

TRIPLETT, ASHLEY WEINKLE, Ed.D. A Qualitative Study of the Impact of Surprises and Challenges on the Identity-Building and Socialization of New Principals. (2018) Directed by Dr. Carl Lashley. 179 pp.

The role of the school principal is an important one. Nettles and Herrington (2007) confirmed, “the school principal is regarded as critical to school success and student achievement” (p. 729). Every year, new leaders are needed to fill this vital role as a result of the high rates of principal turnover (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Stevenson, 2006). New principals, however, must quickly adapt to their new role; “. . . a newly appointed principal is expected to take on the full set of responsibilities” (Galdames, Montecinos, Campos, Ahumada, & Leiva, 2008, p. 319). Research into the unique experiences of new principals is vital due to the importance of the principal’s role. This research study illuminates the challenges these individuals will face in pursuit of the goals set forth for their schools and has the potential to ultimately help better support and prepare new principals.

This study was a qualitative study that involved five participants and data collected through a series of four interviews, three focus groups, and participant reflective journaling through the first 8 months new principals in Cross Keys County Schools were in their roles. All participants participated in each of four interviews and attended at least one of the three focus groups. Participation in reflective journaling was limited. The data collection and analysis were intended to address the following research questions: “What do new principals believe the principalship is like as they begin their work?”; “How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter support their socialization into the principalship?”; and “How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter

influence their emergent and professional identity?” Understanding these challenges and being aware of the specific knowledge and skills principals need can help new principals to ease the transition into the role and can minimize the challenges and surprises they encounter, particularly given the high number of new principals in the local district and the potential impact on the students they serve.

The following themes emerged from the analysis of data collected and existing research. The new principals in this study clarified and realized their core values in their new role. They also developed meaningful relationships with stakeholders and this partnership enabled them to build a positive school culture. Confidence in their abilities increased over time and this confidence enabled them to leverage their power and positionality. The new principals focused on cultural leadership and struggled to focus on instructional leadership. Finally, new principals largely socialized within the school setting with families, students, and staff members as opposed to others within the organization.

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SURPRISES AND  
CHALLENGES ON THE IDENTITY-BUILDING AND  
SOCIALIZATION OF NEW PRINCIPALS

by

Ashley Weinkle Triplett

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Greensboro  
2018

Approved by

Carl Lashley  
Committee Chair

© 2018 Ashley Weinkle Triplett

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and kind husband, Jay. Your selfless support made the completion of this work and fulfillment of my goals possible. I love you.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Ashley Weinkle Triplett, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair Carl Lashley

Committee Members Kathryn Hytten

Craig Peck

October 15, 2018  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

October 15, 2018  
Date of Final Oral Examination

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I reflected on the journey and experience of the past months and years, I am reminded of the support and encouragement my family, friends, and the faculty at UNCG provided me as I conducted this study and finished my doctoral degree. I was never without someone motivating me to continue my pursuit of this work; many times throughout this journey that motivating or kind word or that reminder of why I was on this journey made all of the difference in my ability to reach the finish line.

To my committee chair, Dr. Lashley—I recall my first class with you in my undergraduate program in the Teaching Fellows program in 2003. I am so fortunate that 15 years later, I am able to finish my doctoral degree with your guidance and wisdom. I know that with every revision of my work, all six or seven revisions, my writing strengthened. My final version makes me the proudest, just like you shared it would if I took the time to make this my very best work. Thank you, not only for serving as my committee chair, but for everything you've taught me over these last 15 years. I hope we cross paths in the future and that I've made you proud. I know I am a better educator because of you.

To Dr. Hytten and Dr. Peck—Thank you for pushing me to always think more critically about my research, this study, and my writing. The classes I took with you before embarking on this study prepared me for this challenge. Even through the final edits, I am still growing as a writer and researcher because of you. I have learned a lot through this process, and it has made me a better practitioner. Thank you.

Heather, Kimberly, Cameron, and Scott—Any time I needed a bit of inspiration or motivation, you were always there for me. I appreciate your frequent check-ins and inquiries as to the progress I was making. I know you will reach whatever goals you set for yourself, and I appreciate you helping me to reach mine.

To Stanley, my sweet, orange cat—You were my most loyal supporter during the writing process. While you will never be able to read this acknowledgement and will never know how much I enjoyed you sitting with me for the hundreds of hours while I wrote, your companionship meant the world to me. We will probably never have time like this together again, and I will remember it always.

Momma—No one held me accountable quite like you did. I knew every Sunday evening or Monday afternoon you would ask me how much I accomplished over the weekend. I would sit down to write every week just so I could report back to you honestly. I am not sure if I would have finished writing this without your predictable weekly inquiry as to my progress.

To Daddy—I hope this work makes you proud. I chose this profession and continued to pursue this degree because of you. Your guidance and wisdom have always made being a leader less challenging, and I hope this study makes being a new school leader easier for others. I believe the positive impact you've had on me as an educator can also spread to so many others through this work.

Jay—I could probably write an entire dissertation on just the support you've given me through this process. You have taken on so many aspects of our lives just to provide



the time, money, and energy needed in pursuit of my degrees and in completion of this work. Your unwavering patience and commitment to our lives while I spent so many hours writing will always leave a mark on my heart and will be one of the most memorable parts of this process. I know we've delayed other parts of our lives while I've finished this dissertation, and I am so excited for those parts of our lives to now begin.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	3
Research Questions .....	5
Study Overview .....	5
Significance of Study .....	6
Researcher’s Motivation for this Study .....	8
Definitions .....	12
Overview of Study .....	13
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	16
Theoretical Frameworks .....	17
Theory of Socialization .....	17
Identity Theory .....	19
Intersection of Theoretical Frameworks .....	20
Review of Existing Literature .....	23
Ultimate Responsibility .....	24
Challenges .....	25
Surprises .....	27
Isolation .....	29
Socialization .....	30
Identity-building .....	32
Summary and Implications .....	39
III. METHODOLOGY .....	41
Setting and Participants .....	44
Recruitment Challenges .....	45
Study Participants Overview .....	47
Data Analysis .....	48
Trustworthiness and Positionality .....	52

Limitations and Potential Problems .....	54
Context.....	55
Overview of Participants.....	56
Alexis .....	56
Caleb .....	57
Phoebe.....	57
Rosalind .....	58
Taylor.....	59
Presentation of Data.....	59
Overview of Data Collection .....	59
Summary of Methodology .....	60
 IV. ANALYSIS OF INITIAL DATA COLLECTED.....	 63
First Interviews .....	63
Communication of Core Values.....	64
Confidence Building.....	66
Cultural Leadership Competency .....	68
Instructional Leadership.....	71
Leadership Preparation .....	72
Positional Relationship Development.....	73
Shift in Perspective .....	76
Task Orientation.....	78
Conclusion .....	80
 V. ANALYSIS OF SUBSEQUENT DATA COLLECTED .....	 82
Second Interviews and First Focus Group .....	82
Emphasis on Cultural Leadership .....	82
Identity Development.....	85
Lack of Preparedness .....	86
Position Confirmation.....	88
Socialization with Stakeholders.....	89
Staff Accountability .....	91
Third Interviews and Second Focus Group .....	93
Building a Global Perspective .....	93
Building Self-confidence .....	94
Change Leadership Management.....	96
Disillusionment with Staff Expertise .....	98
Struggle to Focus on Instruction.....	100
Vital Relationship Development.....	101
Fourth Interviews and Third Focus Group.....	103

Assertion of Power.....	104
Juxtaposition of Challenges and Accomplishments .....	105
Management of Responsibilities.....	108
Success with Families and Success for Students .....	110
Chapter Conclusion.....	112
VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION .....	114
Summary of Findings.....	115
Presentation of Research Questions.....	117
New Principals’ Beliefs about the Principalship .....	118
Socialization Supported by Surprises and Challenges.....	119
Professional Identity Influenced by Surprises and Challenges .....	119
Connection to Theoretical Framework .....	120
Research Analysis, Recommendations, and Conclusion .....	120
Research Question 1 .....	121
Research Question 2 .....	127
Research Question 3 .....	138
Research Questions Conclusion.....	149
Recommendations for First-Year Principals.....	151
Recommendations for School Districts .....	152
Recommendations for Principal Preparation Programs .....	153
Further Research .....	154
Researcher’s Reflections.....	155
Conclusion .....	156
REFERENCES .....	161
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	170
APPENDIX B. JOURNAL QUESTIONS/PROMPTS.....	171
APPENDIX C. FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS.....	172
APPENDIX D. THEMES/CATEGORIES/CODES .....	173

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Study Participants .....	47
Table 2. Development of Categories and Themes from Codes .....	51
Table 3. Categories Identified by Time Span .....	115

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Socialization of New Principals .....	22
Figure 2. Data Collection and Analysis Process.....	50
Figure 3. Data Collection Timeline .....	60

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The school principalship is marked by unique experiences that vary significantly from year to year. The local community, educational policy, and the current culture of the school and district influence those experiences. School principals must navigate those experiences to successfully meet the demands of this vital role. The conclusions drawn by Hallinger and Heck (1996) from a review of existing empirical research conducted between 1980 and 1995 indicated the impact of the school principal is significant as the principal influences relationships among staff, students, and families and also plays a key role in determining the school's educational outcomes. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) discussed the influence the principal has on school culture and academic achievement. More recently, Lee (2015) asserted that "principals are both the symbolic and functional head of the school organization" (p. 262). Nettles and Herrington (2007) confirmed, ". . . there is ample evidence in the body of research and in educational practice to confirm that the school principal is regarded as critical to school success and student achievement" (p. 729). Principals new to the role often face even greater challenges than the unique experiences principals face annually. The daunting role of the school principal and the learning curve for principals new to the role is amplified by the important impact of the building leader on student learning and academic outcomes.

The challenges new principals must overcome might not seem a significant issue if there was a relatively stable workforce of qualified, experienced school leaders. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) acknowledged that the need for new educators to enter school administration has increased due to principal turnover from retirements and the transition of former principals into other roles. Stevenson (2006) confirmed the shortage of principals in Western society. In addition, the turnover rate of new principals in particular is high. According to a published report by the School Leaders Network (2014), “Twenty five thousand (one quarter of the country’s principals) leave their schools each year, leaving millions of children’s lives adversely affected. Fifty percent of new principals quit during their third year in the role” (p. 1).

The unique challenges of the principalship and the struggles that come with being the school’s primary and most accountable leader shape how new principals experience their first year. New principals tend to have optimistic expectations about their first year in the principalship. Gentilucci, Denti, and Guaglianone (2013) found that the “grand hopes [of new principals] shaped their perspectives of site leadership” (p. 79). Furthermore, Bauer and Brazer (2013) confirmed, “the new principal has dreams about how to help more students succeed at a higher level and how to work harmoniously with adults to enhance instructional experiences” (p. 173). This optimistic outlook, however, is often tempered when the realities of the role set in and new principals must shift their learned prior experiences into on-the-job implementation and application. Walker and Qian (2006) asserted, “the energy needed previously to climb must be transformed quickly to balancing atop an equally tenuous surface—a spot requiring new knowledge,



skills, and understandings” (p. 297). These new energies required to be effective in the first year of the principalship makes the first year unique and often different than what new principals may have anticipated.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Research into the unique experiences of new principals is vital due to the importance of the principal’s role. This research study can illuminate the challenges these individuals will face in pursuit of the goals set forth for their schools and has the potential to ultimately help better support and prepare new principals. One of my goals in this study was to help both aspiring new principals and district leaders better understand the socialization and identity-building of new principals in order to support their transition to leadership in their first year on the job. In this study, socialization refers primarily to the definition as asserted by Crow (2006) which considers the difference between professional socialization (“ . . . relates to the initial preparation to take on an occupational role”) (p. 311) and organizational socialization (“ . . . context-bound and includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to conduct the role in a particular setting”) (p. 311). By better understanding the socialization and identity-building process, district leaders may be able to create opportunities for targeted orientation and induction of new principals as well as find solutions to reducing challenges new principals face. The goals of this research were to identify the common experiences of new principals in existing literature and then to conduct a qualitative study focused on the surprises and challenges new principals face and the impact of those surprises and challenges on principal socialization and their emergent professional identity.

These findings will be shared with the purpose of informing future new principals about those challenges and surprises and how they impact socialization and identity-building in the principalship. Galdames, Montecinos, Campos, Ahumada, and Leiva (2018) suggested, “From his/her first day at the school, a newly appointed principal is expected to take on the full set of responsibilities and combine learning about the school’s culture with introducing changes to move the school forward” (p. 319). While new principals are expected to quickly acclimate to their role, they must be prepared to do so. As Gentilucci and colleagues (2013) suggested, the experiences new principals encounter for which they are not adequately prepared impact their ability to meet the goals they set for their leadership. Stevenson (2006) identified a “high expectation/low trust vortex” (p. 413), whereas the unrealistic expectation and accountability placed on schools, coupled with the limited resources and funding available to meet those expectations, makes the role of the principal seem almost impossible.

The skills new principals lack and the unmet intended goals suggests that additional research should be considered in this area in order to proactively address the learning curve new principals encounter. The surprises and unanticipated challenges of the first year impact the first-year principal’s experiences. Understanding these challenges and being aware of the specific knowledge and skills principals need can help new principals to ease the transition into the role and can minimize the challenges and surprises they encounter, particularly given the high number of new principals in the local district and the potential impact on the students they serve.

## **Research Questions**

Existing research on new principals provided insight into the unique challenges new principals face and the skills that must be acquired in the first year of their role. This study was centered around the impact of those challenges and surprises on the socialization process and process of identity-building of the principalship. The following three research questions were the focus of this qualitative study.

1. What do new principals believe the principalship is like as they begin their work?
2. How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter support their socialization into the principalship?
3. How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter influence their emergent professional identity?

## **Study Overview**

To answer these research questions, I designed a qualitative study that involved five participants and collected data through a series of interviews, focus groups, and participant journals. All participants were from Cross Keys County School district in their first year as a principal. The school district is located in the southeastern United States; all schools the new principals led were Title I, elementary schools. The data were collected over the first few months of the new principals' first year in their new role.

Each of the five participants participated in four different interviews and at least one of the three focus groups. The five participants (Caleb, Alexis, Rosalind, Phoebe, and

Taylor) all previously served in other leadership roles at the school level and started their careers in education as a classroom teacher.

### **Significance of Study**

The role of the principal is important and the leadership effectiveness of the principal correlates to the academic achievement of students within his or her school. Leithwood and colleagues (2008) stated, “. . . leadership has very significant effects on the quality of school organization and on pupil learning . . . there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership” (p. 29). Hallinger and Heck (1996) asserted there are various factors, including the effectiveness of the principal, that have an impact on school achievement. Central to the “mission of schools remains that of improving student achievement and quality of educational opportunity” (Knoeppel & Rinehart, 2008, p. 502). Principal effectiveness impacts student achievement and because student achievement is the primary purpose of schools, the role of the effective principal is a critical one.

Principals already face different challenges that require a new skillset each year. West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010) analyzed the pressures of the urban principalship in a historical and narrative qualitative study; “increased school academic performance pressure,” “communication technology developments,” and “new urban school political power dynamics” were identified as “emerging,” or new, stressors recently impacting and changing the role of the principal (p. 244). The increased emphasis worldwide on education due to competition among countries in the world has resulted in greater

expectations on systems of education (Stevenson, 2006). Stevenson (2006) also asserted there “has been a loss of confidence in traditional professions to meet societal expectations, and this has often been particularly pronounced in education” and “the consequence has been to subject schools, and particularly principals, to huge accountability pressures as leaders seek to meet the demands of both the state apparatus and the local market” (p. 412).

With the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2002 and reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, school and district accountability for all students’ academic achievement has increased (U.S. Department of Education, 2015); certainly, due to the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2016, the demands and level of accountability on the school principal will change again. Spillane and Lee (2014) confirmed that as a result of “. . . the emergence of a high-stakes accountability policy environment . . . the demands on school principals have changed . . .” (p. 433). They further state that there is a limited body of research that examines the challenges of new principals following the era of increased accountability that occurred in the years after 2002. The impact of No Child Left Behind and the subsequent accountability is an important juncture in educational leadership; Crow (2006) stated, “The higher expectations for US principals in the area of instructional leadership, created among other things by the NCLB Act . . . have significantly changed the role of school principal in the USA” (p. 310). In general, the available research on the experiences of new principals after the era of accountability beginning only as far back as 2002 is limited (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Oplatka (2012) synthesized existing scholarship on new

principals and only identified 34 total studies published in academic journals related to the experiences of new principals from 1990 through 2011; research was conducted in the United States in only 14 of those studies and two since 2002. While the goal of the review of existing research is to consider the most recent scholarship, there is a limited amount of research related to identifying the experiences of new principals and even less since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2002.

In an era of increased accountability and the challenge of developing a skillset needed to tackle the significant role of a new school principal, new principals face an extensive learning curve during the first year. Research that aims to better understand the challenges and surprises new principals face will inform principal preparation programs and school districts of those challenges to better orient principals to their new role. One goal of mitigating those challenges is to lessen their impact on the new principal and ultimately student outcomes. By identifying these challenges and surprises with an understanding of how they impact the socialization process and the subsequent building of their professional identity, findings can inform other new principals about those experiences allowing for a greater focus on the responsibilities of the job. While new principals will always be a part of the educational system and a part of schooling, enhancing and improving the research in this area can contribute to greater understanding of the challenges of the role and increase the possibility of positive outcomes.

### **Researcher's Motivation for this Study**

My own experience as a first-year principal coincided with the beginning of my work towards attaining my doctorate in educational leadership. As I formed the research

that would eventually be the foundation of my literature review and study proposal, I found it difficult to separate my own experiences in the principalship from my interest into educational research. In my first year, I experienced two significant events that I realized had a profound influence on my identity-building and socialization. One of my goals is to provide the learning gleaned from this research to future new principals so they will be more aware of experiences they will encounter and more equipped to successfully navigate those experiences.

In November of my first year in the principalship, I learned late one evening from a call from the sheriff's department that a student at my school had passed unexpectedly that evening. Earlier that day, the student attended classes and boarded the bus home as usual; a few short hours later he had died. As I hung up the phone, I felt unprepared and for the first time since I assumed the role of principal very alone. While I am fortunate to lead in a district with a protocol in place to address crises such as this one and with a team of central office administrators willing to guide principals through the steps when something like this occurs, there are certain things for which I, as the building's principal, was solely responsible. No one else could call the family and share their condolences as the school's representative. That had to be me. No one else could tell the staff one of their beloved students had passed. That, too, had to be me. No one else could record the message to send via telephone to hundreds of families to share the devastating news of a loss of a student. That had to be me.

Leadership, when tragedies occur, cannot be delegated or divided. There is no leadership course to teach the principles that guide one through an event such as I had

experienced. I felt, by November of my first year in the principalship because of this tragedy, like a principal. As Spillane and Lee (2014) describe the feeling of “ultimate responsibility,” that is exactly what I felt. I was ultimately responsible to navigate this tragedy with care and comfort; I felt ultimately responsible to avoid any missteps or blunders in working with the family and the school community in the healing process. No school leader wants this experience as part of their principalship; however, my first year of the principalship required my navigation through this experience and even with others holding a map and telling me what to do, no one could take my place.

