systemic change, if a small, rather insignificant procedural change attracts this much teacher attention and conversation.

Researchers (Alvy and Robins, 2005; Shipman, Queen, & Peel, 2007) suggest that new administrators face the daunting challenge of learning to lead while simultaneously leading. They offer several suggestions for helping new administrators navigate through the cultural waters. First, have high expectations for your staff and the students. Make decision based on what is best for the students. They believe that this should be the focal point that administrators use to guide all decisions. Mr. Allen did this. He continually focused on the written curriculum versus the taught curriculum. He continually used data in his conversations with grade level teams and his leadership team. “I want them to look at the

data at the team level—there are 125 kids—and they are all our kids—how can we regroup, make decisions about interventions that helps all of them.”

Second, a new administrator should learn to be a learning leader by asking questions (Alvy & Robins, 2005; Bolman & Deal, 2002; Shipman, Queen, & Peel, 2007). Let the staff and school community know that you want to learn about them, how they do business, and what they value. A principal who identifies themselves as a risk-taker and as a person open to new ideas invites the staff to share their experiences and knowledge and is not viewed as a threat to the existing culture. Mr. Allen tried to do this. His natural tendency is to talk, so listening is more difficult. It was clear, however, at the beginning of the year that the teachers thought he was a listener and was interested in learning about them and considering their opinions. “He is constantly asking what do you think we should do or what do you think we need?”

Third, a new principal should be a life-long learner. A new administrator needs to understand that they do not have all of the answers for the myriad of questions and situations that arise each day (Alvy & Robins, 2005). A school is a living, breathing ecosystem where each component affects another in either small or less significant or in profound and lasting ways. This was clearly the case for Mr. Allen. He often talked to the teachers, asked questions, and solicited opinions, “He has come around and you know, said what do you think...and I think I appreciate that, having been here the longest—there are only three other teachers who have been here about the same time.” He also used his extensive network of colleagues to understand the mechanics of the job such as positions, budgets, and waivers.

Building Relationships

Rooney (2008) suggests that the key to a successful principalship is building relationships. He suggests, “Get out of the office. Get to know everyone and let everyone know you. Recognize that multiple relationships exist within the school and that communication and power do not operate vertically—schools are horizontal communities.” Tschannen-Moran (2009) indicates that practices such as reflection, collective inquiry, and decision-making are prevalent when there is greater trust within the organization, and this trust begins with the professional orientation of the school principal. Daly (2009) found that trust, empowerment, and teacher involvement helps mitigate external accountability factors and suggests that policymakers should consider relationship building initiatives that extend beyond accountability compliance when building organizational capacity.

Mr. Allen continually struggled with this. He participated in every meeting within the school so that he could learn. However, in conversations with teachers, they often mistook this for a lack of trust and that he was always watching them. On the other hand, he was often in the halls and in classrooms and teachers consistently remarked that they liked this and welcomed him into their rooms. Yet, he had a definite plan for the school that did not involve collective inquiry or teacher empowerment. His vision was a top down structure and he asked for compliance, not for authentic input.

Mr. Allen’s entry into his school was somewhat unique. He began the job at the very end of a school year. The school was on a sort of autopilot, moving through state mandated testing and end-of-year activities. Admittedly, he spent this time learning the school, learning

the names of staff, and working on preparations for the next school year. During the summer, he worked with the school secretary, the data manager, and the head custodian. It was not until August that that he was faced with building relationships and trust with his staff.

Building Trust

It was evident that trust did not come naturally to the staff or to Mr. Allen. At first, Mr. Allen struggled with whom he could trust. As much as he wanted the staff to trust him, he was hesitant to trust as well. Trust is the foundation of effective schools. A new administrator builds this trusting environment on interpersonal actions that are honest and open (Barth, 2001; Bolman & Deal, 2002; Rooney, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2007). With a new administrator, they have to be the first one to be open, honest, and trust. However, being open and honest does not guarantee that people will automatically trust you. People develop trust at their own pace (Jennings, 2008). This was definitely the case with Mr. Allen. He talked often about trust and his attempt to build it. He understood why the staff did not immediately trust him when he walked into the building on the first day. But, as Jennings stated, “trust is a two-way street” (p. 39) and Mr. Allen also had difficulty trusting the new staff.