For me, the building of that feeling of responsibility built my identity as a new principal. I assumed the identity of a principal. While I had accepted the role of principal and started to build my identity as a school principal, I believe a second event in my first year shaped others’ perceptions of me as a building leader. This experience, I felt (and often still feel), shaped my identity as a school leader in the view of others. Crow (2006) described, the “notion of effective socialization typically assumes a certain degree of conformity, where the new principal is socialized to conform to a conception of the role that is accepted by the socializing agents” (p. 321). This experience asserted my leadership as a school principal in the district as I forged through previously uncharted territory. This experience also socialized me into the principalship because my actions forced others in the district and in my school to see me as a principal, one who is not only accountable for her actions but the decisions I made.

I vividly recall a member of my school’s office staff coming down the hallway to my office early one morning and followed me into my office. She shared a substitute had



arrived at school and inquired with me if I wanted to remove the substitute from the list of available substitutes at the school. The substitute, she explained to me, was transgender. I remember my reply was, a reply I would repeat again if asked the same question, “No.” As the substitute stayed that day, and returned the next, I faced criticism by teachers, the office staff, and parents. Her skills as a substitute were exemplary, that was never the question or concern. The concern was that we (I) allowed a transgender substitute in our school.

As the news spread about the substitute, I found myself on the phone with the entire team of central office administrators who supported my school. They shared this was the first issue they encountered related to a transgender employee. While I could share other additional details of that conversation that might add to this discussion, I prefer instead to share here only that my decisions and actions related to this event were supported strongly by my central office administrators and our local school board. I believe this event and my actions following solidified their view of me as a school principal. Through their support, my leadership felt validated. I interpreted this validation as their validation of my role as a principal in the district.

These experiences became turning points in my identity-building and socialization as a principal. When I initially considered the research study for my dissertation, I classified these experiences as surprises and challenges with little connection to the overall impact on my leadership. I was both surprised and challenged by these events. I was surprised to experience two very significant, unanticipated events in my first year as a principal, and I was challenged to navigate through these

successfully. The impact of those surprises and challenges were on my identity-building and socialization, not simply surprises and challenges that I faced. While the result of the entire year's experiences, the identity-building and socialization of my first year shifted significantly from these two events. I cannot remove the impact of the perceptions of my own experiences from this research; however, this context is necessary to understand and provided the motivation for my study. These experiences are uniquely mine, just like those of the new principals in my study. Just as the surprises and challenges they experienced and the decisions they made shaped them as a leader, these surprises and challenges shaped me.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are included to assert the manner in which they are applied for the purposes of the review of literature and subsequent findings in this study.

*Formal training*—Induction programs, college courses, or professional development an individual receives for the purposes of and designed for preparation for the principalship.

*Identity*—As defined by Burke and Stets (2009), “An identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person” (p. 3).

*Interactions (formal and informal)* —Addressed by Greenfield (1985), organizational socialization occurs through both deliberate (formal) and unintentional (informal) context-bound experiences with the school community and colleagues.

*New principal*—An individual who has assumed the role of the school leader without having previously served in a similar role and who is in his/her first year in a school’s top leadership position.

*Organizational socialization*—Setting-specific acquisition of the “knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to conduct the role” (Crow, 2006, p. 311).

*Professional socialization*—The training and preparation required to assume a particular role regardless of the setting (Crow, 2006).

*Self-efficacy*—“. . . the expectation to cope successfully (self-efficacy) in a number of different areas of functioning” (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 576).

*Self-view*—The result of the “reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular *groups* or *roles*” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225).

*Socialization*—As defined by Greenfield (1985), socialization is “. . . a process concerned with the manner in which one develops the attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors needed to work satisfactorily within organizational settings” (p. 2).

### **Overview of Study**

Through this study, I sought to identify how the challenges and surprises new principals experienced impacted their socialization and identity-building in their first year of their principalship. High rates of principal turnover contribute to a large number of new principals entering administration every year. The information gained from this study supports better understanding new principals’ initiation into their role as their

experiences occur while students and teachers enter the schoolhouse every day and learning must continue.

For the large numbers of new principals, the first-year challenges and surprises must be minimized to lessen the potential impact on their schools. This study contributes to the existing literature on new principals and can contribute to the knowledge districts, new principals, and principal preparation programs have to support new principals and reduce the learning they must acquire in their first year.

This qualitative study was conducted in Cross Keys County Schools, a district in the southeastern part of the United States. The study involved three data collection methods including interviews, focus groups, and reflective journaling among five participants. Each of the five participants was a new principal in his or her first year of the principalship and served Title I elementary schools in Cross Keys County. The data were collected over 8 months and involved four interviews of each participant at various time intervals during their first months in their new role. I also held three focus groups with the participants. Each participant participated in at least one of the three focus groups. While I initially planned to collect reflective journals from participants throughout this study, only two participants each submitted one reflective journal. Data were coded using Initial Coding and Axial Coding methods by hand; codes generated categories and themes were developed from the categories in order to address the three research questions. The findings and answers to the research question resulted from a triangulation of existing research, the data collected from this study, and the framework.

Chapter II begins with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks of socialization and identity that provide a context for the findings from the data collection process. Next, Chapter II summarizes the existing body of research on new principals, particularly related to the surprises, challenges, socialization, and identity-building that shapes their first year in their new role. Chapter III describes the methodology used in this research study. The chapter includes an overview of the research questions and the data collection process, which included interviews, focus groups, and reflective journaling from the participants at various time intervals in their first year in the principalship. Chapter III also describes the data analysis process and the limitations and challenges of the research study. The participants and the setting in which the study took place are introduced in Chapter III.

Chapter IV summarizes the data collected from the initial interviews in the principals' first year. Chapter V discusses the categories identified from the data collected in the participant journals, subsequent interviews, and focus groups.

Chapter VI summarizes the findings and provides answers to the research questions in the study and includes the theoretical framework in the discussion of themes. Chapter VI also provides recommendations for further research and recommendations for new principals, school districts, and principal preparation programs based on the data collected from this study to support future new principals in minimizing the challenges and surprises they face in their first year.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The existing literature on the experiences of new principals has been situated broadly around several topics: the surprises and challenges encountered early in their role, new principals' feelings of self-efficacy, new principal socialization processes and role isolation, orientation towards responsibility and new tasks, and the process of identity-building. Each of these topics contribute to the general underlying theme that there are skills and knowledge new principals must acquire early on in their role in order to ensure the success of their school and success in their leadership (e.g., Gentilucci et al., 2013; Lee, 2015; Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone, 2008; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). In addition, identity-building and the socialization of new principals will be important to interpreting the data from this study; identity theory and the theory of socialization are further described below.

The literature review will begin first with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that provide a backdrop for this study. Following this discussion, existing research will be outlined. Existing research is organized first by providing an overview of new principals' orientation to responsibility and requisite skills followed by a specific discussion on the challenges new principals experience. Finally, the isolation of new principals is juxtaposed with the socialization process new principals undergo as well as the identity-building that shapes their first year as a school principal.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

The theory of socialization and identity theory will be used to anchor this inquiry. For new principals, the process of socialization into the principalship started earlier in their formal training and continued through the early part of their new role. This socialization into the role contributes to new principals' perceptions of themselves as a principal and supports the building of their identity as a school leader. In concert, the theory of socialization and identity-building will provide a framework in which to interpret the data collected.

### **Theory of Socialization**

Broadly considering socialization, the theory of socialization has its roots in social theory and the examination of how individuals interact through social constructs. One of the earliest theorists of the processes of socialization was Franklin Henry Giddings who in 1897 asserted that when individuals associate with one another socialization occurs, thereby creating similar responses to similar conditions for those socialized individuals. Giddings described socialization which includes “. . . the capacity of somewhat differing individuals to become more alike under exposure to the same conditions and to each other's influence. It is capacity for assimilation and for a common approach to a type or to an ideal” (Giddings, 1897, p. 11). As an outcome of the processes of socialization through association with other individuals and to assimilate into a similar culture, Giddings (1897) stated, “. . . the individuals of the aggregation respond in like ways to the same stimuli . . . these like individuals will feel alike under like conditions” (p. 13). For the purposes of this theoretical framework, I have aligned his assimilation and

development of similar responses by individuals in a group with the formal training that occurs for new principals through principal preparation programs.

This aspect of Giddings's work most closely relates to the research on the socialization of new principals who interact informally and formally with one another and members of the school community and thus assume particular attitudes and behaviors. Greenfield (1985) referred to these dispositions as role-enactment, and "include relations with teachers, with the community, with peers and superiors, and the necessity to establish and/or develop routines associated with organizational stability and the maintenance of smooth day-to-day operations" (p. 42); Greenfield (1985) found that the work context significantly impacted and shaped the socialization of new principals. Both Giddings's and Greenfield's work suggested that the particular work context of the new principal influenced the socialization of new principals. Due to the formal training new principals typically undergo (applying Giddings's theory of socialization) as well as the skills and dispositions that are acquired upon assumption of the principalship (applying Greenfield's work), two types of socialization occur; both professional and organizational socialization, as described by Crow (2006):

Professional socialization, which in the USA occurs primarily in university preparation programs, relates to the initial preparation to take on an occupational role such as school principal and includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to enact the role regardless of setting. Organizational socialization, in contrast, is context-bound and includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to conduct the role in a particular setting. (p. 311)

This suggests that during the early stages of assuming the principalship new principals are impacted by professional socialization that occurs during formal training and



principal preparation, while further socialization is influenced by the schools they lead. The theory of socialization, particularly around Giddings's description of association as part of the socialization process, is coupled with more modern understandings of professional and organizational socialization and provided a valuable backdrop to the potential findings of this study.

### **Identity Theory**

Identities “. . . are dynamic, multiple, socially negotiated, contextual, and developmental. In contrast to the notion a single self-concept, identities are not static. Rather they change as the context, role expectations, and individual change” (Whiteman, Scribner, & Crow, 2015, p. 579). Furthermore, “Identities are not simply who we say we are, but reflect the motivation, drive, and energy connected to our actual practices” (Crow & Møller, 2017, p. 751). Stryker and Burke (2000) suggested that identity refers to a self-image resulting from multiple meanings related to the various roles individuals play. Two of the leading researchers on identity theory, Stryker and Burke, reconciled the competing views of identity theory, one where society influences the development of one's identity and the other where identity is internally verified. While there are both external and internal components to identity-building, identity theory focuses on the self and the meaning that the individual attaches to their understanding of their role. As defined by Burke and Stets (2009),

Identity theory seeks to explain the specific meanings that individuals have for the multiple identities they claim; how these identities relate to one another for any one person; how their identities influence their behavior, thoughts, and feelings or emotions; and how their identities tie them in to society at large. (p. 3)

More specifically, “one’s identities are composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular *groups* or *roles*” (Stets & Burke, 2000, pp. 225–226).

For the purposes of this study, identity theory was used as a lens to understanding how new principals view themselves in the context of their new role, “being a principal,” and how their experiences impact or change their self-view in the role of principal. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) found that “Role-identity transformation through a new mind-set appeared to be a critical step in the professional growth process” (p. 479), suggesting that the process of identity-building for new principals is an important one and vital to new principals’ success. Scribner and Crow (2012) also discussed identities in the context of the role of the principal and that identities change. They asserted, “identities are constantly being negotiated as individuals interact with and make sense in a relationship to the various contexts in which they work” (p. 246). Similar to Crow (2006) and the organizational socialization that is location-specific, identities are impacted by the context. New principals’ identities are built as they begin their role and within the organization in which they serve. As a result, identity theory and the concept of identity-building were used to consider findings from this study of new principals.

### **Intersection of Theoretical Frameworks**

The theory of socialization and identity theory together provided a context with which to inform research questions, develop questions asked of participants, and analyze participant responses in this inquiry. The existing research of Browne-Ferrigno (2003) and Crow (2006) informed the development of the theoretical framework for this study.

Their research acknowledged the socialization process and to some extent, the relationship between the process of socialization and the identity-building of new principals.

Figure 1 illustrates the socialization that occurs for new principals and that socialization leads to the building of a principal's professional identity and self-view as a principal. The diagram includes an arrow pointing in both directions; this is to suggest that socialization impacts a new principal's identity-building and that identity-building also impacts a new principal's socialization. The graphic is intended to summarize simply the various aspects of socialization and the impact socialization has on the new principal's emergent professional identity. Because this study focuses on the first year in new principals' role, the framework and graphic emphasizes that socialization and identity-building occurs; the socialization of new principals results in identity-building and identity-building plays a role in new principals' socialization.

One aspect of socialization is the formal training (Giddings, 1897) and professional socialization (Crow, 2006) of schools of education and leadership training for new principals that occurs typically before the new principal begins his or her job. The other is the formal and informal interactions that occur during the principalship which Greenfield (1985) describes and Crow (2006) names as organizational socialization. Furthermore, as socialization occurs as the result of these processes identity-building and a principal's self-view also emerges.

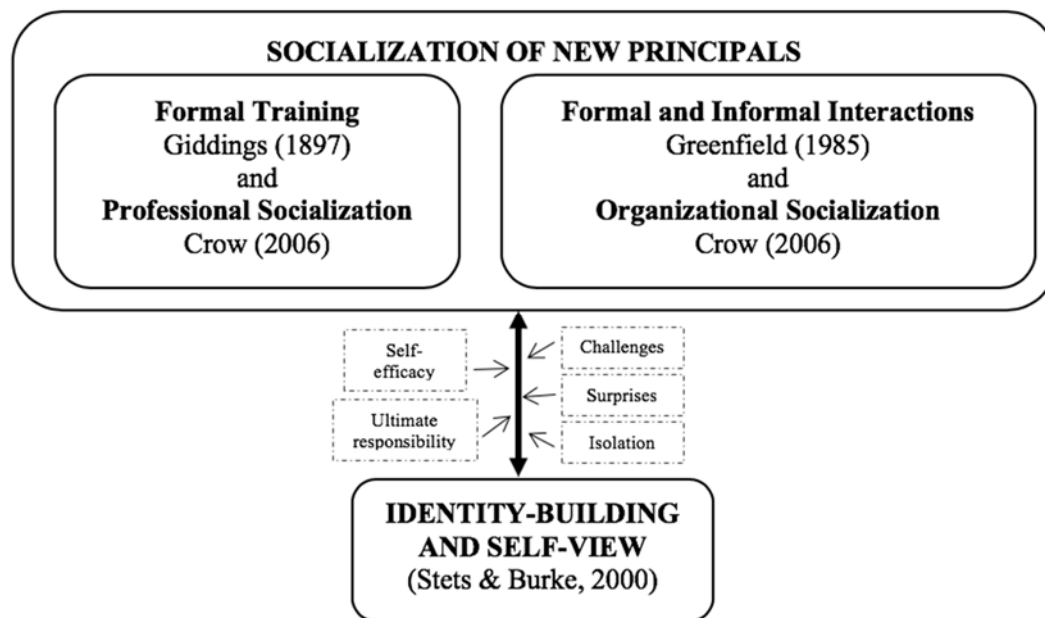


Figure 1. Socialization of New Principals.

Existing research affirms the structure of the theoretical framework, including the relationship between socialization and identity-building. While socialization and identity-building are further discussed in the literature review, research related to their dynamic is extracted here. Socialization and identity-building is an ongoing process and largely impacted by the context in which they occur; “a principal’s role identity interacts with social identity by virtue of being in a particular school context” (Scribner & Crow, 2012, p. 246). New principals’ process of organizational socialization and identity-building occurs once they assume their new role. The individuals with whom they interact and socialize impacts their identity. Scribner and Crow (2012) suggested,

[identities] are socially negotiated with various audiences in terms of expectations to confirm/disconfirm identities and to develop trust and social capital with constituents . . . For example, principals, as they interact with teachers, are negotiating identities based not only on the principal’s expectations for

her/himself but also the teacher's expectations of the principal's identity in relation to the teacher's view of his/her own identity. (p. 250)

Browne-Ferrigno (2003) stated the transition to the principalship is “an intricate process of learning and reflection that requires socialization into a new community of practice and assumption of a new role identity” (p. 470). The acknowledgement of the transition to the principalship by Browne-Ferrigno summarizes the theoretical framework that serves as a background for this research and study.

The research questions and findings of this study aimed to focus on the formal and informal interactions (Greenfield, 1985) and the organizational socialization (Crow, 2006) that occurs in the first year on the job for the new principal. The surprises and challenges new principals encounter are the experiences that Greenfield (1985) asserted as socialization into the role and results in the organizational socialization Crow (2006) discussed. The socialization that occurs from these surprises and challenges contributes to the identity-building for new principals.

### **Review of Existing Literature**

For the purposes of this study, my review of existing literature focused initially on the surprises and challenges new principals faced in their first year of the principalship. The other topics included in the subsequent literature review emerged from this initial review of surprises and challenges. One of the first surprises new principals face is the sentiment of “ultimate responsibility” and is included first in the existing literature review below. “Ultimate responsibility” emerged from this review as a significant deviation from previous experiences new principals had in other roles and is included in a separate

section from other surprises new principals faced. The research related to the challenges and surprises follows. Next, I reviewed isolation and socialization of new principals; the topics of self-efficacy and identity-building emerged from the literature and is differentiated in a separate section of the literature review. Formal training is included in the theoretical framework and also plays a role in principal preparation and was thus reviewed and included in this literature review.

### **Ultimate Responsibility**

As one of the first studies conducted following the era of high stakes testing and accountability for teachers and schools, Spillane and Lee (2014) considered the daunting tasks ahead of new principals related to the sense of the ultimate responsibility they face for student achievement; they used the phrase “responsibility shock” (p. 442) to emphasize the drastic difference between previous roles in education and the first year in the role of school principal. This sense of “ultimate responsibility” and the subsequent feeling of missing necessary skills make the first year of the principalship significantly more challenging than in ensuing years. Lewis (2016) asserted new principals felt some tasks were familiar as a result of previous experiences; however, he used the phrase “The buck stops here!” to described new principals’ overwhelmed feelings by the revelation of the weight of their new role (p. 27).

Bauer and Brazer (2013) differentiated between new and experienced principals; they stated, “more experienced principals, however, may learn to mitigate the effects of role overload through prioritizing tasks, appropriate delegation, and pushing back a bit . . . to have obligations removed or reduced” (p. 171). In a study conducted by Gentilucci

and colleagues (2013), the researchers suggested that new principals' initially optimistic outlook for the first year "modified in response to challenges encountered as principals interact with the phenomena in their environment" (p. 84). Many new principals are also unprepared to navigate the increased responsibility the principalship requires. Daresh (1987) stated new principals felt "it was pleasant and personally satisfying to be called 'the boss,' few could imagine all of the responsibilities that were associated with that title until actually living in that role" (p. 10). This year-long adjustment requires reconciliation of the missing skills with the understanding of the tasks necessary for a successful year in the principalship as a principal. Using quantitative data generated from surveys of new principals, Spillane and Lee (2014) found that ultimate responsibility also resulted in "increased stress, a constant alertness to what might go wrong, and an inability to leave the job behind even on the weekends" (p. 444).

### **Challenges**

Research suggests that new principals' experiences are shaped by challenges related to the managerial, human resources, and cultural aspects of the role, both "soft skills" and "hard skills," according to Gentilucci and colleagues (2013). Cowie and Crawford (2008) assign the various roles school principals play as being both a set of "appropriate intellectual abilities" and "interpersonal professional abilities" (p. 682). Lee (2015) summarized the multifaceted challenges for new principals, ranging from the resistance of staff members, creation of a school budget, and building maintenance to ineffective staff members and implementing new policies. These myriad gaps in the preparation of new principals often leave them with a significant learning curve. In

addition, “It is expected from novice school principals to have the same knowledge and skills as their predecessors and to master several professional skills in a short time” (van Jaarsveld, Mentz, & Challens, 2015, p. 94). The work and demands on new principals are the same as experienced principals; however, new principals are expected to also simultaneously master the skills they come into their role often lacking. van Jaarsveld and colleagues (2015) also stated, “. . . the novice school principal is indeed bombarded by new knowledge and vocational demands, and that there is a lack of sufficient time to process the new knowledge, which can be damaging in the end” (p. 94). These missing skills compound the already challenging work of a school principal.

While many new principals have served previously in the role of assistant principal, “what novice principals need is both more technical information and a better understanding of the human-relational aspects of leadership” (Nelson et al., 2008, p. 297). Typical research on the topic of new principals identifies key themes in the skillset gap of new principals. For example, Gentilucci and colleagues (2013) found in a study that combined surveys and interviews of new principals in close proximity to various California State Universities that the most frequent challenges new principals faced were “stress, time management, relationships, and support” (p. 80). New administrators are often surprised by the amount of time spent on managerial tasks and the limited time available to focus on instruction (Walker & Qian, 2006). Lewis (2016) suggested the necessary skills new principals lacked led to exhaustion and new principals’ inability to interact and connect with their students.



Principal succession further compounds the challenges of acquiring necessary skills for the first-year principal and must be acknowledged as having an impact on the new principal's experience. Lee (2015) affirms that "different intended trajectories [of the school's direction] present different challenges for successor principals" (p. 263). The perceptions the new principal has of his or her predecessor's legacy of the direction of the school and relationships with stakeholders have the potential to broadly influence the new principal's experiences and decisions (Oplatka, 2012). Weindling and Dimmock (2006) acknowledged that challenges the previous principal created is one of only many issues that confronts a new principal, they identified that

difficulties caused by the style and practice of the previous head; the school buildings; communication and consultation with staff; creating a better public image of the school; coping with a weak member of the senior team; dealing with incompetent staff; and low staff morale (p. 329)

all face the new principal.

### **Surprises**

New principals have high expectations and hopes about their first year in the principalship and what they plan to accomplish. Gentilucci and colleagues (2013) found, in a qualitative study focusing on principal interviews, that new principals believed under their leadership, "faculty morale would soar, student achievement gains would be impressive, and overall school operation would be smooth and nearly trouble-free" (p. 79). Oplatka (2012), through a synthesis of existing research on new principals published from 1990 to 2011, found "novice principals experience some sort of surprise, reality shock, high levels of stress and a sense of loneliness in their first years as well as have

insufficient managerial competence, low practical expertise . . . and a greater propensity for making mistakes” (p. 129).

Unanticipated outcomes, or a deviation from expectations set forth before beginning the principalship, is a theme in the literature related to new principals. Gentilucci and colleagues (2013) suggested that “[new principals] often lack the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to meet demanding challenges created by their multi-faceted leadership roles” (p. 75). Gaps in previously acquired skills and those necessary for success as the building principal are often illuminated in the first year. Louis (1980) discussed the surprises new members of an organization face when they enter their new role:

Time and space become problematic at the moment of entry. At that particular time, all surroundings, that is, the entire organizationally-based physical and social world, are changed. There is no gradual exposure and no real way to confront the situation a little at a time. (p. 100)

New principals are forced to encounter the surprises of their new role as they orient to the principalship and quickly adapt to new expectations, responsibilities, and surroundings. Gentilucci and colleagues (2013) discussed while also mastering the job responsibilities that are routine for experienced leaders.

Shoho and Barnett (2010) echoed other research that the first year for a new principal is marked by surprise as the role is much different than expected. Furthermore, they acknowledged similar themes about the new principalship, including a missing link in the categories of “(1) technical skills, including resource management and budgeting, and (2) cultural and moral issues” (p. 564). Petzko (2008) stated that new principals felt

challenged and had needs vastly different than experienced principals. Even balancing “. . . the day-to-day pressure and changing demands can be quite unsettling and discordant for the new head teachers” (Holligan, Menter, Hutchings, & Walker, 2006, p. 117). Furthermore, in his quantitative analysis of a survey of new principals and assistant principals, Petzko (2008) identified that new principals have an awareness of the gaps in their principal preparation training after experiencing their first year in the role.

### **Isolation**

Among the most researched areas about new principals are the issues of socialization and isolation. New principals can be isolated and lack support for socialization. This isolation stems from a degree of individual decision-making authority and the lack of access to colleagues on site with whom to collaborate. In addition, isolation tends to be a significant factor in new principals’ overall satisfaction with their new role. In a recent study, Bauer and Silver (2018) found isolation had a significant impact on new principals’ self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and burnout and “emerges in this model as a predictor of all variables” (p. 325).

Stephenson and Bauer (2010) connected the isolation of new principals with the increase in managerial tasks due to the fact that new principals “spend a significant amount of time learning the administrative ropes” (p. 13). For new principals, the isolation they experience is often the result of having the “sole responsibility for school outcomes and the strong possibility that principals will make many of their key decisions in isolation” (Bauer & Brazer, 2013, p. 156). Spillane and Lee (2014) confirmed “new principals often struggle with feelings of professional isolation and loneliness as they

transition into a role that carries ultimate responsibility and decision-making power” (p. 433). New principals feel isolated in their new role; these feelings may have a profound impact on their ability to serve effectively as a school leader. The “. . . more numerous and varied social interactions, the degree to which principals feel separated from this enhanced interaction may exacerbate feelings of isolation and may thus have a severe impact on principals’ abilities to serve as instructional leaders” (Bauer & Brazer, 2013, p. 153). The isolation new principals felt is related to not only their new responsibilities but also to the learning that must occur within the first year.

### **Socialization**

Socialization is necessary for school leaders in order to learn their role and about their new context, as well as to address issues of isolation they may face as the sole leader of a school building. Daresh (1987) identified “socialization in the profession and in individual school systems” as one of a new principal’s “major categories of concern requiring support” (p. 1). The socialization process for school principals occurs first in principal leadership programs but continues in the early years of the principalship. Professional socialization occurs for new principals during the “formal and informal processes” of preparation programs (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 335); however, in the early months of the principalship, “It is a time of ‘surprise’ and the importance sense-making is highlighted as organisational socialisation begins and the new head attempts to develop a cognitive map of the complexities of the situation, the people, the problems, and the school culture” (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 336). Daresh (1987) contributed to the early body of research on principal socialization. His research of new

principals found the problem of socialization new principals faced “were the implicit expectations felt in most school districts that principals, regardless of whether they were newcomers or veterans, should somehow understand the proper routes to be taken in order to survive and to solve problems in their building” (p. 14). Socialization requires new principals to understand how to navigate the organization of which they recently became a participant.

The socialization process must occur within the context of a largely changing educational landscape in an effort for new professionals to adapt to their new role (Crow, 2006, p. 217). Lee (2015) identified three stages of principal socialization, including “challenges related to shock, survival, and personal insecurity,” followed by “trying to ‘fit in’ and achieve role clarity” and finally, “stabilization [and] integration into the new school” (p. 264). Oplatka (2012) named the period of socialization of new principals the “*induction*” stage, where the new principal “has to confront many issues and difficulties, such as attaining acceptance, learning the organizational culture, and establishing ways to overcome the insecurity of inexperience . . .” (p. 131). These aspects of principal socialization, in Oplatka (2012) and Lee (2015), focused primarily on the formal and informal socialization described by Greenfield (1985) and organizational socialization as described by Crow (2006). Browne-Ferrigno (2003) further asserted that the transition to a new principal, “is an intricate process of learning and reflection that requires socialization into a new community of practice and assumption of a new role identity” (p. 470). Both isolation and the socialization of new principals impacts the experience of

principals and the stress they experience once in the role. Furthermore, socialization also has a profound impact on the building of the new principal's identity.

. . . at a time when the new head is trying to forge a new professional identity; s/he is often preoccupied with the previous incumbent's legacies and identities. However, it is through adapting, changing, and often rejecting the status quo, that the new headteacher is socialized into the role, thereby acquiring his/her distinctive identity. (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 338)

### **Identity-building**

Principal identity-building occurs for new principals as they assume their role as the school leader. "Identity is not a label we or others place on us, for example, as an educational leader. Rather it shapes and molds our practices. Identity also provides motivation for our actions in the role" (Whiteman et al., 2015). Scribner and Crow (2012) said, "the concept of professional identity . . . [helps] us understand what influences a leader's behaviors and what drives a leader's willingness and ability to take on and enact creative and effective leadership in a high-stakes, dynamic knowledge society" (p. 245). Research suggests that the process of building the new principal's identity occurs over time and is constantly evolving. "Identities are a product of both structure and agency, and the interplay between them; they are in a constant state of flux, shifting and changing over time" (Stevenson, 2006, pp. 114–115).

Whiteman and colleagues (2015) asserted that various interactions with members of the community, colleagues, school staff, students, and families impacted the ongoing building of the principal's identity. However, the principal's perceptions of those interactions also help to shape identity. "A principal's identities are not merely a

reflection of constituent demands or interests but also involve the active reflection, exploration, and commitment of the individual principal to a set of identities” (Whiteman et al., 2015, p. 579). For new principals, the process of identity-building requires an abandonment of previous roles and identities and an assumption of the identity of principal. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) found that building the identity of a principal requires an abandonment of the principal’s previous identity and requires a “mind-set shift” (p. 488).

While the process of identity-building is an ongoing and fluid one, early in the principalship new principals often have to confront challenges without their professional identity as principal fully realized. Stevenson (2006) asserted that when educators

assume the role of principal for the first time . . . This is the moment when school leaders really have to confront the difficult questions, but they often do so without the experience, the networks of support and the reservoirs of loyalty that more established principals can draw on. (p. 417)

In the process of identity-building, principals have to realize the core of their value system and beliefs. Cheung and Walker (2006) found new principals must “clarify their own values and ethics and . . . develop the skills necessary for reading and coping with macro- and micro-political environments that are outside their immediate control” (p. 405). Weindling and Dimmock (2006) confirmed, “Moulding a new professional identity as a head requires the formation of a new sense of status, image and self-worth in the role and in the career; it means establishing values, priorities and what one stands for—an ‘educational platform’” (p. 338). Crow and Glascock (1995) asserted new principals must

identify their values and beliefs as acknowledgement of each is vital to effective school leadership.

Preparation programs provide new principals “the attitudes, skills and behaviour necessary to ‘hit the ground running’” (Cowie & Crawford, 2008, p. 678), which suggests that principal identity-building is not only a dynamic process where principals adapt to their current circumstances but there is also a set of characteristics that make up the identity of a principal.

Cowie and Crawford (2008) confirmed “the schools to which they were appointed each have their own accepted norms and values and these exert pressure on the new principals to adapt to the norms of the culture of the school” (p. 678). Whiteman and colleagues (2015) acknowledged the environment in which the new principal leads has an impact on the building of the new principal’s identity and requires “mak[ing] sense of their roles and position[ing] themselves in response to the demands and vulnerabilities of their urban setting” (p. 578). Scribner and Crow (2012) assert principal preparation programs must intentionally support the development of aspiring principals’ identities:

Courses must assist individuals in understanding and developing their own set of values and beliefs about education and leadership, to understand their own motivations and drives, and to acknowledge how their conception of the role influences how they practice it. (p. 272)

Discussion related to principal preparation programs and its impact on socialization and identity-building is further developed at the end of the literature review.

**Self-efficacy.** While there is a significant amount of research on the surprises and challenges new principals encounter, there are limited findings that consider the impact



of those surprises and challenges on principals' own sense of effectiveness. Furthermore, Gentilucci and colleagues (2013) found that while there is existing research related to the strategies contributing to new principals' success, very little research has been conducted based on reports from new principals themselves. Research acknowledges the self-efficacy of principals is important to consider. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) asserted "Self-efficacy beliefs . . . determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of failure or difficulty. The stronger the self-efficacy the longer the persistence" (p. 501). Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) also discussed the link between self-efficacy and willingness to set goals and "remain systematic and efficient in their problem solving" (p. 502). Self-efficacy, then, is "of great importance with respect to the overall managing of schools" (Federici & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 578). Ultimately, understanding new principals' sense of their own effectiveness should be considered in identifying the perceived needs they have in orientation to their role that could contribute to a reduced impact of the challenges and surprises experienced.

One study in particular considers the role identity of new principals in the context of self-efficacy. Grodzki (2011) found in a study of new principals in one school district,

Administrators were having difficulty reconciling the expectations and realities of their jobs although they tried very hard to meet both organizational goals. As a result, they expressed difficulty in developing the necessary perceptions of self-efficacy to competently enact their roles. (p. 16)

Other research found that the experiences of new principals during the first year impact their perceptions of overall success and effectiveness in their role as a school leader.

Versland (2013) described the impact of self-efficacy on principals' productivity. She

found, “Perceptions of self-efficacy can be either positive and empower people to action, or negative, and cause people doubt, resulting in inaction” (p. 14). New principals’ experiences throughout the first year on the job impact their views regarding their work and role (Gentilucci et al., 2013). In a qualitative study of new principals in Hong Kong that examined the value system and personal characteristics of new principals, Cheung and Walker (2006) found “. . . those who perceived themselves as having strong characters were more likely to have a strong sense of efficacy. On the other hand, those who experienced high levels of self-doubt were less likely to perceive themselves as being confident” (p. 396). Bauer and Brazer (2013) identified that new principals’ feelings of isolation had the potential to negatively impact principals’ perception of their effectiveness and self-efficacy. Grodzki (2011) acknowledged that new principals’ positive “necessary perceptions of self-efficacy [are needed] to competently enact their roles” (p. 16).

**Formal training.** Because preparation and induction are critical to the training of aspiring principals and informs new principals’ perceptions of their role, existing research related to this study is considered. Formal training and professional socialization (Crow, 2006) orients aspiring principals to the dispositions and skills needed to effectively lead schools. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) confirmed that one of the goals of formal training is socialization into the profession. Initially, role transformation (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003) shifts aspiring principals toward a set of attitudes that alter their perspectives and a more global view of schooling. Thus, formal training contributes to the socialization and identity-building new principals experience. Bush (2018) confirmed,

“moving into the very different role of principal is likely to lead to new socialization processes and a change in identity” (p. 68). Furthermore, “. . . preparation for headship may be a crucial aspect of professional development and progression, helping to develop the professional identity of aspiring headteachers, broaden their outlook and develop confidence and self-belief . . .” (Cowie & Crawford, 2009, p. 19).

Whereas research acknowledges the importance formal training plays on new principals’ socialization and identity-building, formal training and induction into the principalship often fails to adequately prepare aspiring leaders. Research suggests that while principal training is intended to “prepare participants to be successful in their chosen career and ultimately become agents of positive change” (Tingle, Corrales, & Peters, 2017, p. 1), principals are still underprepared to lead their schools. Browne-Ferrigno (2007) stated that while university preparation programs and licensure make aspiring administrators eligible to serve as a school principal, “Becoming a successful school leader, however, requires important dispositions and skills (e.g., integrating new knowledge into authentic practice, reflection about school-leadership issues, confidence to take calculated risks as educational leaders)” (p. 21).

New principal induction itself is largely unsuccessful. Bush (2018) stated,

induction, where it occurs, is often a one-off event, typically offered by a local administrator, unconnected to previous or subsequent development and often provided just before, or just after, the principal takes up the post. This type of induction is usually confined to procedures and reporting processes, and is rarely customized to the specific needs of the principal or the school. (p. 69)

Heck (2003) asserted new principals' needs are very different from the preparation they received. Heck stated, "the norms and values of the work context often conflict with the formal preparation (e.g., university course work) an individual has received" (p. 240). Furthermore, "the need of each principal differs depending on his or her level of experience, understanding of curriculum, ability to build relationships, operational and management skills, parental involvement . . ." (Tingle et al., 2017, p. 2).

Formal training leaves many aspiring leaders underprepared for their role in leading schools. They are largely underprepared because the skills and dispositions they have acquired may not match the needs of the schools they now lead. This gap in knowledge makes the socialization and identity-building processes that are unique to the schools and organizations they lead even more critical. While formal training and induction programs aim to support the identity-building and socialization of new principals, these processes do not begin fully until the new principal assumes their role.

Existing research affirms the theoretical framework and the socialization and identity-building new principals experience in their first year. The framework focuses on socialization and identity-building; however, those experiences are largely the result of the surprises, challenges, and isolation they face. Self-efficacy and feelings on ultimate responsibility are also a part of the interaction of socialization and identity-building new principals experience. As the new principal better understands the implications of their ultimate responsibility (Spillane & Lee, 2014) and they navigate through the surprises, challenges, isolation, and self-efficacy of their role, they socialize into their new role and begin to build their emergent professional identity as a school principal.

In effect, the theoretical framework and the literature review can be summarized in the following way: The formal training new principals experience and the gaps in their preparation (part of the professional socialization) leads to challenges and surprises new principals face, particularly because they are underprepared for their new role. As they realize their new responsibilities (and begin to understand the “ultimate responsibility” of their role) and interact with stakeholders through formal and informal interactions as well as socialize into the organization, they become aware of their new identity as a school principal. The building of this new professional identity deviates from their previous roles and forces them to learn how to navigate the challenges and surprises of their new role. These surprises and challenges also inform the new learning that takes place in that first year.

The existing literature and the theoretical framework derived from identity theory and the theory of socialization indicate that the process of identity-building results from socialization processes new principals experience. This process extends beyond the first year a new principal is on the job; however, research suggests significant learning takes place during the new principal’s first year.

### **Summary and Implications**

Existing research acknowledges new principals experience “responsibility shock” (Spillane & Lee, 2014) and face surprises and challenges when they assume the principalship. This feeling of “ultimate responsibility” (Spillane & Lee, 2014) creates feelings of isolation among new principals and lack of preparedness to face these new responsibilities impacts their self-efficacy. While formal training aims to begin the

identity-building and socialization processes, organization-specific socialization and identity-building more fully occur once new principals assume their roles. As the theoretical framework acknowledges, socialization for new principals begins both before new principals assume their roles and during their first year in their new school.

Socialization also has an impact on the principal's emergent professional identity and their identity impacts their socialization through the experiences they face in their first year.