Managing Versus Leading

Mr. Allen was intent on creating a vision for the school regarding student achievement and leading the school towards this vision. However, the amount of managerial duties that consumed most of his time and the amount of time he spent on this aspect of his job surprised him. Researchers (Doyle & Rice, 2002; Rishi & Muskal, 2005) found that

novice principals spend more time on areas they considered managerial such as managing their time, developing rapport, and establishing credibility. Mr. Allen devoted a significant amount of time doing exactly these things. It was not unusual for him to be at the school until 8:00 pm or 9:00 pm several nights each week attempting to finish his daily to-do list.

Kerchner (1993) stated, "School principals need to be trained to understand the strategic importance of their everyday activities" (p. 19). He believed that the ordinary decisions that each principal makes multiple times every day add up to creating and communicating the big picture, the vision for the school. As a new principal, Mr. Allen never articulated this, but it was evident in his actions. Mr. Allen spent a huge amount of time working on the budget, which felt to him, distant from his vision. However, he worked hard to remain transparent in his decisions and gave the leadership team a monthly report of purchases and the money remaining. He queried the staff to determine which supplies to order and had lengthy discussions about textbook orders, paper supplies, and other budget items. While he viewed these topics as management items, his inclusiveness demonstrated his leadership style.

Staffing was another issue that consumed a great deal of time. Again, while he did not share personnel matters with anyone, he was transparent in explaining the available positions to the staff and his plans to fill open positions. He even openly told the staff general information about potential candidates and his interviewing schedule. While this task was managerial in nature, his treatment of it defined his leadership.

Induction Process

The literature indicates that a new principal should have an induction program to “orient a principal to a school while strengthening their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be an educational leader” (Andrews, 1989, p. 19). Mr. Allen had a structured coaching induction program however, the first time he met with his coach was six months after he assumed the principalship. To compensate, Mr. Allen created a network of colleagues and friends whom he could call and ask questions. A small group of principals called him during the first few weeks he was on the job to offer support and guidance. He relied heavily on the retired principal from his previous school and the current principal of his previous school. He mentioned several times about meeting with them to discuss issues or for explanations of situations. Mr. Allen was fortunate that he could create this network of support. Through his previous experiences within the district, he developed a wide assortment of friends on whom he could rely when he needed support. However, this network of friends did not mitigate his feelings of isolation. The isolation occurs each day as a new principal sits in their building and is bombarded with situations, questions, and events that are unique and for which a novice principal does not have a bank of previous experiences on which to draw a solution or answer.

Researchers (Crow, 2002; Rooney, 2008; Walker & Qian, 2006) found the need for an induction program because isolation from peers, lack of feedback, and lack of interpersonal support are the most difficult problems facing a novice principal. Without a doubt, these were the problems facing Mr. Allen. He talked extensively about the isolation

and lack of feedback. The situation of the school compounded his isolation. Mr. Allen did not have an expert already on staff that he could trust or from whom he could learn. The core staff was also new and he was helping them navigate a new school as he was learning his job responsibilities. He spoke often about the sense of isolation and continually questioned himself about whether he was doing the right thing. He spoke often about his previous school, the relationships he had formed, and the ease in which he was able to do his job. After about eight months into the job, he spoke openly about grieving for those relationships. Yet while he longed for these relationships, he was very reticent to form them. He felt it was not the responsibility of a principal to get to close to any one person.

Just as there is not one right way to induct a novice principal into a school, there is not one right way to be a principal. Some form close relationships with staff while others draw a distinct and impenetrable line between themselves and staff. However I believe, both from my experiences and from observing Mr. Allen for a year, that real trust and relationship building requires a vulnerability that Mr. Allen was not willing to accept or display.

The Role of the Assistant Principal as a Training Ground

The literature indicates that the role of the assistant principal is not an adequate training ground for the principalship (Batenhurst, 2002, Chan, Webb, & Bowan, 2003; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Royal, 2003) and the role of the assistant principal is markedly different than the role of the principal. Mr. Allen discovered that this was true. Mr. Allen was eager and enthusiastic about becoming a principal. He understood there would be challenges, but he was looking forward to this new chapter of his professional life. He had worked for a

principal who was willing to share all information and let her assistant principals take on a variety of responsibilities. However, Mr. Allen's three years as an assistant principal did not prepare him for being a principal.

He was unprepared for many aspects of the position, including budgeting, staffing, mandates from Central Office, and the isolating nature of the position. He would state that while he had looked at the budget as an assistant principal, he did not understand areas such as funding streams, allocations, credit card regulations, or how to produce and read the reports. In the area of staffing, he was an excellent interviewer. His former principal had always stressed finding the candidate who was the right fit for the school and he was able to do this. He struggled with understand position allocations and changes that were made by the state department of public instruction that had to be carried out at the school level.