As discussed in this review of literature, research related to the experiences of new principals identified the challenges they face, surprises of their role, and their feelings of isolation; there are gaps in the knowledge new principals require to fulfill their responsibilities, and socialization into the principalship and identity-building is necessary to their success. This study aims to close the gap in the existing research between the surprises and challenges of new principals and how those surprises and challenges are related to the identity-building and socialization of new principals.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study intended to identify the surprises and challenges new principals face and the impact of those surprises and challenges on the socialization and identity-building of new principals. Through participant interviews, participant reflections, and focus groups, new principals' experiences were shared; findings are intended to close gaps in existing literature where the impact of the surprises and challenges on new principals' socialization and identity-building is not emphasized. This chapter includes the methodology for this study, discusses limitations of this study, and introduces the setting and participants. The data collection process and participant selection process are also examined.

The methodology for this study was a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with data collection including a blend of individual, semi-structured interviews; written participant reflections through open-ended, guided prompts; and focus groups. A small group of participants, five new principals, took part in the data collection. Using a longitudinal comparison of the data collected over time as used in Spillane and Lee's (2014) qualitative study, the interviews, reflections, and focus groups of this study occurred over an 8-month period, from early in the year when the new principal began in his or her new role and through the first semester. While Spillane and Lee emphasized breadth in their study through many participant interviews at only three time intervals

from the beginning and end to the school year, in this study I focused on depth, similar to the methodology used by Nelson and colleagues (2008) with a focus on fewer participants. This methodology provided an opportunity for me to study participants' experiences as new principals in more detail and more deeply and to better understand how they socialized into their role and built their new identity in the first few months of their principalship.

The decision to conduct a qualitative study was intended to ensure that new principals' differing perspectives are considered in the context of a shared experience of the first year in a principalship. As defined by Lichtman (2013), a qualitative study, "is a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters" (p. 7). A qualitative study provided an opportunity to research the different surprises and challenges that new principals experienced during the same first year of their principalships. This emphasis on the experience of new principals in this qualitative study provided them the opportunity to share their perspectives on that shared experience through the various data collection methods of individual interviews (Appendix A), written reflection through open-ended, guided prompts (Appendix B), and focus groups (Appendix C) with colleagues.

The various data collection methods were selected in an effort to provide an opportunity for participants to share their experiences using various communication modalities. The goal was to ensure participants provided their perspectives in different ways and at various intervals throughout the year in which this study took place. Because



this research focused on the surprises and challenges new principals experience, interviews were selected as a primary data collection method. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) asserted, “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 108). The focus group was selected because “the group interaction may trigger thoughts and ideas among participants that do not emerge during an individual interview” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 207). In addition, the goal of the reflective journals was to promote a method for participants to capture their thoughts in a setting where they had time to reflect and to provide them an opportunity interact with me electronically between interviews and focus groups. Further rationale regarding the selection of these data collection method is discussed under each specific data collection method heading.

The research questions I intended to answer as a result of this study of new principals are:

1. What do new principals believe the principalship is like as they begin their work?
2. How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter support their socialization into the principalship?
3. How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter influence their emergent professional identity?

The findings from the data collected and the answers to these research questions contributed to understanding the surprises and challenges new principals faced with the goal of minimizing the surprises and challenges to better support principal socialization

and the identity-building of new principals. The qualitative findings included principals' own perspectives and voices in pursuit of answers to these questions.

### **Setting and Participants**

This study took place in Cross Keys County Schools, an urban school district in the southeastern United States where principal turnover rates are high. In the Cross Keys school district alone, during the 2014-2015 school year, the turnover rate was 5.60% among principals and in the 2015-2016 school year, the turnover rate increased to 9.52%. Furthermore, projections for the next 5 years indicate 26 of the 127 principals will retire (Cross Keys County Schools, 2017). The high turnover rate in this school district indicated a need for this research as many new principals assume the principalship in this district annually. High principal turnover also provided an opportunity to select multiple participants from a single district; the participation of principals from the same district ensured that the expectations of new principals were generally equitable and the demands of the role were similar across different schools.

Five principals were selected for this study to ensure an adequate sampling of new principals to research. Participants served at elementary schools with a variety of demographics and had diverse educational backgrounds in experience and years. As new principals were named to schools in Cross Keys County Schools the year this study was conducted, consideration was given to various potential participants based on their level of willingness to participate in the study and to ensure a diverse representation of schools and participant demographics. Once those factors are considered, invitations to participate in the study were given with the goal of four to five new principals agreeing to

participate fully. Following the IRB approval process and approval by the school district in which the study was conducted, recruitment occurred primarily through email communication.

### **Recruitment Challenges**

While I anticipated the time and commitment of each of the participants in this study to be significant, I did not anticipate such tremendous difficulty in acquiring research participants. Initially, the recruitment of study participants was impacted by the delayed naming of new principals in Cross Keys County Schools in the summer directly preceding the study. While in previous years new principals were named and in place by the first of July (the beginning of the academic calendar), the majority of new principals were not named to their schools until late July and even early August. The naming of principals late in the summer delayed the beginning of the study and also forced the first interviews to be held immediately before or even during the first weeks of school, as existing research asserted is the busiest time of year for new principals, particularly as they are first becoming acclimated to their role. Spillane, Harris, Jones, and Mertz (2015) stated, “The volume of demands was a prominent theme in novice principals’ emerging understanding of their new position, even before the start of the school year, and the challenge of volume intensified over their first three months on the job” (p. 1076).

As a result of the timing of the district’s selection of principal, participant recruitment and initial interviews took place throughout the first quarter of the school year. Furthermore, only elementary school principals agreed to participate in this study. In the summer preceding the 2017-2018 school year, there were 11 new principals in the

school district including six at the elementary level (all Title I schools), one at a traditional high school, two at non-traditional high schools, and two at non-traditional schools. Out of the six new elementary school principals, I secured five as participants in the study. I intended to recruit participants who served as new principals from a variety of levels; however, there was a lack of response from the high school and non-traditional school principals. The only new high school principal in the district agreed to participate in the study but then did not reply to subsequent requests to establish a date and time for the first interview. A second new principal, one of the two new principals at a non-traditional high school, asked that I reach out to her a few weeks following my initial contact in hopes that her schedule would allow her participation. The three other new principals never responded to communications requesting their participation. Out of the 11 new principals in the district, five were participants and the other six either declined due to time constraints or did not reply to my communication.

Based on the new principals who declined to participate typically by lack of response or by turning down the request due to time or scheduling constraints, I speculated time was a factor in new principals choosing not to participate in this study. In fact, Gentilucci and colleagues (2013) confirmed that time management is a key area new principals identify as a challenge in their first year. While the focus of this study was on the participants rather than on those new principals who chose not to participate in the study or did not reply to participation requests, the potential challenge of time new principals face is significant and should be noted. Furthermore, as a result of the lack of potential participant response or new principals declining to participate coupled with the

district's late selection of principals to schools, the initial interviews were not held before the school year as originally intended and slowed the initial momentum of the study.

### Study Participants Overview

The five study participants met the definition of “new principal” for the purposes of this study and responded to the participation invitations sent electronically. The schools the participants led were all diverse, Title I elementary schools, even though that was not an intended outcome. Their prior experiences differed; however, they all started their careers in education as classroom teachers. They also each held a leadership position prior to entering the principalship. See Table 1 for study participant characteristics.

Table 1

#### Study Participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Previous Experience</b>	<b>School Description</b>
Alexis	Female	Black	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• elementary school teacher</li> <li>• led after school programs</li> <li>• reading teacher</li> <li>• curriculum facilitator</li> <li>• assistant principal</li> </ul>	Large Title I elementary school with predominantly Black, Hispanic students; low teacher turnover; an experienced faculty
Caleb	Male	White	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• elementary school teacher</li> <li>• high school assistant principal</li> </ul>	Small Title I elementary school; predominantly White students; an experienced teaching staff

Table 1

Cont.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Previous Experience</b>	<b>School Description</b>
Phoebe	Female	White	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high school English teacher</li> <li>• curriculum facilitator</li> <li>• district literacy coach</li> </ul>	Small Title I elementary school; diverse student body; inexperienced teaching staff
Rosalind	Female	Hispanic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• classroom teacher</li> <li>• assistant principal</li> </ul>	Large Title I elementary school; new administrative team; diverse study body
Taylor	Female	Black	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• classroom teacher</li> <li>• curriculum facilitator</li> <li>• assistant principal</li> </ul>	Large Title I magnet elementary school; focused on the arts and community partnerships; high teacher turnover

This study's focus groups created a social or professional network among the participants. New principals experience isolation as a result of their new roles and responsibilities (e.g., Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). The focus groups designed for this study may have disrupted some of the isolation felt by new principals and in some ways created a community of new principals with shared experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

Participant interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed throughout the study. In addition, two participants submitted written reflections based on prompts I sent to them. I read each individual interview, focus group transcript, and participant

journal first in totality. Next, I read the participant(s)' response to a single question, and then I coded that question using the Initial Coding process. When appropriate, "in vivo codes" were used to capture the participants' own words. I reviewed and coded each question following this same process. At the end of the transcript, I entered the codes into an Excel spreadsheet with column headings, "Source Number," "Question," "Source," "Participant," "Note Number," "Note," and "Code"; each row included the direct quote from the participant used to identify a code and labels for each quote in order to refer back to the specific source (specific interview, focus group, or journal). I concluded each review of the transcripts by re-reading each in its entirety and recording general thoughts to capture my macro impressions of the transcript.

As data were gathered, I followed a conventional coding method (Creswell, 2016), using different first coding and second coding methods (Saldaña, 2016), by reviewing the transcripts from focus groups and interviews as well as the text from written reflections of the participants. Initial Coding "is an opportunity . . . to reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of your data and to begin taking ownership of them" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 115); Initial Coding was the first coding method used to analyze the data gathered from this study and is "appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 115). In order to ensure the voice of participants in the findings, "in vivo codes" were utilized to the greatest extent possible during Initial Coding to ensure development of codes "that resonate with [my] participants" (Creswell, 2016, p. 160). The voice of participants was especially critical to answering the research questions

related to the surprises and challenges of new principals. Figure 3 provides an overview of the analysis process.

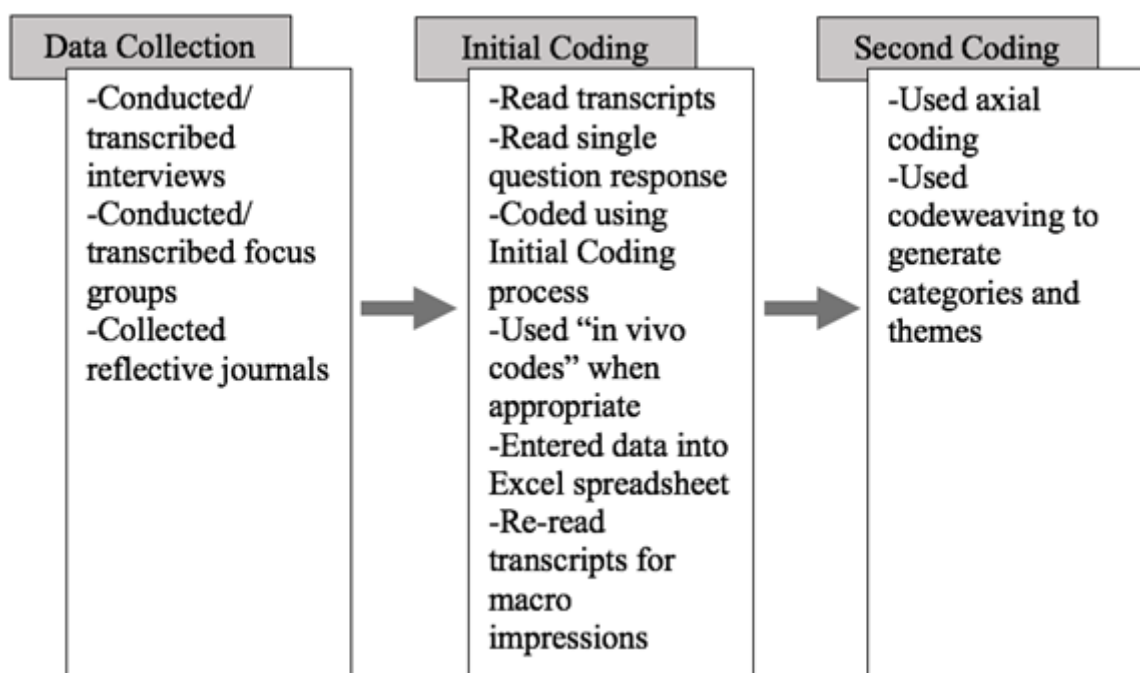


Figure 2. Data Collection and Analysis Process.

Axial coding was used as the second coding method to further analyze the data generated from initial coding. This coding method was especially important following Initial Coding and complemented the Initial Coding process, because it enabled me to identify similar codes among the data, remove repetitious codes, and prioritize the most important information (Saldaña, 2016). Both Initial and Axial Coding occurred by hand rather than through the use of qualitative analysis software. Once coding was completed, codeweaving, generated categories and themes to be used in the process of analyzing data. Using the codes from each text, codes were further categorized and themes



identified; these themes were connected into an overall narrative and were used to inform findings and connect directly back to the research questions (Saldaña, 2016, p. 276).

Table 2 indicates an example as to how codes led to categories and then to the development of themes. The complete list of codes, categories, and themes is included in Appendix D.

Table 2

Development of Categories and Themes from Codes

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Theme</b>
accessibility awareness climate and instructional communication community exhaustion groundwork improvement perspective preparation presence rapport values visibility	Building a global perspective	New principals largely socialized within the school setting with parents, students, and families as opposed to within their organization.
access boundaries capacity care for others change coaching collaboration colleagues communication community conflict district relations families feedback	Socialization with stakeholders	New principals largely socialized within the school setting with parents, students, and families as opposed to within their organization.

Table 2

Cont.

Codes	Category	Theme
impact interpersonal needs relationships self-view socialization staff staff perspectives student-centered supervisor support trust	Socialization with stakeholders	New principals largely socialized within the school setting with parents, students, and families as opposed to within their organization.

### **Trustworthiness and Positionality**

Positionality and the perceived dynamics of power between researcher and participant must be confronted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). New principals may have perceived that a more experienced principal who has overcome first-year challenges either did not experience the same challenges or possesses better leadership strategies. These perceptions must be noted as they had the potential to influence participants' honesty in their responses and was directly related to my positionality as compared to that of the participants. Research on the topic of new principals identifies that isolation and socialization as aspects of new principals' first year in the role; participants may have responded to questions and prompts in ways they feel will be acceptable to the researcher in a desire to be accepted and socialized into the principalship as a colleague. In general, to address issues of positionality, reflexivity in findings was used; "it is incumbent upon

the critical researcher to be reflexive: to consider issues such as positionality and insider/outsider stances in research and to try to own their effects in the process in so far as this is possible” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 64–65).

Trustworthiness with participants was gained through prolonged engagement. I interacted with each participant over the course of 8 months through various communication methods and at their school setting in an effort to gain their trust. Building trustworthiness with participants was necessary to this study, as Lichtman (2013) acknowledged that “those studied in qualitative research are real people with real needs, ambitions, fears, and desires” (p. 295). To ask new principals to confront their challenges and surprises regularly through their first year in the principalship required confirmation of confidentiality and anonymity.

The acknowledgement of my own experiences as a new principal impacts the trustworthiness of the findings. “In qualitative research, each idea, interpretation, and plan is filtered through your eyes, through your mind, and through your point of view” (Lichtman, 2013, p. 190). I recently served in the role of a new principal, and my experiences have the potential to impact the reliability of findings. In order to confront the trustworthiness of my findings and my interpretation of data, I explicitly acknowledged my own experiences and how they influenced my interest in this study in Chapter I and the conclusion. Furthermore, participants member checked the transcripts of focus groups and interviews for accuracy.

### **Limitations and Potential Problems**

A qualitative study with a focus on the experiences of individuals met unanticipated challenges, limitations, and potential problems. This study focused on a small number of participants over a period of time, so the ongoing commitment and engagement of participants was vital to the study. Furthermore, the reflection component of the study required time and attention; because participants did not actively engage in this portion of the research, this is a limitation. While participants attended and participated in the interviews and at least one of the focus groups, there was a very limited response to the requests for participants to send me their thoughts via open-ended prompts or general reflections. This could be the result of participants' unwillingness to put their thoughts in writing.

Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005), in a School Leadership Study on developing principals, asserted, "The positive effects of cohort structured learning experiences include enhanced feelings of group affiliation and acceptance, social and emotional support, motivation, persistence, group learning, and mutual assistance" (p. 11); because this study has the potential to disrupt the isolation new principals experienced and to create a professional network, this aspect of the study also served as a benefit to study participants. As with other studies of new principals, the participants were limited to a single geographic region. New principals in this study faced challenges that may have been unique to the state or district, which brings into concern broader application of findings. While this limitation was mostly unavoidable, it must be considered. Furthermore, the reflection component of the study could have contributed to

the overall findings and research questions, yet participants did not actively participate in this method of data collection.

As the research indicates, new principals have busy schedules with many responsibilities. The time available to participate in a study contributed to even more demands on the new principal. Ultimately, the outcomes of this study have the potential to provide insight with the goal of alleviating the surprises and unexpected challenges of the first year. While this study could contribute to the reduction of stress over time, the participation by first-year principals was challenging for them but beneficial to future leaders.

Finally, as this study focused on the socialization of new principals, participation in the study, particularly through the focus group, increased new principals' abilities to interact with other new principals. This resulted in diminishment of some of the isolation of the principalship felt by new principals. This should be noted as the actual impact of their participation in this study on their socialization into the principalship cannot be extracted from the findings.

### **Context**

Cross Keys County Schools is an urban district in the southeastern United States. With more than 100 schools and over 70,000 students, the district is one of the five largest in the state. The five participants in this study were among the 11 new principals named in Cross Keys County Schools the same summer the school district experienced a 14% principal turnover rate. During the school year in which this study took place, the district's central office reorganized under the district's new superintendent to create

principal supervisor positions with a ratio of 11 or 12 principals and schools per supervisor. The five participants in this study were all principals in Cross Keys County Schools in the first year of their principalship; they served Title I, elementary schools and agreed to participate in this study following participant recruitment.

### **Overview of Participants**

#### **Alexis**

Alexis is a Black female who started her teaching career in elementary school. She then led after school programs, served as a reading teacher and a curriculum facilitator all in elementary schools before beginning administration. Alexis served as a middle school assistant principal before earning her first principalship at the elementary school level. She served as the principal of Radburn Elementary School, a large elementary school, during the year of this study. Alexis's school is a Title I school and school demographic data indicate a student population where the majority of students are Black and Hispanic. Her school is in a newer facility with low teacher turnover and an experienced staff.

When asked, "How do you see yourself as a new principal?" during the first interview, Alexis stated,

I see myself growing. So when I think about myself as a new principal, I think of you planting that seed, and I continuously see roots coming from me, growing and learning new things, but I see new—the root, the flower growing up in the right direction.