He was completely unprepared for the isolation of the position. Part of his isolation was self-imposed. He never found anyone at the school that he could trust, even his secretary. At times, he had significant personnel issues that required intervention by the district human resources department. He did not share any of this—not with his secretary, not with his coach, not with his family, and not with his principal colleagues from other schools.

I believe what we can learn from these experiences is that a novice principal needs a person who can walk-the-walk with them on a regular basis. My weekly observations, while I did not offer suggestions, seemed to be a comfort for Mr. Allen and he looked forward to my being at his school. A coach or mentor really needs to bust in and not be afraid to be part of this induction process with a novice principal. The coach or mentor cannot wait for an

invitation to help because, depending on the personality of the novice principal, the request may never come though the need is immediate.

Cognitive Problem Solving and Mental Models

Researchers believe that cognitive problem solving and mental models is the ability to reflect on a situation in order to learn from it. There are several key components. The first is previous life experiences. Bolman and Deal (1993) and Ohde and Murphy (1993) indicate that new principals bring their previous experiences as mental models or cognitive schemata to their new position and view the new school through these lenses. Through experience and reflection, the new principal gains expertise and additional mental models of success. This was the situation with Mr. Allen. His frame of reference for an existing school was his previous school at which he had been on staff for eleven years. Though he never stated this out loud, Mr. Allen definitely believed that the procedures and focus on teaching were much better at his previous school. It was his mental model of a well run school. Contrary to that, the staff of the new school had mental models of their school that they thought were exactly right. During his first six months as a principal, he questioned every decision he made. He agonized over every detail and every conversation.

Toward the end of his first year, Mr. Allen became much more relaxed and self-confident in his role as the principal. While he continued to reflect on decision and challenges, his conversation became much more self-assured. He said, "It has been a great year. I get up every morning and am excited to come to school every day."

Mentoring and Coaching

Mentoring is the most common method of inducting a new principal into their position. The research indicates that there are no specific formulas for setting up a mentoring relationship and no clear positive outcomes of these relationships (Cohn & Sweeney, 1992; Villiani, 2006; DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, L., & Haycock, 2007). While Mr. Allen was not in a mentoring relationship, he did have a county appointed coach with whom he worked.

Mr. Allen utilized his coach when the opportunity presented itself. They scheduled regular monthly meetings, beginning in October. Mr. Allen kept a list of questions that he asked her when she came to the school. Twice they met at her school. The coaching model used was the inquiry based method, so the coach asked reflective questions that were of benefit to Mr. Allen. The major drawback to the situation was the lateness in starting the program (six months after Mr. Allen was appointed principal of Fern Valley) and the contrived visitation schedule.

Lessons Learned

It is impossible to spend this much time with someone and not learn from the experience. I was fascinated watching Mr. Allen grow and develop as an administrator. It was clear from the beginning that he had the skills necessary to be successful. Watching him realize that he could do the job was the most interesting part. I also was impressed with his consistent focus on the goals he set for the school. He never wavered from this focus nor did he allow anyone else to deter him. It was a good lesson for me.

However, what I truly learned from this experience is the importance of reflection and being in a community. My continual reflection on Mr. Allen's practice helped me reflect on my own practice. As I processed through his actions, I was able to refine and define some of my own. His extensive conversations about trust and relationships encouraged me to look more closely at the relationships within my building. His continual focus on student achievement and the use of universal assessments helped me to put them in place at my school. While universal assessments are the norm at the elementary level, there is nothing countywide for universal assessments at the middle school level.

The lessons I learned from this experience is that there is not a "one size fits all" induction/orientation/mentor/coaching program for new principals. Just as every school is uniquely different, so are the new principals that walk through the door. The variables are extensive. As a principal myself, I know many people who would welcome the idea of having a more veteran mentor/coach walk along side them during their first year. I also know new principals who believe they can go it alone and would not be as receptive to this type of professional guidance.

My observations, however, confirmed my belief that there is great value to having a mentor/coach walk along side of a new principal. Numerous times I watched Mr. Allen struggle with a report, an email from Central Office, or an unexpected problem (staffing, parents, students) and I could have easily offered a suggestion or clarification, but I did not. In this instance, my role was merely to observe him and not to advise him. These situations, however, reinforced my belief of the need for a person to fill this role.

Another insight I had during the study was the role of positive reflection. I watched Mr. Allen second guess almost every decision he made. Second guessing is a form of reflection, but it is often unhealthy and usually unproductive. Having a mentor/coach who is in the situation with you can provide a forum for healthy, positive reflection which often leads to professional and personal growth.

Finally, during my personal reflection on this study and in continually reviewing my data, the theme of isolation continued to pop up. In the literature, this theme is always coupled with another topic—understanding the school culture and isolation, building relationships and isolation, risk-taking and isolation, decision-making and isolation—but it is never a major topic on its own. I found that Mr. Allen’s sense of isolation was pervasive in everything he did.

After conducting this study for just short of one full year, I believe that a new principal needs a more veteran person to walk along side them. This relationship should begin before the new principal walks into their school for the first time. It does not matter what level, elementary, middle or high school, the problems and challenges are varied, but still present. I might even venture that a person who has principal experience, but moving to a new school level (elementary to middle or middle to high) might also need this assistance. In the end, I don’t think it’s important if you call the person a mentor, a coach, or even a professional buddy. It is the offer of steady and enduring, positive, professional assistance that is important.

Implications for Practice

Based on this research study, as well as the literature reviewed, it is clear that there is not one perfect model for either the principalship or the type of support that should be provided. The inherent uniqueness of the position, the person in the position, the school, the level (elementary, middle, or high), and the external influences plainly lead to this conclusion. However, some conclusions and recommendations can be drawn from this study.

First, the isolating nature of the job is a major concern. The new principal is typically in a situation where they are completely new—there are all unfamiliar faces waiting for the new principal to do something and unfamiliar procedures that have to be learned immediately. Without someone to talk to, share with, or commiserate with, the job becomes overwhelming.

Second, understanding the culture of the new school is critical for success. The mental models of the new principal and the current school community might clash and the more information a new principal has about the current school culture, the greater the chances for a successful entry.

Third, it is wrong to get caught up in the terminology of mentor and coach. The basic need is for support for the new principal and how this support is configured should be and can be different for each person. What should be constant is the commitment of support by a school system or a superintendent. This support might be weekly meetings or a just-in-time phone call or email when faced with a challenge. The key is for the new principal to know

that a knowledgeable person is available to walk the walk with him. Mr. Allen was a natural inquirer. Whenever he was in a situation with a more veteran principal, he would start the conversation with, “I have three questions to ask you.”

Fourth, the literature is correct that the assistant principal position and pre-service programs are not an adequate training ground for a new principal. The jobs are usually vastly different. Even assistant principals who work for principals who allow them to work on budgets, staffing, and other tasks that are usually the sole responsibility of the principal are not adequately prepared to assume the job with knowledge and confidence.

Fifth, change is difficult. Mr. Allen really used two definitions of change. When referring to student achievement, he always acknowledged the previous good work and couched his message of change in terms of continual improvement. “We always want to get better.” “This is a great school with wonderful things going on—we just have to be slow and steady in looking at our data and moving forward.” While this admittedly caused stress for the teachers, the changes that caused the most uproar were very minor procedural ones. This reinforced the concept that if small procedural changes cause this type of conversation, true systemic change necessary for real school reform is incredibly difficult to achieve.

Finally, reflection is critical for success. The new principal must have an avenue for critical reflection of their actions and decisions. Mr. Allen was a natural reflector. He did a lot of self talk and consulting with colleagues throughout the year. Principals for whom this does not come naturally should be provided an opportunity for reflection. This is the best avenue for continued growth of a school administrator.

These conclusions and recommendations taken individually are important, but when added together present a compelling reason for a major paradigm shift in how we orient, induct and mentor new principals. Current research, including this study, indicates that we can no longer look from the outside in, but instead, we must be on the inside, working side by side with new principals so that they are effective from the first day on the job. It can no longer be blasphemy to state that a novice principal is not prepared for the challenges presented in a new school. It is important that we recognize this and create authentic and realistic programs that nurture, guide, and support these individuals as they balance the internal and external pressures to educate all students at high levels. It is common sense that as our expectations increase, so should the support. This is a call to all school systems to leverage their resources to develop real programs that nurture and sustain a novice principal through at least their first year in a school.

These conclusions and recommendations must honor the uniqueness of each individual and each situation. The most difficult thing about a new principal is that there is no well-defined path for success. Success depends on the individual and each school. However, that is also the best thing about being a new principal—the distinctiveness and uniqueness of each situation. A new principal quickly finds that each day brings new challenges and issues often never confronted before. For successful principals, that is the best part of the job.