**Caleb**

Caleb is a White male who previously served as an assistant principal at one of the district's high schools. Originally an elementary school teacher, Caleb commented that others encouraged him to pursue administration before he acknowledged he desired to be a school leader. Caleb finally considered administration when he applied for a leadership preparation program and was accepted. He served as an intern at the high school where he later became assistant principal. During the year this study was conducted, Caleb was the new principal at Wisteria Elementary School, a small, Title I school in Cross Keys County Schools. Caleb's school has a predominantly White student body and an experienced teaching staff.

When asked, "How do you see yourself as a new principal?" during the first interview, Caleb stated,

Today, [I feel] exhausted. No, how do I see myself as a new principal? I see myself as a new principal that has an energy and excitement to lead a group of people and I'm trying to be extreme, I'm trying to be a new principal that's being strategic.

**Phoebe**

Phoebe started her career as a high school English teacher. After 6 years in the classroom, she moved into the curriculum facilitator position with the inception of the role in the high school setting in the school district. A few years later, she worked as the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate coordinator for the district and then returned to her role as a curriculum facilitator. From that role, she had the opportunity to participate in a leadership academy and received her principal license. Phoebe returned to

central office as a literacy coach before being named as principal at the school she led at the time of this study.

The elementary school she led during the year this study took place, Fort Cape, is one of the smallest elementary schools in the Cross Keys County Schools district. A diverse, Title I school, Fort Cape has a small staff of teachers early in their careers. Community partners support Fort Cape through donations to help beautify the building and provide school supplies to students.

Phoebe responded to the question, “How do you see yourself as a new principal?” with

Haggard. Haggard. How do I see myself as a new principal? I think that I have been effective. The feedback that I’ve received is that I have been effective in injecting a new energy in the staff and students . . . I feel like as a principal, I’m more of a cheerleader than I am anything else . . .

### **Rosalind**

Rosalind taught for 18 years in Mexico and then the United States when her husband relocated for work. The principal at the school in Cross Keys County Schools where she taught encouraged her to apply for a principal preparation program after Rosalind had the opportunity to serve in different leadership capacities. Rosalind was an assistant principal before she became principal at Johnstonville Elementary. In the year of this study, Rosalind led Johnstonville Elementary, a large Title I school. The entire administrative team, including the assistant principal and curriculum facilitator, were new to their roles the same year. The school’s student demographics are almost evenly divided among Black students, Hispanic students, Asian students, and White students.



Rosalind responded that as a new principal she sees herself as “Overwhelmed. But I see me, at the same ti—besides that, I mean, I am, but I don’t want my teachers to see it. So, I see myself as outgoing, and really trying to boost morale.” She further added, “I see myself as really trying to understand the principalship and trying to do a good job.”

### **Taylor**

At the time of this study, Taylor had served in education for 17 years. Taylor started her career in the classroom before she moved into a curriculum facilitator position. She completed her administrative internship while she served as a curriculum facilitator and then moved into an assistant principalship for 6 years before promotion to the principalship. During this study, Taylor led an arts magnet school in Cross Keys County. Country Terrace Elementary School is a large school with a focus on the arts and community partnerships. Teacher turnover at Country Terrace Elementary School is high compared to other schools in the district and the state. Like Alexis and Rosalind, Taylor also has an assistant principal as part of the school’s administrative team.

Taylor shared as a new principal she viewed herself as,

confident and I’m confident in my ability to do the job and I know that I can do the job, but I think the—sometimes the challenges can overwhelm you and it becomes overwhelming sometimes, but deep down I know and I have to tell myself you, you got this, it’s gonna be okay.

## **Presentation of Data**

### **Overview of Data Collection**

Four interviews were held with each participant at different time intervals during their first year in their principalship. Three focus groups were held in the same year;

while all participants participated in at least one focus group, they did not all participate in each focus group. Phoebe and Rosalind participated in all three focus groups. Rosalind and Taylor submitted journal entries. The interviews, focus groups, and journal submissions occurred between the months of August through March of new principals' first year in the principalship. The timeline of data collection is shown in Figure 4.

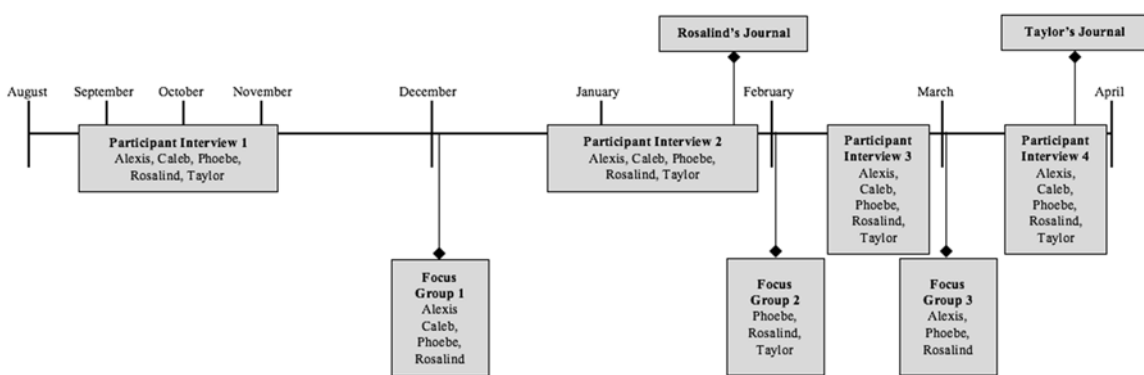


Figure 3. Data Collection Timeline.

### Summary of Methodology

The goal of this study was to examine the impact of the surprises and challenges new principals experienced and the impact on their socialization and identity-building as a principal. Through interviews, participant reflections, and focus groups, new principals had the opportunity to build a professional network addressing the isolation new principals felt in the first year in their role. Additionally, while I have recently served as a new principal, my own experiences must be acknowledged within the context of the study's discussion to ensure increased reliability of findings and to address the trustworthiness of the findings. Due to the various collection methods and the intervals at which collection occurred (illustrated in the timeline of data collection), sufficient data

were collected. The data collected were connected to other data collection methods and triangulated with existing research and the theoretical framework.

Research that examines the challenges and surprises new principals face is vital to minimizing those experiences in order to support their socialization and identity-building and the learning they must acquire in their first year. While the research on new principals after the era of increased academic accountability is limited, research suggests new principals experience challenges and surprises in their first year and these challenges and surprises contribute to the already existing challenges school administrators face every year.

Chapters I, II, and III provided insight into the importance of this study, the existing research on new principals, and the methodology for this research study. The data collected from this study will provide insight into the surprises and challenges new principals face and will support new principals, school districts, and principal preparation programs in their acquisition of further knowledge to better transition new principals into their role. New principals must be better prepared to face the experiences of their first year so student learning in their schools can successfully continue and so they can successfully navigate their new role. Chapter III concluded with a brief discussion of the context of the study and short biographies of the five new principals who participated in the study.

Chapters IV and V include the presentation of data. The organization of the presentation of data is chronological, as discussed in Biklen and Casella (2007), and used to build a narrative of the new principals' experiences throughout their first months in

their new role. Data are presented through a discussion of categories identified through the coding process as explained in Chapter III, in sections by each of the four rounds of interviews. Focus group data and reflective journals submitted by participants are included in the interview section closest in timespan and explicitly indicated. Further discussion of findings is included and expanded upon in Chapter VI.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS OF INITIAL DATA COLLECTED**

New principals' beliefs about the principalship and perceptions early in the year provided a useful background into the challenges and surprises they experienced in the first year in their role. While the same questions were asked of participants across each of the four interviews and three focus groups, these first individual interviews with each participant conveyed ideas about their role, largely based on knowledge acquired in previous roles and early experiences of the principalship. They asserted their core values, started to build confidence in their abilities, and grappled with instructional and cultural leadership. In addition, new principals discussed the shift in their perspective and their orientation to the new tasks they were expected to assume in the principalship.

#### **First Interviews**

The first interviews with participants took place between August and November of their first months in their new role as principal. Participants' responses based on their experiences early in their principalship can be organized into the following categories. In each timespan in Chapters IV and V, the categories are presented alphabetically as no single category emerged as more significant than the other. Furthermore, the most salient point in each category is italicized.

### **Communication of Core Values**

During the first interview, each of the five participants described their reliance on core values in education they developed even before beginning the principalship.

*Individual reliance on their core values was not only of importance to their leadership, but also was the ability to effectively communicate their values in order to establish vision for their schools in their new roles.* None of the five principals' core values had yet changed as of the first interview with each participant; however, they shared that the communication of their values and leveraging support for those values would be vital to fulfilling their goals they had for their school. Caleb summarized this in his first interview: "you have to share that core value with the stakeholders that you meet."

The core values new principals possessed were relied upon in the first months of their principalships. Caleb briefly shared his unchanged beliefs about education: "my core belief has not changed, my core belief of kindness and treating people with respect and building foundations for kids has not changed." Phoebe's beliefs around learning impacted how she created structures and processes in her school. She reported, "I know that all children can learn and I know that all children can perform at high levels." All participants shared that their core values impacted their leadership style, actions, and priorities.

While new principals' core values remained unchanged as of the first couple of months in their new role, they recognized that some shifting in those beliefs occurs in order to adapt to the unique schools they lead. Rosalind stated, ". . . you're still you, you're still identifying yourself as your core values, and then you do some shifting and

some adapting according to your needs” and further emphasized, “So the goal is the same, my essence is the same, I believe in the same things about, you know, opportunities and choices, but how I present it is gonna be different.” Rosalind acknowledged that the way she presented her core values changed based on the audience. Caleb believed that principals need to be aware of and steadfast in their beliefs. He said, “. . . you have to be firm, you have to be firm in what you believe.”

Above communicating their core values to stakeholders, new principals shared the belief that leveraging support for those core values was of particular importance. Phoebe mentioned this at length during the interview to emphasize this:

you’ve got to be able to get people to believe in what you believe in . . . you’ve got to be able to communicate what it is you want for kids and you want for teachers and you want for families in a way that people can believe in it.

Taylor also shared,

I think that’s the biggest thing too, is making sure that when you come in as a new administrator you yourself have to know your vision and your expectations of what it is that you have for your school and you have to make sure that it’s clearly stated and people understand what that looks like . . .

Alexis conveyed in her first interview a similar thought; her goal was “. . . getting the staff to see that we’re in the business for children and not for adults.”

In all of the initial interviews, each of the five new principals shared the common belief that their core values remained largely unchanged and that communicating their values and gaining support for those values were critical to the principalship. While they emphasized that communicating their core values was important, they did not share

specific strategies and new principals did not share examples of how or if they communicated their core values with stakeholders during the first interview. Important to their principalship, first-year principals emphasized communicating their core values to stakeholders early in their role.

### **Confidence Building**

New principals grappled with emotions of confidence and lacked confidence related to their ability to successfully do the work required of the principalship. Each of the new principals reflected on their ability to be an effective principal and even self-talked in an effort to regain self-confidence during the interview. The principals in this study gauged their success by the feedback and opinions others provided them, either solicited or unsolicited feedback. They discussed whether they were making the changes they intended to at their schools and expressed feelings of doubt in their skillset. Based on the first interviews conducted with each of the five participants, *new principals struggled to build confidence in their ability to successfully and effectively lead their schools.*

New principals wondered if they have the necessary skills to lead their schools. During the interview, participants explicitly shared their lack of confidence and then juxtaposed self-talk that expressed effort to reclaim confidence as a new principal. Caleb openly shared, “. . . even in that moment of I don’t think I can do this, you can, you’re ready, you know you’re competent, you know you’re confident to be able to do the job.” While Caleb portrayed confidence and intentional planning in the actions he took during



his first few weeks in his school, he questioned his preparedness for the principalship.

Taylor echoed this same sentiment in her first interview and said,

I am confident and I'm confident in my ability to do the job and I know that I can do the job, but I think the—sometimes the challenges can overwhelm you and it becomes overwhelming sometimes, but deep down I know and I have to tell myself you, you got this, it's gonna be okay . . .

Alexis expressed her nervousness at the beginning of her principalship. Instead of engaging in self-talk to build her confidence, she reached out to her previous principal under whom she attributed many of the lessons of leadership. She shared, “I think my first week sitting in the office, it kind of hit me—wait a minute? The ball stops with you? And I was just like—I think I called [my previous principal] and was like, okay, am I ready?” Other principals affirmed that their own confidence in their performance is based on the feedback their stakeholders share or their perceptions other have of their ability to be successful. Rosalind wondered about her supervisors' perceptions of her ability if she asks for help or asks questions in her new role.

Sometimes I'm afraid to ask questions, like I said, because, I don't know, are they really gonna think I wasn't ready for this position? Why does she have that job? We shouldn't have given it to her. I don't know. It's just like, the wondering of what if.

On the contrary, Phoebe's confidence in her effectiveness was shaped by the thoughts of others and stated, “[the] feedback that I've received is that I have been effective in injecting a new energy in the staff and students.”

Taylor expressed fear and even questioned her decision to become a principal in her first interview, and said, “. . . because the principal is the all, be all, and people are going to come to with the answer, what if I don’t have that answer to give them?” Later in the interview Taylor shared, “it makes me, at times, wonder why I’m doing what I’m doing.” Early in her first year as principal, Taylor questioned her ability to serve effectively in the principalship and lacked confidence.

New principals struggled with building confidence in their ability to lead their schools. Because of the seriousness with which they approach their new roles, they wanted to make a difference. According to Phoebe, “when you don’t have those key components that are in place you end up doing lots of little things that sometimes don’t feel like they even matter.” And in Caleb’s own words, “man I got to get this right.” Often, they felt like their strengths in their previous roles manifested into weaknesses when they became a principal. As one example, while Rosalind felt skillful at time management as an assistant principal, in the principalship she felt she lacked confidence in that particular area.

Within the same interview, new principals wavered between statements of confidence and lack of confidence in their abilities as a principal. Through feedback provided by others, perceived beliefs of others in their abilities, and their evaluation of their own effectiveness, new principals wonder if they are thriving in their first year.

### **Cultural Leadership Competency**

A key area that emerged with each of the new principals in their initial interviews surrounded cultural leadership competency. This phrase used here emphasizes the

complexity of cultural leadership that required listening to stakeholders and developing and leveraging relationships to bring about positive change to school climate and culture. *Not only did new principals identify the need to forge a relationship among the stakeholders of their school but they also sought to improve school climate and initiate changes they believed needed to be made.*

In order to develop the necessary relationships and to lead change new principals identified areas of improvement. They emphasized communication here as well; however, they stressed that listening to stakeholders and then responding by acting on their needs brought about quick change in key areas. Caleb reallocated Title I funds based on parent feedback he received to create a part-time translator position rather than intervention support he could provide through other means. Phoebe listened to teachers who shared that student behavior after lunch diminished as compared to the morning, so she initiated lunch where students and staff eat together; the goal was to decrease student discipline referrals to the office and to enhance schoolwide community through fellowship around lunchtime meals.

Taylor emphasized that the principalship required she develop the skill of community outreach and cultural leadership as compared to being an assistant principal. She shared, “. . . you have to look at it much more than just this four, you know, the dimensions of the building, it’s out there too . . .” Taylor also conveyed her concerns about losing high quality teachers and students choosing to attend other schools. She believed school marketing was necessary for teacher retention and growth in student attendance. Caleb hired the part-time interpreter and Rosalind facilitated a relationship

with a parent to translate parent communication in an effort to forge relationships with families who otherwise experienced barriers to parent participation in both of their schools. Alexis worked with a family to ensure they kept the student enrolled at her school despite their custody issues; she was surprised by the many custody issues that required her involvement since beginning in her new role. New principals' emphasis on developing cultural leadership skills to reach the community and families were a large part of their leadership in the first few months on the job.

Each of the principal participants identified school culture as an area of improvement early in their year. Rosalind shared that school staff specifically mentioned morale in her individual meetings held with each staff member. She said, "It was kind of sad. Because they kept saying . . . the morale is so low, and we don't want to do this or that." As a result, teachers stopped participating actively in the school before Rosalind arrived. In Phoebe's words, "I feel like as a principal, I'm more of a cheerleader than I am anything else."

The complexity of cultural leadership required new principals to develop their competency in building bridges with all stakeholders and improving school climate and culture. Each new principal listened to stakeholders with the intention of learning more about the needs of their schools and responded by making necessary changes. While they felt some success in this area, instructional leadership challenged the positive school climate they work to build. Phoebe said specifically, "I've got to start having more hard conversations and how do I do that and continue to motivate and encourage the staff . . ."

## **Instructional Leadership**

The principalship requires the skill of instructional leadership. *While instructional leadership is not unique to only new principals, the demand of managing teacher accountability, prioritizing and selecting impactful instructional strategies, and balancing instructional leadership with other daily tasks required skills new principals may not have previously acquired.* Even when instructional leadership was a focus for each of the new principals in their previous roles, teachers approached them differently with regards to instruction. Taylor shared, “. . . as a principal I still feel like I’m a supportive role, but it doesn’t seem like it’s a supportive role, because people don’t feel as if they can come to you . . .” Teachers did not approach Taylor for instructional support as they did when she was an assistant principal.

New principals emphasized that they spent time providing teachers with feedback to improve instruction and that teachers’ perceptions were that the new principals heightened teacher accountability. At Phoebe’s school, teachers shared they worked harder in the first few months of the school year in order to meet her high expectations than they had done so in previous years. Teachers at Rosalind’s school and at Taylor’s school grew anxious about the increased instructional accountability that came with their visibility in classrooms and with walkthrough observation feedback. While new principals sought to improve school climate, this increased instructional accountability required intentionality in their approach and in planning.

According to Taylor, “There’s so many things that you know that need to be fixed but you have to figure out what’s the bang for your buck coming in that is not gonna be

too overwhelming for teachers but something that can be successful.” New principals also worked to identify the specific needs of their school in order to prioritize the instructional improvements that needed to be made. Alexis shared that her work early in the principalship involved identifying areas of instructional improvement at her school, and “how to use data to drive instruction, looking at making sure the master schedule is maximizing instructional learning.”

New principals emphasized the importance of their visibility in classrooms. Even while many principals may also emphasize classroom visibility, new principals struggled with time management as it relates to other tasks that require their attention. As new principals spent a majority of their day in classrooms, they were left spending hours in the evenings, at night, and on weekends completing their other tasks.

Rosalind stressed the importance of spending her day in classrooms. She said, “I’m not doing the paperwork, I’m not responding to emails, I’m just in the classrooms . . . it’s very, very, very important.” Caleb shared he intended to spend and Phoebe shared she spent the majority of the day in classrooms as well. While new principals each shared they focus on instruction, they also had a great deal of experience with instructional leadership in their previous roles. In effect, new principals desired to spend the majority of their day focusing on the area in which they were most experienced—instructional leadership.

### **Leadership Preparation**

*New principals varied in the leadership preparation they received and their perceptions of the preparedness they felt for the principalship.* While each participant

described that they transitioned smoothly from their previous role to the principalship, they shared mixed beliefs about their preparation. Phoebe and Caleb shared they had successful internship experiences, while Alexis and Rosalind emphasized the experience they received as assistant principals as critical to their preparedness. They each conveyed their previous roles emphasized managerial tasks as well as instructional leadership.

Formal training, provided through university coursework, leadership academies, or principal preparation cohorts provided through district initiatives gave new principals the background in the philosophy of education, an understanding of managerial responsibilities, and specific planning for the principalship; however, the implementation of these skills into practice occurred only through internships and assistant principalships. New principals did not explicitly share that there were gaps they identified in their leadership preparation.

### **Positional Relationship Development**

*New principals shared the new relationships they developed as a result of the transition from previous roles to the principalship.* They discussed central office and supervisors as it relates to the context of the principalship, collaboration with colleagues including both experienced and new principals, and issues of trust with those they supervised. In their new role, they developed new relationships unique to the principalship.

Rosalind and Phoebe emphasized that in the principalship their work was managed by their perceptions of what central office believes about the principalship and their effectiveness. As a principal, Phoebe believed that her priorities were established as

a result of the tasks required. “If you believed my work was out in the building you wouldn’t ask me to turn around this stuff in the time you ask me to,” Phoebe shared. Rosalind trusted the principal under which she served as an assistant principal and reached out to her instead of to central office or her supervisors. According to her, “I don’t have to call other people and say, can I do this, can I do that, because I don’t know how that’s going to be taken.” These two examples demonstrate how new principals may build relationships with central office and their supervisors through the messages new principals receive and how they perceive those messages. Other new principals discussed the relationships they had with their supervisors and central office. Overall, the relationships were task-oriented rather than focused on the mentoring and support for new principals.

While new principals built relationships with central office and supervisors through messages they received and due to the task-oriented nature of their interactions, new principals were intentional about establishing relationships with other new principals. In Cross Keys County Schools, new principals participated in a new principal orientation before they began in their new role. The new principals in this study shared the orientation led to the development of an informal network of new principals within the district who worked together and supported each other in the principalship. Alexis shared that as a result of this orientation, she forged a relationship with Caleb and Phoebe, and, “we kind of keep each other on our toes, and make sure everything is done.” These informal relationships provided new principals a supportive network of colleagues who experienced similar deadlines, expectations, and challenges to their own.



More often, new principals shared that the relationships developed under principals for whom they previously worked continued during their first year as a principal. Alexis, Rosalind, and Phoebe mentioned their mentors not only provided them confidence that they could be a successful principal through explicitly stated support but also answered their questions and gave advice. Rosalind shared that even though other principals offered to answer her questions and provide support, she preferred to reach out to the principal under whom she had served as an assistant principal. New principals shared that their former principals played a critical role in navigating the first months of the principalship and they trusted the support they provided and the answers to questions they asked.

During their first interview, new principals described trust as one of the challenges they faced early in their principalship. The issue of trust surfaced in many forms, from trusting that those to whom new principals delegated tasks would complete them in their vision, to relying on people for advice and guidance. Taylor sought out someone she could trust:

They always say that the principal is a lonely place but the surprise is when you actually get here and you realize that you're trying to figure out who can I--at some point you have to feel like I gotta be able to trust someone.

New principals felt that while they needed to be able to trust the staff members in their building to execute the work to be done, they hesitated to trust even those with whom they worked most closely.

In their new role, new principals developed relationships with central office and their supervisors, other new principals, informal mentors, and those they supervise. Caleb affirmed the importance of building relationships: “you have to be able to learn other people’s core values and their mental mindset so that you can help, you know where they’re at.” Even as new principals established relationships in their role, Caleb’s thoughts echoed other new principals’ as they learned and navigated others’ core values, including those they supervised and those who supervised them.

### **Shift in Perspective**

As new principals moved into their role, *their perspectives about the principalship shifted as did the perspective from which they approached daily work*. In general, the participants described a shift from a focus on the managerial tasks of their previous jobs to a larger role instructionally within the school setting. This shift required a change in perspective regarding the daily tasks of leadership. New principals also viewed the magnitude of their role differently than they perceived before they arrived at the principalship, largely as a result of the change in their focus from managerial tasks to instructional and cultural leadership. Phoebe shared that her role now emphasized people instead of completing isolated tasks. Additionally, during the school day new principals shared their perspective and role changed. Rosalind commented on the various perspectives she worked from in a single day, “You become a counselor, a parent, a nurse, a social worker, and at the same time you have to be that rock.”

New principals experienced an initial shift in perspective during leadership training and during their internship experiences. They shared that leadership training

forced them to shift their lens from their current or previous role towards the lens of leadership. While new principals had notions of leadership, they also perceived the work of a school principal to be very different than when they finally took the reins of their schools. Alexis was the one exception; she stated that even with the surprises she encountered, her perception of the principalship remained unchanged. Phoebe, who previously worked in central office, perceived the work of principals from the view of a central office administrator very differently when she became a principal. She expressed her previous frustration with principals completing required tasks and the realization now that she is in the role,

but you don't really get, until you walk in it and you know that, even sitting in the office, you know, sitting in central office, you know, I know they're swamped, I know it must be so hard for them to get things don't, but daggone it, why can't they get it done.

Even in the first interviews with participants, new principals already felt their perspective shifted. Taylor described that instructionally she worked with teachers differently and felt teachers approached her more easily as an assistant principal due to the time she had available. With that change, she learned she needed to shift her perspective and that as principal she was the “end all, be all” and the principalship required her to be a problem-solver. Taylor indicated this change as necessary and an area of growth for her.

New principals' perspectives about the principalship and perspectives regarding their new role shifted during the first months of their leadership. While participants described their perceptions of what the principalship would be and how those notions

changed, they did not share any particular circumstance, surprise, event, or challenge that shifted their perspectives. Leadership training contributed to new principals' abilities to shift from their previous role to the principalship; however, the summary of experiences as of the first interviews with each participant more significantly contributed to this overall shift in perspective.

### **Task Orientation**

In the first months in their new role, *new principals struggled with orientation to the tasks of the principalship*. Participants shared that as new principals even skills they believed they mastered in previous roles, such as time management, became a challenge after they assumed the principalship. They felt unprepared for their new role, strived to effectively delegate tasks, and the balance of various responsibilities challenged them. Taylor summarized the difficulty with task orientation in her first interview: "there's so many duties and lots of things that a principal *can* do and get bogged down with doing because there's paperwork that goes with it too."

While new principals shared they experienced managerial task orientation in their previous roles, the tasks of the principalship required a blend of new tasks, such as delegation, with more familiar tasks. Taylor and Alexis explicitly stated they were largely underprepared for their new role. The new principals in this study shared they felt underprepared in the first months on the job. Task delegation as a challenge emerged throughout the first interviews with new principals. Trust, discussed previously, made delegating tasks difficult. New principals struggled with oversight that delegated tasks were completed in alignment with their vision and correctly. In schools with no assistant

principal, new principals had limited options as to whom they could delegate tasks. Caleb struggled with this over the summer as he prepared for the arrival of teachers in August:

finish the handbook for me, go hire a teacher, let me sit, you know, go, I need you to fill out this report, I need you to make sure the staff is responding, I need the bags ready, I want the media center set up, you know, those pieces, and then with nobody in the building, who do you assign those tasks to?

The exhaustion and challenge with task orientation resulted from the responsibility new principals felt to play the critical role of relationship-building, a responsibility they felt unable to delegate. Relationship-building compounded the challenge of task orientation. Phoebe shared, “I could do everything you ask me to do and I could answer these emails in a timely manner, but that would mean that I’m not out building relationships with staff and students and that’s the important part.” Phoebe’s response demonstrated that new principals often prioritized people-oriented tasks over the managerial tasks.

Each of the five new principals shared their desire to focus on classroom instruction often resulted in long hours working at home or in the building until late in the evening. Even when the tasks to be accomplished required time on managerial tasks, they often struggled to switch their focus due to the need to improve instruction in their schools. As Phoebe stated,

You think about prioritizing those tasks you can’t get to the community building or the partnerships, the business partnerships, if you’re trying to just put a band-aid on or stop the bleeding of instruction inside the school.

Rosalind, who desired to spend the school's instructional hours in classrooms, took work home every day to complete or stayed late at school to finish the required tasks. In their individual interviews Caleb and Alexis also stressed their focus on classroom instruction during regular school hours and late evenings working on managerial tasks they were required to complete.

New principals felt challenged to balance the many new tasks they were forced to master with familiar managerial tasks that were often left to be completed during late hours working at their schools or from home. They desired to delegate tasks; however, they struggled with issues of trust and oversight. As a result of prioritized tasks that could not be delegated and those instructional and people-oriented in nature, other tasks fell far down their priority list and may have resulted in pushed deadlines and late submissions. Overall, the challenge of task orientation emerged in new principals' interviews during their first months on the job and required their intentional efforts to overcome that challenge.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings from the first interviews, new principals struggled to focus on instructional leadership, built their confidence in their ability to successfully and effectively lead their schools, and established their positionality within the organization. The first research question, "What do new principals believe the principalship is like as they begin their work?," which largely draws on the data collected from these first interviews, is discussed in Chapter VI. One theme that resulted from the examination of the first research question was that cultural leadership eclipsed instructional leadership,

even while new principals perceived they would be able to largely focus on instruction as they started the principalship.

New principals learned early in the first year of their principalship that cultural leadership would be necessary to leverage instructional change and that they would not have the flexibility to focus solely on instructional leadership. Furthermore, they were able to rely on the values that emerged from their previous experiences and were still applicable in their new roles. As they found their places in their new roles, new principals shaped their identity as they were socialized into the principalship. One example was their desire to still focus on instruction but were largely compelled to focus on cultural leadership in order to make the instructional changes they desired. While this will be further discussed in Chapter VI, these early transformations new principals underwent should be noted.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **ANALYSIS OF SUBSEQUENT DATA COLLECTED**

The subsequent interviews, the focus groups, and the reflective journals are included in this chapter. The first interviews, discussed in Chapter IV, provided insight into new principals' beliefs of the principalship in their first months in their new role and laid the groundwork to better understand their core values and the adjustments to their thinking about their role that had already taken place early in the year. The second, third, and fourth interviews further examined the changes new principals experienced and the focus groups confirmed these changes. The data are presented chronologically and include the various findings from each time span.

#### **Second Interviews and First Focus Group**

The second interviews with participants took place between December and January of their first months in their new role as principal; the first focus group occurred at the beginning of December with Caleb, Phoebe, Rosalind, and Alexis. Rosalind's journal entry, submitted in January, is also included in this dataset. Participants' responses based on their experiences between December and January can be organized into the following categories.

#### **Emphasis on Cultural Leadership**

New principals shifted their focus from instructional leadership to cultural leadership early in their first year. While the new principals who participated in this study



served previously in assistant principalships or district level positions that emphasized instructional leadership and planned for instructional leadership to be the focus of their first year as a school principal, their emphasis shifted to cultural leadership in the first few months. The participants in this study acknowledged instructional improvements and academic achievement cannot be made without time, focus, and attention being placed on cultural leadership. Alexis shared this sentiment: “. . . if you’re doing it for the best interest of the children then everything else will fall in place.” *The new principals’ emphasis on cultural leadership included the improvement of school climate, building the capacity of others, and inspiring others. As a result of the shift towards emphasizing school culture, new principals believed this would contribute to the instructional gains they sought.*

Each of the new principals worked intentionally to be visible in the school to promote school culture and improve climate. By being visible new principals could reinforce expectations, hold teachers accountable, grant access to stakeholders, and work directly with students. While visibility is an aspect of the principalship not unique to new principals, their realization of the impact of intentional visibility and what simply being visible could accomplish was explicitly recognized in the second round of interviews and first focus groups with new principals. For Alexis, visibility granted her the opportunity to assess the culture and climate in the classrooms and its impact on the school. Without visibility, new principals were unable to assess the cultural changes that needed to be made in their schools.

As new principals progressed through their first year on the job, they also gained awareness of the importance of building the capacity of others. Building capacity afforded them to expand their influence and their vision for their schools. While new principals themselves worked to build their own capacity and learn new skills, they also took seriously the role of building the capacity of their staff. In the first focus group, Caleb shared he grew his curriculum facilitator into a coach: “It’s to grow her to be a better coach, that’s like, I just keep using that word, ‘you, you’re the coach.’” Rosalind was tasked with growing the capacity of her assistant principal and curriculum facilitator, also new to their roles. New principals shared they built the capacity of teachers through professional development, shifting existing staff’s roles, and shifting teachers’ mindset towards student-centeredness.

Phoebe acknowledged that cultural leadership would not contribute as significantly to student achievement as much as intentional instructional change. For Phoebe, cultural leadership focused primarily on building relationships with members of her school staff. “I know it’s not going to play out in increased test scores as well as good instruction would,” she said. However, culture building was necessary to leveraging instructional change and added, “if you can’t get the culture right, it doesn’t matter how much time you spend on deconstructing standards.” Rosalind shared that as a principal she wore many hats, but she emphasized that “I feel like now my main job is to inspire others and lead others with example.” New principals acknowledged the importance of inspiring others, leading cultural change, and improving school climate. Cultural

leadership required new principals to focus on the work that has to be done building the culture in a school before forging with instructional change or other change.

### **Identity Development**

New principals' identities emerged during their first months in their roles.

*Participants shared their struggle to discover their values, negotiated what they felt was important, and clarified their strengths and weaknesses as school principals.* Vision-building, value systems, and their role in the context of the school environment also contributed to their emergent identity.

Rosalind struggled with time management and her ability to prioritize tasks. In both her second interview and in the first focus group, she discussed this as an area of growth in the principalship but was a strength in her previous role as an assistant principal. By acknowledgment of her weakness related to time management, Rosalind felt compelled to delegate tasks to others on staff. The task of delegation required Rosalind to define herself as an educational leader and the principal of the school, one to delegate rather than being delegated to. Caleb's recognition of "you can't do it all" and Rosalind's acceptance that "I'm not gonna finish and I'm getting better at it, it's okay" focused new principals' identities that differed from their previous roles; this forced them to redefine their priorities and reflect on their values as school principals.

The new principals in this study became more reflective in intentionally acknowledging the individual interactions and decisions impacted their ability to fulfill their vision. Phoebe recalled an interaction with a teacher she granted instructional flexibility and wondered if the teacher would perceive this as a perpetual permission to

alter the schedule or if the decision would provide other teachers a reason to also seek the same flexibility. During the first focus group, Phoebe also shared a story of a teacher who communicated a response to an inquiry she felt was inappropriate. Immediately, she reflected on her own leadership style and shared, “[the situation] made me reflect on why do they think they can do that with me, like it made me reflect on my own behaviors.”

Caleb reflected on an occasion when he navigated a staff conflict and miscommunication regarding standards teachers set on a common assessment. He found “we’re not working well as a team so I’m a little upset with myself, but they don’t work well as a team.” Because Caleb valued collegiality and cooperation, he felt they needed to “recalibrate” and he clarified his expectations. While new principals confirmed the values they developed in their previous roles, as in Caleb’s experience with a team of teachers, new principals found that the values they share have to also be communicated with staff. This provided an avenue for others to recognize the principal’s identity they built early in their first year. Typically, as participants encountered experiences and challenges, they were forced to articulate their value systems, clarify their vision, and master skills required of the principalship, thus establishing their professional identities unique to the principalship.

### **Lack of Preparedness**

Gaps in new principals’ knowledge and skills emerged in the second round of participant interviews and first focus group. *As new principals experienced the daily tasks and expectations of the principalship, they grew increasingly aware of areas they felt underprepared.* At this point in the year, new principals were able to identify the

shortcomings of their leadership training, internship experiences, or previous roles in gaining the necessary experience to be successful in the principalship.

Participants struggled with the school budget and issues of finance. Caleb shared that this challenge was magnified as a result of minimal district support in this area for new principals. They also faced challenges of navigating their role in the community as the local elementary school's principal. Furthermore, they acknowledged they felt underprepared to lead high needs schools and the unique challenges facing them. In her journal entry, Rosalind shared that she made assumptions about the principalship and shifted her focus to the whole school rather than isolated parts of the school, as she had done in the assistant principalship. As Taylor shared the lack of preparedness she felt to increase the achievement at her school quickly based on her supervisor's expectations she questioned, "I'm not seasoned, I'm not veteran, so I don't have all the tricks up my sleeve, I don't know all the answers, and how do I, you know, help myself do that?" New principals shared a range of areas in which they felt underprepared for their new role.

While new principals felt underprepared for many of the tasks and skills of their daily work, some of the participants emphasized they had both new and experienced colleagues they could approach to provide answers to their questions. Alexis shared, "everybody will say just call me and so you'll call every now and then . . . because on that first year it's a—there are a lot of questions." For many of the new principals, their previous supervisor served as an unofficial mentor. New principals also used these experiences to grow and fill the gaps in their skillset. Taylor summarized the growth new principals undergo in their first year. She said,

If I see this is not working, what's more effective, what can we do, so I see myself as a new—I mean a new principal that is, I would say if we're looking at a rating scale, I would say developing.

The principalship was uniquely different from previous roles the participants held. Even with the best preparation, new principals faced challenges and surprises. Taylor shared this feeling of being underprepared for the principal's role: "I think you can have the best experience in the world as an AP, but until you step foot into the role, it's different, it's truly different . . ."

### **Position Confirmation**

New principals experienced position confirmation early in their principalships. *Participants' self-view of their role and their perceived success resulted in their confidence as a principal.* All new principals shared the sentiment that they made good decisions in their role as of their second interviews and first focus group; changes new principals established contributed to their confidence and feelings of success. Taylor was the only participant who questioned her decision to become a school principal. *New principals also valued the role of the principalship and their ability to impact change in their school and the community.*

Participants acknowledged the role they played as they assumed the principalship. Taylor shared her toughness developed in the principalship. Caleb shared his responsibility in creating and fulfilling the vision for his school and how it differed from the assistant principalship. "I don't feel like I have to bite my tongue anymore. I'm the leader . . . I'm not standing beside a leader and moving their vision for their school," he discussed. Rosalind shared, "I am the one that makes the ultimate decisions" in her

journal response to the question regarding how her current work deviated from her previous role. Participants confirmed the responsibility they felt as a school principal and the skills they acquired as they differed from the assistant principalship or district level position.

New principals shared they grew in their confidence and ability to make decisions. Phoebe confirmed, “you have to be willing to make those decisions quickly, recognize when it doesn’t have to be answered or decided right then . . . [and] stick with them.” Participants also shared the more they were in their new role the more confident they felt making decisions.

Position confirmation occurred for new principals in this study early in their principalships. They built confidence in their capacity, found schools they felt they could lead successfully, gathered positive feedback that confirmed the work they accomplished, and acknowledged the position they now held. New principals, while experiencing gaps in their skills and even questioning their future as a principal, acknowledged that with experience they were better equipped to lead.

### **Socialization with Stakeholders**

While new principals experienced position confirmation as a result of their perceived abilities and the confidence they developed, *the perceptions of and socialization with their administrative or instructional team, families, teachers, and district personnel emerged in the first months of the principalship. Experiences, decisions, actions, and communication impacted not only principals’ self-views but also the relationship of new principals with stakeholders.*

New principals asserted their role among their instructional or administrative team at their respective schools. Caleb struggled to redefine the role of the principal in the context of the team made up of his office staff and curriculum facilitator. He sought to focus on instruction with the support of his curriculum facilitator but more closely collaborated with the counselor and office staff due to supporting the behavior of students in the school. Limited time decreased Caleb's ability to collaborate with his curriculum facilitator. While growing into her role, Rosalind was also tasked with growing her curriculum facilitator and assistant principal who were also new to their roles. She was forced to create a structure for the team as well as their respective roles within the team.