Recommendations for Further Research

While this study accomplished what it intended to do, there is a significant amount of room for further research in understanding the needs of the new principal. We must understand that each situation, each school, and each new principal is unique and there are no clear and concrete answers for predicting the success of a new principal. As long as new standards are being developed and new federal, state, and local requirements are being implemented, the job will continue to evolve.

A replication of this study using a principal who is new to a particular district might yield new and useful information. Since Mr. Allen was a veteran of this particular district, several potential problems he might have encountered were not present. A new principal who is also new to the district might encounter more significant isolation and an even steeper learning curve. Another potential avenue of study would be either a middle or high school principal. Do they face the same or different challenges?

Additional studies of teacher perceptions of the new principal might yield interesting results. I found the teacher conversations extremely informative and often their perceptions were very different from the perceptions of the new principal. Possibly their feedback could be used to guide a new principal through their first year.

Though I did not consider gender or age a significant factor when choosing my research subject, a study might be done using these criteria as factors. Does a woman face the same challenges as a man? Does a very young first time principal face the same or different challenges than a more mature first time principal? Additionally, my study was conducted in

a large, urban, and wealthy school district. Additional research might be conducted in a smaller, less urban, rural, or suburban area.

One other related avenue of research that might be explored might be principals who are not successful. The information concerning what caused them to leave their schools might inform new principals regarding areas of danger or concern.

Finally, additional research in a novice principal's sense of isolation might yield interesting and helpful information. This is an area that is often mentioned in the literature, but not singled out as an important factor in the success of a new principal. Learning how to mitigate this sense of aloneness might provide additional ideas of support structures for new principals.

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges facing a first year principal through the lenses of culture and accountability. Using qualitative methods, these challenges were observed and documented. The findings were consistent with current literature that the job is complex, varied, intense, and multi-faceted. It is clear that no one model can adequately describe the principalship.

This study did highlight several important points. First, change is very difficult for both the person attempting to implement the change and the persons having to change. Recurring anecdotal stories from the teachers indicated that even the smallest changes can cause lasting effects and undermine the best plans. Second, the isolation of the job can cause self-doubt in even the most self-confident new principal. It is an area that should be of

concern and continually addressed when devising a support program for a new principal.

Third, there is a sharp divide between the responsibilities of an assistant principal and a principal. Currently, the on-the-job learning is intense. Smoothing this path would be helpful for a new principal.

The implications of my findings are novice principals need sustained and continued support. Mentors or coaches need to be trained and available on the first day the new principal walks into their school. They need good observation skills and good communication skills. They need to help new principals reflect on their practice and reframe situations. They need to provide options and ideas when challenges present themselves. Mentors or coaches need to be seasoned professionals so that they have a variety of experiences from which they can draw suggestions. They need to be able to point out successes and help the new principal celebrate when things go well. They need to recognize that their way is not always the right way and that the principalship, school principals, and schools are all unique. There cannot be a one size fits all induction program for school administrators.

Children and their education are too precious to leave to a trial and error method of school administration. We support teachers as they learn to teach; we need to do no less for school administrators. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) state, “[School] leadership not only matters, it is second only to teaching among school related factors in its impact upon student learning” (p, 5). Discovering and implementing authentic and real support for new school administrators is critical to school and student success. The job of a

school principal is both frustrating and fulfilling. Most principals would never dream of doing anything else. Therefore, the more we learn about how our novice principals meet the challenges of leadership, the better off tomorrow's schools, students, and new principals will be.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I will conduct two teacher focus groups during my study. The focus groups will consist of a purposeful sample of between 6-9 teachers. One third will be teachers new to the school, one third with less than five years teaching experience but not new to the school and one third with over 10 years teaching experience and not new to the school.

Session 1

The following protocol will be used for the teacher focus group interview session.

Welcome and thank participants for their involvement in my study

Explain the purpose of the study and review the fact that they are participating voluntarily, the session will be audio recorded so that I capture all of the information, and that their answers will be kept confidential.

Ask people to introduce themselves and incorporate the following information

- Name
- Subject area and grade taught
- Number of years in education
- Number of years at this school, previous schools
- Number of principals for whom they have worked

Questions

1. What are your expectations for your new principal?
2. How do you communicate these expectations to your new principal?
3. How will you know if the new principal has met your expectations?
4. What are your views on student achievement?
5. How does the culture of this school impact student achievement?
6. What type of leadership style would you like to see at this school? Why?
7. What do you believe are the qualities of a good principal?
8. So far, what has your new principal done well? What has your new principal not done well?
9. What was the climate/culture of the school before the new principal?
10. What is the climate/culture now that the new principal has assumed the position?
11. If you could give your new principal one piece of advice, what would it be?
12. Have you shared this information with the principal? If not, would you like this information shared with the principal?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

When the session is concluded, thank each teacher for their participation and remind them that all information is confidential. Remind them that I will provide them with a transcript of the session and that I might contact them individually to follow-up on ideas or to clarify their comments.

Session 2

Towards the end of the study, reconvene the teacher focus group. Remind all participants of the audio recording and confidentiality.

Questions

1. How has the year gone? Successes? Challenges?
2. What is their opinion of the new principal after one year on the job?
3. Did the new principal live up to their expectations? Did the new principal exceed their expectations?
4. How has the new principal affected student achievement?
5. What is the current climate of the school? How has it changed? Why has it changed?
6. What did the new principal need to learn about the faculty and/or the school to be successful? Did the learning occur?

When the session is concluded, thank each teacher for their participation and remind them that all information is confidential. Remind them that I will provide them with a transcript of the session and that I might contact them individually to follow-up on ideas or to clarify their comments.

APPENDIX B

AREA SUPERINTENDENT PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

During the study, I will interview the area superintendent who is the direct supervisor of the new principal.

I will make an appointment and be on time for the interview. At the beginning of the interview I will explain the purpose of my study, explain the purpose of the audio recording, and the confidentiality of the information.

Questions

1. Thank the area superintendent for their time
2. How do you select principals for hire?
3. How do you match them with the schools?
4. How do you get information from stakeholders (teachers, parents, students) about their preferences for a new principal?
5. What were the qualities of this person that you thought they would be a good match for this particular school?
6. Were there any specific problems/challenges at this school that you expected the new principal to address?
7. How do you support new principals?
8. How do you use the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's New Vision for Public School Leaders to select a new school principal?
9. How do you determine if the new principal met the expectations of the teachers?
10. Is there any other information that you would like to share?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION SUMMARY

	Date	Type
1	June 23	Lunch meeting
2	July 10	Observation
3	July 16	Observation
4	July 23	Observation
5	July 30	Observation
6	August 10	Leadership meeting and observation
7	August 10	Reflection meeting
8	August 13	Principal meeting
9	August 24	Observation & Meet the teacher
10	August 29	Observation
11	September 8	Principal meeting
12	September 8	PTA
13	September 16	Teacher focus group and observation
14	September 17	Observation
15	September 24	Principal meeting
16	September 30	Observation
17	October 6	Leadership Meeting and Observation
18	October 6	Reflection meeting
19	October 7	Faculty meeting and observation
20	October 9	Workshop on RPOI
21	October 13	Principal meeting
22	October 14	Observation and meeting with coach
23	October 28	Observation
24	October 29	Principal meeting
25	November 1	Observation
26	November 3	Observation
27	November 8	PTA
28	November 13	Principal meeting
29	November 24	Reflection meeting
30	November 29	Principal meeting
31	December 1	Observation
32	December 5	Leadership
33	December 8	Principal meeting
34	December 9	Faculty meeting and observation
35	January 5	Leadership and Observation

36	January 6	Faculty meeting and observation
37	January 12	Principal meeting
38	January 14	Meeting
39	January 28	Principal meeting
40	February 9	Principal meeting
41	February 9	PTA
42	February 15	Observation
43	February 17	Faculty meeting and observation
44	February 25	Principal meeting
45	March 9	Principal meeting
46	March 25	Principal meeting
47	April 13	Principal meeting
48	April 13	PTA
49	April 14	Reflection meeting
50	April 16	Second teacher focus group and observation
51	April 19	Meeting with coach
52	May 17	Reflection meeting
53	May 19	Faculty meeting and observation
54	May 25	Principal meeting

APPENDIX D**LIST OF DOCUMENTS EXAMINED**

- School Improvement Plan
- Principal's Goal Summary
- Principal's Consolidated Assessment
- All group emails sent to staff (I was included on the staff group email list)
- School Blackboard site
- School web site
- PTA meeting minutes and agendas
- Leadership Team meeting minutes and agendas
- Faculty meeting minutes and agendas
- School newsletter to parents
- Selected letters to parents from the principal
- The school budget
- The school (personnel) allotment page
- Applicant resumes
- Staff Handbook