The community's and the schools' families' perceptions and relationship with the new principals influenced their socialization in the context of the school setting. Caleb conveyed the community inquiry about the role of the new principal was, "How are you going to uplift our community and keep our community in your heart and keep us moving in the right direction?" Caleb also navigated challenging situations where families tested his firmness in decision-making; as a result, his decision-making strengthened and value system emerged. Phoebe was intentionally visible during student arrival and dismissal so she could articulate her vision through questions families would ask and the relationships she built. Alexis forged relationships with families through custody disagreements she navigated. Through these experiences she also asserted her vision for making the school student-centered and focused on meeting students' basic needs.

The relationship forged with district personnel also socialized new principals into the principalship. Alexis felt confident reaching out to her supervisor in Cross Keys



County when she experienced challenges or had a question. Taylor felt her supervisor had unreasonable expectations about leveraging instructional improvement at her school.

While both Alexis and Taylor had different experiences with their direct supervisor in their first year, they both played the role of principal in the view of their supervisors and had to establish credibility in their roles.

Rosalind shared, “you’re dealing with students, parents, community, advocates, you know, staff, you name it, I mean it’s a whole gamut of you know, different people that you’re dealing with.” This statement exemplified the challenges new principals faced in socializing within the school setting by the magnitude of daily interactions. Each interaction was an opportunity for new principals to communicate their vision, form relationships with stakeholders, and negotiate the role they played in their schools. As new principals were new to the school in which they worked, they had to develop the role they would play in an already existing school and district culture.

### **Staff Accountability**

Staff accountability emerged as a challenge new principals faced and as a daily task they perceived as required of their role. Participants shared they set expectations for staff, held staff accountable for meeting expectations, and documented staff members who did not meet expectations. While they did not share this was an area they lacked in their preparation programs or previous experiences, *new principals acknowledged their responsibility in setting the expectations for their school and choosing the strategies used in monitoring those expectations.*

Caleb intentionally set expectations for staff. He believed “setting the expectation for all stakeholders” consumed the majority of his day and served as a daily task in the principalship. Phoebe also believed one of her daily tasks was staff accountability. She shared, “one of the daily tasks is to ensure that students are receiving quality instruction every day.” Similarly, Taylor stated her daily work included teachers “being held accountable for learning.”

During the first focus group, Phoebe shared she struggled with staff accountability as a new principal. Coupled with staff accountability, communicating to staff when they did not meet her expectations challenged her. Her colleagues offered supportive suggestions as she discussed a particularly difficult staff issue. Phoebe acknowledged the importance of staff accountability. She stated in her second interview, “I believe that our primary purpose here is to educate children and I don’t hold the people who educate them accountable . . . how can we adequately educate them?” Phoebe shared in the focus group that because she did not address the issue earlier, she felt she could no longer do so. “I did not address things head on, I allowed stuff to brew,” she told her colleagues.

Often, new principals shared their expectations with staff as a result of experiences in their role or difficult staff or circumstances they faced. New principals did not explicitly share how they proactively set expectations in order to mitigate the accountability measures they enacted. Additionally, staff accountability as a daily task and challenge for new principals did not emerge until the second round of interviews with participants; for new principals, staff accountability was reactive rather than proactive. Phoebe shared she found herself “reacting instead of responding” to various situations.

As new principals confirmed their positionality as a school leader and socialized into their role, setting expectations and holding staff accountable emerged as a challenge due to the fact new principals were still new to their roles and establishing who they were as a leader.

### **Third Interviews and Second Focus Group**

The third interviews with participants and second focus group took place during the month of February in their first year of their principalship. All participants participated in the third round of interviews; Phoebe, Taylor, and Rosalind participated in the second focus group. Participants' responses can be organized into the following key categories.

#### **Building a Global Perspective**

As new principals served in their first year of the principalship, *their understanding of their role as vital to the community, the impact of their leadership, and the need to be aware of the overall operations of the schoolhouse increased*. This global perspective provided new principals an expanded view of their school and the position of the principal in the community and district. Participants explicitly shared their acknowledgement of the power of the position they now held and the importance of considering a global perspective of their respective schools. In just a few words, Phoebe conveyed this sentiment: "I'm trying to make this little piece of the world better."

Participants acknowledged they did not have the awareness of the whole school in previous roles; they conveyed they now required a perspective of the entire school community. Rosalind shared in her third interview, "you need to be able to multitask, and

you need to be able to communicate with everybody.” Caleb and Taylor acknowledged the vital role their leadership plays in the context of their school communities. While Caleb’s school is a community school, the school Taylor lead is a blend of the community and a magnet student population; however, they both prioritized collaboration with the surrounding community early in their principalships. Even though neither Taylor nor Caleb have had the opportunity to build a relationship with their school communities as they originally intended, their global view of the school community and importance of their leadership and school to the community required they create a plan to solidify this partnership in the future. Differently, Phoebe, who previously served in a district-level position, recognized the function of her school and position in the context of Cross Keys County Schools; she shared, “I now feel much more like a cog in a wheel.” Participants recognized successful leadership required a knowledge of the whole school and its position within the community and larger school district. By February of their first year in the principalship, new principals recognized that building a global perspective was necessary for their success and leadership.

### **Building Self-confidence**

The third participant interviews and second focus group reflected increased confidence in their ability to do the work of a school principal. In their own words, *new principals conveyed confidence based on their ability to apply previous experiences to their new roles, their belief they made good decisions in their new role, and their accomplishment of goals they set.* All five participants explicitly communicated a self-

view of success at this point in their first principalship; however, they also conceded there were still areas of improvement to be made in their effectiveness.

In the context of challenges and surprises new principals faced in the principalship, they still reflected on their current abilities and felt prepared to accomplish the work and fulfill their vision for the schools they led. Phoebe stated, “I feel like I was more prepared than I thought I was.” Rosalind shared, “I mean, I don’t want to sound cocky but I think I’m doing a pretty decent job,” while Caleb said, “I guess I see myself as having a lot of energy.” New principals expressed feelings of confidence in their new role. Rosalind concerned herself with improving the school culture at Johnstonville Elementary School and received feedback, through staff surveys and anecdotal data, on the work she had already done so early in her first year there. Her confidence was the result of accomplishment of the goals she set for her first year in the principalship at Johnstonville.

Participants also discussed confidence in decision-making in their third interview and in the focus group. Taylor believed that she made good decisions; however, in the context of what described as a challenging school setting, there were still factors outside of her control that impacted the execution of those decisions. For Caleb, he felt confident making decisions based on opportunities he had during the assistant principalship to make decisions. Other new principals shared they felt responsible for making decisions after listening to stakeholders and simply making a necessary decision to move progress forward at their schools.

Still, embedded in participants' responses in the third interviews and focus groups were feelings of exhaustion and doubt, an awareness that new principals had of the work that remained ahead. Taylor summarized this sentiment, "There are times where I feel like my head, that I'm under water and I'm gasping for air, and I—and there are times where I feel like, 'Hey, am I doing what I need to be doing? Is it the right thing?'" Overall, however, new principals felt more equipped to make decisions, more confident overall, and more accomplished in meeting the goals they set for their schools as of February in their first year in the principalship.

### **Change Leadership Management**

*Participants struggled with managing the change their leadership brought about at the schools they led.* New principals realized that even after building relationships with staff members and feeling that the changes they instituted were minimal, their leadership style differed from their predecessors and brought a new perspective to staff members at their respective schools. Phoebe recalled a situation where a student and her mother were granted access to the private restroom in the principal's office and the dismay by the office staff. Phoebe used this situation as an example of how she worked to increase staff's ability to interact with compassion and kindness with students and families.

Caleb acknowledged that in his first year he would not be able to make all the changes he had planned. He was still confident about the legacy he would leave on the school by some of the small changes he made, such as supporting the office staff offering a piece of candy to student visitors to the office. Taylor struggled with teacher's responses to feedback she provided them instructionally in their classrooms as teachers

shared they were unaccustomed to the principal providing them feedback on their teaching. Regardless of these challenges new principals faced in change leadership, they did not alter their actions or beliefs. They aimed instead to manage this change and reconcile existing staff with new initiatives they enacted.

New principals shared the challenge to leverage support for the change was a new skill they developed during their first year in the principalship. Phoebe shared, “So having the conversation with—and with those folks is a skill that I’m developing that I hadn’t needed before.” Caleb discussed the balance of accomplishing his vision and executing change while maintaining a positive school culture for each individual at Wisteria Elementary. He asked, “How do you get people on board that don’t want to change without it bringing down your ship?” Just as Caleb and Phoebe shared the challenge and new skill of balancing change with staff sentiment while remaining focused on their goals, Rosalind also stayed committed to sharing and fulfilling the vision she set for Johnstonville. Even in the face of daily challenges she shared you have to “really try to transmit that vision that you have.”

Their first principalships required new principals to manage change and leverage support for the vision they set out for their schools. They acknowledged this type of change leadership deviated from the skills they needed in their previous roles, and while they acknowledged the challenges of enacting change, new principals remained firm in their goals and actions despite the new learning required of them.

### **Disillusionment with Staff Expertise**

Participants grew disillusioned with the limited skill set of staff members as of February in their first year in the principalship. *As a result of their lack of awareness of staff members' capacity and preconceptions regarding educators' abilities, new principals were forced to refocus their attention on addressing these deficiencies.* New principals spent time addressing both classified staff members' skill gaps and teachers' classroom management instead of focusing on other areas of their leadership. The disillusionment with staff expertise and the need to focus on addressing problem areas limited new principals' time to accomplish other goals in their first year, as this was an unintended and unplanned aspect for new principals.

Non-licensed, non-instructional staff and teaching staff alike required new principals' attention to address skill deficiencies and lack of adherence to expectations. While this may be a challenge of school leadership in a larger sense, new principals were largely unaware that this would require as much time and attention as it had by February of their first principalship. Rosalind discussed the assumptions she made about teachers' instructional abilities. She said in the focus group, "I think I made a lot of assumptions, and that's a big mistake, you know, you're assuming that teachers are doing [the right thing]." Phoebe echoed this sentiment in her interview. She "expected that people worked really, really hard and the kids were just low" in reference to teacher performance in a low-performing, Title I school. This realization required her to reexamine her beliefs about teaching expertise at Fort Cape Elementary School, particularly because district



staff shared the teachers would be more skilled there than Phoebe observed once the school year started.

Aside from addressing the instructional staff at the school, new principals were surprised by the time they spent working with non-instructional staff on meeting basic expectations. At Country Terrace Elementary, Taylor held a recorded conversation with an office staff member who refused to complete a task she had assigned. This staff member even reported Taylor to the school district to avoid a task he felt was unaligned with his job description. Phoebe struggled to redirect the actions of her lead custodian who could not complete the basic tasks of his job. When she had the custodial supervisor visit the school to provide her with support, the supervisor instead validated the poor work of the lead custodian. Caleb also spent significantly more time with his non-licensed, non-instructional staff to ensure they met his expectations and completed their work in alignment with his vision “than [he did] with [his] teachers and their wants and needs.”

While new principals were focused on addressing the deficiencies of staff members, their limited time prevented them from proactive instructional leadership they originally set out to accomplish in their first year at their schools. New principals were forced to reallocate their attention towards supporting staff members in meeting the basic expectations and requirements of their role when they discovered some staff members lacked the expertise to do their work.

### **Struggle to Focus on Instruction**

Even as of February of their first year in the principalship, new principals struggled with managerial tasks, which detracted their ability to focus on instruction. As discussed previously, *the need to address staff expertise, the time spent on change leadership management, and even the importance of new principals gaining a global perspective of their school and their role took time from the instructional support new principals believed they could accomplish their first year.* Even though the participants in this study acknowledged this shift from instructional leadership as necessary, they still made intentional decisions to focus on other areas.

New principals, new to the daily requirements of the principalship, faced a learning curve related to daily school operations. This time spent mastering new tasks distracted them from being able to focus on instruction. Phoebe shared she had to spend her time on things she “feel[s] like has to be done in order to just keep the day-to-day functions moving.” The time she spent on daily management meant she felt she had not fulfilled the role of a school principal. She said, “I’m not doing what I believe the expectation is for principals because I’m not moving [the school] instructionally.” Caleb spent more attention on attending to personnel issues than working with teachers on instruction and moving the instructional program of his school forward.

Student discipline distracted Rosalind and Taylor from being able to focus on instruction. In an effort to improve the discipline process at her school, Rosalind spent a lot of unintended time on discipline. She shared that she focused her attention on some of the “frequent fliers”; she told the focus group, “we’ve created a culture I feel that has

given students the opportunity to make better choices, so but what I am spending with a few frequent fliers, I am spending time with them.” Taylor also reinforced the time she spent on student discipline in the focus group; she stated, “. . . which I am in classrooms, but because of the dynamics of the school and the behaviors that are at the school, it takes me away from getting in the classrooms.”

The daily work simply exhausted Taylor and made her unable to focus on instruction as she had intended. She said, “You get tired, you’re exhausted, my body is exhausted.” Phoebe, who previously believed her strength would be instructional leadership, acknowledged, “What has actually turned out to be the hardest is improving instruction.” New principals recognized the importance of instructional leadership; however, they struggled to maintain their focus on tasks they believed were vital to instructional improvement. Even with an intentional shift away from instructional leadership towards other areas they felt were necessary in their first year in the principalship, new principals continued to reference instruction as a focus as necessary to school leadership. Whether new principals created the state of their schools intentionally or they met challenges that existed before their arrival, the state of the schools they led in February of their first principalship distracted new principals from focusing on instruction. Each participant entered the principalship with the belief they would be able to focus on instruction; however, by February, each of the participants struggled to do so.

### **Vital Relationship Development**

New principals learned developing relationships with stakeholders was necessary to their principalship. *They discovered that building vital relationships required*

*transparency and communication, enabled them to complete the other tasks of the principalship, and was key to their success in their first year as principals.* New principals explicitly shared the importance of building relationships vital to fulfilling their vision and becoming a part of the fabric of their schools. Rosalind's words in her third interview clearly described the importance of building relationships. She shared the daily tasks of the principalship included "building relationships with the students, building relationships with the parents and the teachers, because then if you have those relationships, you're going to be able to do the other tasks." Taylor shared that developing relationships with the community "helps as an administrator to help bridge those gaps and build those—make those bonds in school."

Rosalind and Phoebe believed new principals needed to build relationships to be successful in their principalship. Phoebe shared, "you have to love people enough to be able to get in there and do that, that dirty, emotional kind of work with them." Similarly, Rosalind believed relationship-building was vital to accomplishing the other work of the principalship. She said, "to me the most important thing is those relationships, so everybody does what they need to in order to improve student achievement and growth."

New principals were also concerned with the relationships they built with colleagues and district staff, aside from those they forged with the stakeholders at their respective sites. Caleb was not able to attend many district meetings where he would have had the opportunity to collaborate with and develop relationships with his colleagues. He conveyed the importance of building these relationships but had not been able to at that point in the school year. Furthermore, both Alexis and Taylor described the

relationship they developed with their supervisors. While Alexis shared examples of her supervisor's support, Taylor felt unsupported by the district as a new principal and by her supervisor through the visits she received. Alexis shared she received support in order to enable her to become a better leader; Taylor described that if she did not meet achievement targets at the end of the year, "somebody's gonna say you're not doing what you're supposed to be instructionally, but not realizing that all the changes that has taken place."

New principals recognized relationship development as vital to their first year in the principalship. They found communication and transparency to be important to forging relationships with stakeholders and even believed relationship development was a necessary daily task of their roles. As new principals developed relationships with staff, families, the community, and other members of the district, they also understood the importance of those relationships to accomplishing the various goals they set for their schools.

#### **Fourth Interviews and Third Focus Group**

The third interviews with participants took place during the month of March in the first year of their principalship; the third focus group occurred at the beginning of March with Alexis, Phoebe, and Rosalind. Taylor's journal entry, submitted in March, is also included in this dataset. Participants' responses based on their experiences can be organized into the following key categories.

### **Assertion of Power**

New principals realized the power of the principalship and asserted their power as of the fourth interviews and third focus group. Participants first recognized the power of the position they were now in and worked to assert the power they now had among their school community. *New principals realized and asserted their power through decision-making and explicit communication of their role to school stakeholders.*

New principals discussed their feelings regarding the power they now had as school principals. Phoebe recognized the importance of the role of the principal and feared making the wrong decisions. She said, “I think in the beginning I was very scared. Scared I was going to do the wrong thing, scared I was going to say the wrong thing, I was scared parents were going to come up here hollering at me and I wouldn’t know what to do.” Caleb also felt the power of the role early on in the year. He described the emotions that overcame him as he held his opening meeting with staff at the beginning of the year. He shared he thought “all these people really think that I’m going to lead this building right now.”

The impact she had on students, staff, and families caused Phoebe a great deal of stress. Phoebe maintained a fever from the third to fourth interviews and discovered “it’s the body’s response, it’s psychosomatic, it’s the body’s response to chronic stress.” Her belief that she herself had to be present and no one could replace her leadership in the event of the absence meant she did not take time away from work. She said, “I feel fully responsible, so I just don’t feel comfortable not going to work.” Taylor also felt the difference in the weight of the responsibility in the principalship from her previous role.

She shared, “You don’t have that feeling [you’re holding a big rock], that feeling is not there when you’re an AP as opposed to when you’re a principal.”

While new principals acknowledged the importance of their role and the power of the principalship, they also asserted their power in their first year of the principalship. A new skill for the participants due to their new role, participants described examples of asserting their newly acquired power. They also struggled with the responsibility and finality of decision-making. Rosalind said, “You make the decisions, you have the last word. If anything goes wrong, it comes to you.” They realized the necessity of making well-informed decisions and the power of decision-making as of the fourth interviews and third focus groups. Alexis shared she felt the power and impact of the principalship in her decision-making. She told the focus group, “just knowing that you, you know, them seeing and you know, okay, it is my final decision, so yeah . . .”

Taylor shared staff members pushed back when she asserted her power, and she confirmed she deviated from the independence given to teachers under the previous administration. She said, “like your tone has to change and let them know like, [the teachers] are not in charge.” Similarly, Alexis asserted her leadership at Radburn. She said ““No, that has to come through me first,”” in response to staff members’ decision-making independent of her. New principals shared their realization of the power of the principalship and provided examples of asserting their power in their new roles.

### **Juxtaposition of Challenges and Accomplishments**

*New principals continued to face challenges, particularly in the management of personnel, through the fourth interviews and third focus group; however, these prevailing*

*challenges can be juxtaposed with the overall improvement in school climate and culture.*

While there were staff issues participants discussed even through the final interviews and focus groups for data collection, each new principal also described specific examples of positive culture change and climate improvements in their schools. As discussed previously, new principals believed leveraging cultural change would be necessary to instructional improvement and achievement, so through the accomplishment of cultural change within their schools this led to a fulfillment of their goals.