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH PRINCIPAL

Title of Study: **An Ethnographic Study of a First Year Principal**

Principal Investigator: **Cathy C. Williams**

Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli**

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to document the experiences of a first year principal as they attempt to fit into an existing culture, promote positive change, and strive to help all students be successful while complying with external and legislative mandates.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Allow me to observe your day-to-day activities from the beginning of the study until the end of your school year. I will sit in your office and observe your activities at least one day each week between 25-50 times.
- Allow me to attend a variety of meetings in which you participate such as faculty meetings, PTA meetings, school-improvement meetings, department meetings, and principal meetings.
- Complete reflective audiotapes throughout the study—at least one per week.
- Allow me to review school documents such as your calendar, memos, newsletters, and school improvement documents,
- All research will take place at your school site unless there is an off-campus meeting that you are attending and I can accompany you as an observer.

Risks

The risks to you are minimal. Potentially you might be uncomfortable with me as an observer, but I will do whatever necessary to remain unobtrusive. I will honor your requests if you need for me to excuse myself from conversations you consider highly confidential

Benefits

The benefits of this study to you are indirect. For example, through your audiotape reflections you might gain additional insight into the challenges you are experiencing as a new principal.

The potential benefits for your participation is adding to the body of knowledge by documenting the experiences and challenges that face a new principal as you attempt to initiate change in an established school culture in light of federal and state accountability requirements.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely in on a flash drive, a secure web site, and a lap top computer that will remain in my possession at all times. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Any pertinent information provided in an email will be extracted from the email and the email will be deleted. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. After the study is completed, all information including written, audio taped, transcribed, and electronic will be destroyed.

Compensation

You will not receive anything for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514), or Joe Rabiega, IRB Coordinator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-7515).

Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX F**INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH TEACHER**

Title of Study: An Ethnographic Study of a First Year Principal

Principal Investigator: Cathy C. Williams

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to document the experiences of a first year principal as they attempt to fit into an existing culture, promote positive change, and strive to help all students be successful while complying with external and legislative mandates.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one focus group at the beginning of the study and one private, individual interview at the end of the study. Additionally, after the focus group, you or I might want to have a private follow-up conversation (in person or electronically) about information discovered in the focus group setting. You will be one of a group of teachers (6-9) that are invited to participate in the study. I anticipate that the focus group will not last more than two hours and all interviews and private conversations will last no more than one hour. The purpose of the initial focus group is to determine your opinions of the culture and climate of the school. The final interview at the end of the study will be to determine if the climate and culture of the school has changed. All research will take place at your school site.

Risks

The risks to you are minimal. You will be able to review the transcripts of the focus group and your individual interview for the purpose of clarifying and refining your comments. The transcripts will be either delivered to you in person or will be sent via US mail.

Benefits

The benefits of this study to you are indirect. You might gain greater insight into the school community through our conversation about the school culture.

The potential benefits for your participation is adding to the body of knowledge by documenting the experiences and challenges that face a new principal in light of federal and state accountability requirements while attempting to initiate change in an established school culture.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential, but total confidentiality cannot be assured due to the members possibly discussing what was said in the group outside of the group. **However, it is important to understand that information from the group discussion must be kept confidential.** Data will be stored securely in on a flash drive, a secure web site, and a lap top computer that will remain in my possession at all times. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. All pertinent information you provide in email format will be extracted from the original email and it will be deleted. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. After the study is completed, all information including both written, audio taped, transcribed, and electronic will be destroyed.

Compensation

You will not receive anything for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514), or Joe Rabiega, IRB Coordinator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-7515).

Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX G**INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH SUPERVISOR****Immediate Supervisor of the Principal**

Title of Study: **An Ethnographic Study of a First Year Principal**

Principal Investigator: **Cathy C. Williams**

Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli**

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to document the experiences of a first year principal as they attempt to fit into an existing culture, promote positive change, and strive to help all students be successful while complying with external and legislative mandates.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in one interview (not longer than one hour) regarding principal selection procedures and the support offered to a first year principal.

The interview will take place at your office.

Risks

The risks to you are minimal. I will honor your requests if you are unable to share some information you might consider confidential.

Benefits

The potential benefits for your participation is adding to the body of knowledge by documenting the experiences and challenges that face a new principal as he/she attempts to

initiate change in an established school culture in light of federal and state accountability requirements.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely in on a flash drive, a secure web site, and a lap top computer that will remain in my possession at all times. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. After the study is completed, all information including written, audio taped, transcribed, and electronic will be destroyed.

Compensation

You will not receive anything for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514), or Joe Rabiega, IRB Coordinator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-7515).

Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

APPENDIX H

LETTER TO THE NEW PRINCIPAL INVITING PARTICIPATION

Dear Participant (New principal):

I am conducting a study of the experiences of a first-year principal. As a new principal, I would like you to participate in my research study.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will need to:

- Allow me to observe your day-to-day activities from the beginning of the study until the end of your school year. I will sit in your office and observe your activities at least one day each week no less than 25 times throughout the school year.
- Allow me to attend a variety of meetings in which you participate such as faculty meetings, PTA meetings, school-improvement meetings, department meetings, and principal meetings.
- Complete reflective audiotapes throughout the study—at least one per week.
- Allow me to review school documents such as your calendar, memos, newsletters, and school improvement documents.

All research will take place at your school site unless there is an off-campus meeting that you are attending and I can accompany you as an observer.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time. The risks to you are minimal. Potentially you might be uncomfortable with me as an observer, but I will do whatever necessary to remain unobtrusive. I will honor your requests if you need for me to excuse myself from conversations you consider highly confidential

The benefits of this study to you are indirect. For example, through your audiotape reflections you might gain additional insight into the challenges you are experiencing as a new principal. Additionally, your participation can potentially add to the body of knowledge regarding the experiences that you face as a new principal as you attempt to initiate change in an established school culture in light of federal and state accountability requirements.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely on a flash drive, a secure web site, and a lap top computer that will remain in my possession at all times. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Any information in an email format will be extracted from the email and it will be deleted. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no

one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. After the study is completed, all information including written, audio taped, transcribed, and electronic will be destroyed.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I am happy to answer any additional questions. An *Informed Consent Form for Research* is attached that can provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Cathy Williams

APPENDIX I

LETTER TO THE TEACHERS INVITING PARTICIPATION

Dear Participant:

I am conducting a study of the experiences of a first-year principal and am requesting your participation in my study.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will need to participate in a focus group at the beginning of the study. The purpose of the focus group is to determine your opinions of the culture and climate of the school and your expectations of your new principal. It is possible that either you or I might request a private, one-on-one interview after the focus group to follow a line of inquiry mentioned in the focus group setting. At the end of the study you will participate in a private, individual interview to determine if the climate and culture of the school has changed and if the new principal met your expectations.

The risks to you are minimal. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time.

The benefits of this study to you are indirect. You might gain greater insight into the school community through a conversation about the school culture. Additionally, your participation can potentially add to the body of knowledge regarding the experiences and challenges that face a new principal as he/she attempts to initiate change in an established school culture in light of federal and state accountability requirements.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential, but total confidentiality from the focus group conversation cannot be assured due to the members possibly discussing what was said in the group outside of the group. You will be able to review the transcripts of your individual interviews to clarify or refine your comments. These transcripts will be delivered to you either in person or by US mail. Data will be stored securely in on a flash drive, a secure web site, and a lap top computer that will remain in my possession at all times. Any information in an email format will be extracted from the email and it will be deleted. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. After the study is completed, all information including both written, audio taped, transcribed, and electronic will be destroyed.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I am happy to answer any additional questions. An *Informed Consent Form for Research* is attached that can provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Cathy Williams

APPENDIX J

LETTER TO IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR INVITING PARTICIPATION

Dear Participant (Immediate Supervisor):

I am conducting a study of the experiences of a first-year principal. As the immediate supervisor of the new principal, I would like to you to participate in this study. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview (not longer than one hour) regarding principal selection procedures and the support provided to a new principal. The interview will take place at your office.

The risks to you are minimal and your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time. I will honor your requests if you are unable to share some information your might consider confidential. The potential benefits for your participation is adding to the body of knowledge by documenting the experiences and challenges that face a new principal as he/she attempts to initiate change in an established school culture in light of federal and state accountability requirements.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely in on a flash drive, a secure web site, and a lap top computer that will remain in my possession at all times. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Any information in an email format will be extracted from the email and it will be deleted. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. After the study is completed, all information including written, audio taped, transcribed, and electronic will be destroyed.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I am happy to answer any additional questions. An *Informed Consent Form for Research* is attached that can provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Cathy Williams