New principals' awareness of the challenges they faced led to the development of strategies designed to address or mitigate those challenges. The acknowledgement of these challenges allowed new principals to reconcile those challenges with culture building and contentment with the challenges of the role they held. While participants discussed the challenges they faced with individual staff members, they also shared examples of success with culture building at their respective schools. They were aware staff issues would continue to face them in leadership; however, the realization of school culture and climate improvement attributed to new principals' feelings of accomplishment and success.

While new principals shared schoolwide examples of accomplishment with school culture and climate, individual changes were also made. Caleb shared his proudest moment when a teacher implemented changes to her classroom environment to align with his expectations. This change was willingly implemented by one of Caleb's teachers most hesitant to implement new practices. To Caleb, this demonstrated her support for his vision and leadership. As new principals led intentional efforts to build school culture and



climate, they also experienced accomplishments with individual staff members. Taylor also acknowledged the importance of building a positive school culture to individuals.

She said,

It's just a matter of helping them to see what we have in common. The common goal, the common vision that what we're trying to accomplish, and once we can get everybody to see—have that same why and what we're trying to accomplish, then we can move forward in the right direction that we want them to move in.

Taylor continued to experience staff members' resistant to the feedback she provided to teachers and to changes in the custodial assignments through the fourth interview in March. While these individual challenges often made her question if she wanted to continue in the principalship, she also said her feelings "calmed down a little bit more, because you get a little bit adjusted." This serves as another example of the challenges the new principals faced and the juxtaposition of accomplishments. While for other principals in this study the accomplishment was in the area of cultural and climate improvements in their schools, for Taylor it was an adjustment to her role.

Overall, the new principals shared school culture and climate improved. Phoebe shared with the focus group, "I'm proud of the change in the culture inside the building . . . teachers have said that there's more collegiality than there has been before." Rosalind said in the fourth interview, "although I'm working them to death, because they say it, they're so willing to do it." She also shared teachers have told her they would follow her if she moved to another school because they have bought into her vision and leadership. While the challenges of leadership were acknowledged by participants, they also expressed feelings of pride and accomplishment with the positive changes they enacted.

## **Management of Responsibilities**

*New principals struggled to manage their various responsibilities particularly as they lacked experience with the tasks necessary to the principalship and struggled to delegate tasks, often the result of a lack of trust in others to fulfill their expectations.* New principals shared they lacked preparedness to work with the budget and school finances as they were not primarily responsible for the budget as assistant principals. The principalship also required they learn how to organize and prioritize their daily tasks, navigate the politics of the school system to meet the needs of their building, and ask questions. Each of these newly acquired skills, in the midst of the school year, afforded new principals the strategies needed to manage the diverse responsibilities of their roles.

New principals adapted to the learning curve of the principalship in order to effectively manage their various responsibilities. Even though Rosalind worked through her challenges with time management and prioritization over the course of the year, she still struggled with unexpected circumstances. She stated, “I have learned that you cannot plan ahead of time, because things happen.” This disrupted the fragile organization and prioritization systems she worked so hard to develop. The increase in paperwork also contributed to her inability to manage her time effectively. Rosalind said, “it’s like I have to do way more paperwork as a principal than I used to as an assistant principal.”

The desire to complete tasks correctly contributed to the evolution of Taylor’s identity. She navigated the challenge of addressing the needs of staff members through deliberately exercised patience. “I have to do it right. So just knowing, giving myself, having more patience, and waiting and giving myself wait time, so that I am not

overwhelmed.” Her increased ability to manage the responsibilities of the principalship contributed to a new identity as a principal. Caleb also made adjustments to manage the responsibilities of the principalship. Caleb learned to use a notebook to stay organized. He pulled out the notebook he carried in his pocket, flipped through the pages and said, “then I’ll go back through it, I need to email you, I need to follow up on this, I need to do this, and it really organized me to get things done.” As the school year ended, participants still struggled to delegate tasks to other staff members. Delegation was an important skill the new principals needed to develop to enable management of their myriad responsibilities.

While Taylor shared she started delegating tasks to others as a coping strategy she used to manage her responsibilities, Caleb and Phoebe did not have the trust in others necessary to feel confident in delegating tasks. Caleb acknowledged this was an area of improvement for him and said, “one of the things I’m also learning is I have to learn how to delegate better and build teams, which I don’t do well.” He shared, “learning trust I think is huge. Learning who you can trust, who you can’t trust. And who’s reliable, and who’s not reliable.” Phoebe also lacked confidence in her staff members. She told the focus group, “I can’t depend on the people around me to be able to do what they’re supposed to do.”

Overall, new principals realized the management of their responsibilities played a vital role in their ability to lead and maintain the school environment. Phoebe recognized the need to maintain the operation of the school. She shared, “I think the daily tasks of the principalship are to ensure that the function—that the school functions efficiently

enough for people to be able to do their jobs.” Aligned with this belief was one of Phoebe’s proudest successes—acquiring new computers, a new phone system, and new lighting for Fort Cape Elementary School. Rosalind said, “Everything and all. I mean there is just—you’re just everything. You’re a parent, you’re a counselor, you’re a social worker,” to summarize of all of the daily tasks of the school principal.

### **Success with Families and Success for Students**

Throughout the study, *new principals described success they experienced forging trust and relationships with families and success for students through instructional improvements or relationship-building*. Participants described these successes more frequently and explicitly in the fourth interviews and third focus groups. As the work principals do is for the benefit of students and in partnership with families, the recognition of the work new principals accomplished in this area should be mentioned. Additionally, the success new principals shared in these areas echo the achievements made in addressing school culture and climate and were also described as new principals’ proudest accomplishments.

In general, new principals established relationships with families, reported increased parental involvement and trust with families, and improved outcomes for students. While Phoebe was concerned that as the first White, female principal at Fort Cape Elementary School she would have difficulty gaining the trust of the families of students that attended the school, she did not find that to be the case. She said she built better relationships with her families than did the teachers who had been at the school. She shared, “I have a lot of contact with parents, because I call parents a lot, I call them a

lot. I send home those ‘good news from school’ postcards a lot.” She even reported fifth-grade students would intentionally get sent to the principal’s office to talk with her, because she had established trusting relationships with her students and allowed them a voice to share their concerns.

Rosalind and Alexis made breaking down barriers between home and the school one of their priorities in their first year. Rosalind shared one of her priorities was to establish a better climate for her students’ families. She told the focus group, “we can start changing or continuing to change the culture if all stakeholders feel welcome and respected.” Rosalind had all communication to families translated into two other languages and worked to build a relationship with the local mosque. She reported better parent participation as a result of her efforts. Alexis shared in her first three interviews one of the most challenging aspects of the principalship was working with families through custody issues. As of the fourth interview, she shared she had made gains in this area, and even after being subpoenaed to court for one custody issue, the parents on both sides of the issue came to school the day following court in appreciation of her efforts to support the family.

In the area of supporting students, new principals experienced success as well. Caleb discussed improvement of the student attendance rate as being one of the priorities of his first year. He saw incremental increases in the school’s historically low attendance rate. He also collaborated with teachers to improve the academic behaviors of students at Wisteria Elementary. He shared one success of his efforts in this area. Caleb said, “And I

walked in today and one little girl, I haven't seen her do a lick of work for 3 months when I've been walking in her classroom. She had tried to do two math problems.”

Rosalind summarized the success and pride she felt with the focus group: “I'm just proud of what things we're doing and really seeing teachers coming on board and trying new things for kids because that's what we do, we are in this profession because we serve kids.” Even in the midst of the myriad responsibilities new principals faced, they established positive working relationships with families and improved circumstances for the students at their schools.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings as illuminated throughout the course of the second, third, and fourth interview. The findings were presented in this manner to demonstrate the changes new principals underwent in their perceptions, focus, and ideas throughout their first year. As the categories included in the above findings suggest, new principals struggled throughout the year to focus on instructional leadership and transitioned in their focus to cultural leadership. They were socialized within their schools and within their organizations, and they increased in their confidence to lead their schools. These findings will be further discussed in the final chapter.

The interviews and second, third, and fourth focus groups discussed the participants' experiences throughout the months following the first interviews. Their experiences illuminated the transition from instructional to cultural leadership, the building of their self-confidence in their ability to effectively lead their schools, and success they felt in achieving some of the goals they established for themselves and their

schools. Chapters IV and V included the presentation of data, organized by time span, from each of the five participants. The data presented derived from an analysis of the data collected from focus groups, interviews, and participant journaling. Chapter VI presents the research questions and describes the implications of this research. Chapter VI also considers the triangulation of the theoretical framework with existing literature and the data collected in this study.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of surprises and challenges new principals faced on the socialization process and the process of building their emergent identity as a principal. Through an analysis of the data collected through participant interviews, focus groups, and journal entries, this chapter provides an overview of the categories derived from the data at each of four time intervals through a triangulation of existing literature, the data collected in this study, and the theoretical framework of socialization and identity-building. This chapter also addresses the research questions and describes the implications of the findings.

While the new principals in this study did not experience any remarkable or outstanding surprises or challenges that they shared, the theoretical framework is confirmed by the findings and existing research. New principals were socialized into their new roles and their professional identity emerged. They oriented to their new tasks, increased in their confidence, and experienced some surprises and challenges. These impacted not solely socialization, but also led to other changes in their identities and their schools.

The findings gleaned from the analysis of the data collection generated five themes. The five themes demonstrated new principals' learning over the course of the first year in their new role. New principals struggled to focus on instructional leadership



and cultural leadership eclipsed their efforts in this area; new principals also asserted their position as a result of the confidence developed in their new role. New principals' socialization occurred within the school setting and led to the development of an improved school culture. Finally, new principals were able to clarify and execute their core values.

### Summary of Findings

Data collected through interviews, focus groups, and journal entries paint an image of the transition new principals undergo in the first year on the job. The categories identified from each of the interviews, focus groups, and journals are captured in Table 3. The themes each of the categories informed are indicated by a (letter) and then referred to in the discussion of themes below.

Table 3

#### Categories Identified by Time Span

First Interview	Second Interviews, First Focus Group, Rosalind's Journal	Third Interviews	Fourth Interviews, Third Focus Group, Taylor's Journal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication of core values (a)</li> <li>• Confidence building (c)</li> <li>• Cultural leadership competency (d)</li> <li>• Instructional leadership (d)</li> <li>• Leadership preparation (d)</li> <li>• Positional relationship development (b)</li> <li>• Shift in perspective (c)</li> <li>• Task orientation (d)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on cultural leadership (d)</li> <li>• Identity development (c)</li> <li>• Lack of preparedness (d)</li> <li>• Position confirmation (c)</li> <li>• Socialization with stakeholders (e)</li> <li>• Staff accountability (d)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building a global perspective (e)</li> <li>• Building self-confidence (c)</li> <li>• Change leadership management (b)</li> <li>• Disillusionment with staff expertise (d)</li> <li>• Struggle to focus on instruction (d)</li> <li>• Vital relationship development (d)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assertion of power (c)</li> <li>• Juxtaposition of challenges and contentment (c)</li> <li>• Management of responsibilities (d)</li> <li>• Success with families and success for students (b)</li> </ul>

These categories provide a chronological story of new principals' first year in their role and the changes they experienced. Following are the themes that emerged from the categories, when considered over the course of the year:

- *Role clarification.* (a) Participants' core values were clarified and realized in their new role. These values did not deviate from those they acquired in their previous roles; however, the principalship afforded them the opportunity to realize those values and execute them through vision development and communication of that vision with stakeholders.
- *Stakeholder collaboration.* (b) Participants collaborated with stakeholders and developed meaningful relationships that enabled them to build a positive school culture.
- *Increased confidence.* (c) Participants' confidence in their abilities increased over time and they increasingly leveraged their power and positionality throughout the first year in their role.
- *Emphasis on cultural leadership.* (d) Participants focused on cultural leadership and struggled to focus on instructional leadership. Participants realized that instructional change could not occur by ignoring cultural change and thus became a key focus of their first year.
- *Socialization within the schoolhouse.* (e) Participants were largely socialized within the school setting with families, students, and staff members. Over the course of their first year, participants discussed decreasing their relationship

with colleagues and district personnel; socialization with these groups was limited.

Themes developed from the data collection over the span of the study are discussed along with an analysis of each theme. The research questions are also answered with a particular focus on orientation and socialization into the principalship and their identity-building as a result of the surprises and challenges they encounter.

### **Presentation of Research Questions**

The three research questions considered in concert and with the theoretical framework provided as a background addressed the impact of the surprises and challenges new principal face in their first year in their role. The new principals in this study did not experience remarkable surprises or challenges in their first year they shared in the data collection process; therefore, the response to the research questions is somewhat limited to the socialization and identity-building new principals experienced even while the impact of surprises and challenges had only a marginally greater influence on new principals' emergent identities than on their socialization. The relationship of surprises and challenges to identity-building and socialization was not apparent from the data collected, although should be acknowledged.

While existing research acknowledges new principals face challenges difficult to overcome in their first year in their role, my research focused on the challenges and the impact of surprises new principals faced. Oplatka (2012) found,

Several experiences seem to be particular to newly appointed principals: reality shock, a lack of sufficient managerial understanding and competence, technical

rather than instructional orientation, principal-staff type of interaction and a sense of insufficient managerial training. (p. 138)

The data collected in this study reinforced these findings and supplied some additional information as to how new principals navigate some of those challenges and surprises and orient to their role through socialization and identity-building.

### **New Principals' Beliefs about the Principalship**

In order to develop a background as to new principals' beliefs about the principalship, I first considered new principals' perceptions about the principalship in order to identify the surprises and challenges they faced. The first research question, *“What do new principals believe the principalship is like as they begin their work?”* provided an opportunity for me to extract participants' beliefs about the principalship to identify surprises or unexpected challenges they encountered. A deviation from their perceptions of the principalship was a surprise or unexpected challenge, even if new principals did not specifically articulate those unexpected experiences as a surprise. Principal preparation and prior experiences shaped new principals' beliefs about what they would encounter in their new role. Even while new principals did not consistently reference particular new skills or surprises they faced in their role, their beliefs about the principalship provided a background into their beliefs, leadership style, and values, similar to the findings of Gentilucci and colleagues (2013). This insight and the gaps in their perceptions about the principalship versus the reality informed the types of challenges and surprises they faced.

### **Socialization Supported by Surprises and Challenges**

While existing research accepts the importance of the socialization process of new principals into their new role (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Crow, 2006; Greenfield, 1985; Lee, 2015; Oplatka, 2012; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006), the second research question, “*How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter support their socialization into the principalship?*,” aimed to identify the specific experiences new principals had through the surprises and challenges they encountered which contributed to their professional socialization. The socialization process involved both formal and professional socialization new principals experienced during principal training. These processes were discussed by Giddings (1897) and Crow (2006). To extract new principals’ prior experiences with formal and professional socialization, new principals discussed their principal training and their transition to the principalship. Additionally, this study also focused on the socialization process after new principals entered the principalship. This aspect of socialization, as described through the formal and informal interactions asserted by Greenfield (1985) and Crow (2006), was considered in the context of the surprises and challenges new principals faced.

### **Professional Identity Influenced by Surprises and Challenges**

Third, new principals’ emergent professional identity was considered in the last research question of this study. The question, “*How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter influence their emergent professional identity?*,” focused on how new principals begin to form their identity as a principal, an identity unique from prior roles. Hence, the use of the word “emergent” suggests that for new principals, their

identity-building as a school principal has not yet concluded. The identity-building process is vital to the success of new principals (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). As identity-building occurs both externally and internally (Burke & Stets, 2009), new principals' identities are built based upon their experience and how they make meaning of those experiences. In this study, the challenges and surprises new principals face were considered as one vehicle through which identity-building occurs.

### **Connection to Theoretical Framework**

The second and third research questions largely focus on the theoretical framework. As noted in the framework, socialization and identity-building are two processes new principals experience in their first year. While these two processes occur beyond the first year, the experiences of new principals shape new principals' identities as different from their identities in previous roles as they are socialized into the principalship. As noted in Chapter III, self-efficacy, ultimate responsibility (Spillane & Lee, 2014), challenges, surprises, and isolation impact the socialization and identity-building processes. The theoretical framework is referenced in the following findings and confirm the themes developed from the framework, the data collection, and existing findings.

### **Research Analysis, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

This section is organized by each of the three research questions and includes relevant background information necessary to answering the questions. Five themes were developed from a triangulation of the existing research, data collected in this study, and

connections to the theoretical framework. These five themes are signaled by an underlined and italicized heading.

### **Research Question 1**

*What do new principals believe the principalship is like as they begin their work?*

The perceptions new principals had about the daily tasks of the principalship and the skills and dispositions necessary for first-year principals' success provided a background to understanding the surprises and challenges they faced. While the focus of this study was not to determine the reason new principals were surprised by or challenged by their experiences, their lack of preparedness or their perceptions may have contributed to those surprises and challenges. According to Gentilucci and colleagues (2013), “[new principals] often lack the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to meet demanding challenges of their multifaceted roles” (p. 75). The new principals in this study indicated their lack of preparedness for their role. Even as of the first couple of months in the principalship, Phoebe said, “There’s a disconnect between what I perceived would happen in the schools and what actually happens” (Interview 1). Taylor stated, “I don’t think there is anything that really fully prepares you for that role . . . because there are things that come up that, hey you, I’ve never experienced, and I’m like oh, gosh, what do I do?” (Interview 1). Walker and Qian (2006) asserted that the skills necessary for the principalship deviate from those required of new principals’ previous roles:

The energy previously needed to climb must be transformed quickly to balancing atop an equally tenuous surface—a spot requiring new knowledge, skills and understandings. In too many cases, the experience of the climb has done little to prepare beginning principals for the balancing act they are asked to perform. (p. 297)

The participants in this study acknowledged their leadership training did not and could not address all of the experiences they would face during their principalship, as the challenges of the principalship radically differed from their previous roles.

The categories of task orientation and leadership preparation emerged from the data collected from participants' Interview 1. New principals also shared their lack of preparedness to serve as an effective school principal, a category generated from the data collected from the second focus group and the second interview with each participant. Furthermore, new principals continued to struggle to focus on instruction as indicated from the third interview and second focus group and still struggled to manage their responsibilities as of the fourth interview and third focus group. Particularly in their orientation to the myriad responsibilities and the struggle to maintain an instructional focus, the challenges new principals faced resulted from gaps in their principal preparation and internships as well as their lack of ability to manage their time and prioritize tasks.

**Challenges unique to the new principal.** These challenges are unique to the new principal. Bauer and Brazer (2013) asserted experienced principals are better able to prioritize and find solutions to balancing the challenging tasks of the principalship. "More experienced principals, however, may learn to mitigate the effects of role overload through prioritizing tasks, appropriate delegation, and pushing back a bit (on central office, on parents, on teachers) to have obligations removed or reduced" (p. 171). Rosalind struggled with time management and prioritization through this study. While she felt these were areas of strength before assuming the principalship, she now shared



both were her biggest challenge. In her last interview, when asked “What do you think has been the most challenging aspect of your principalship?,” she said, “Time management. And I’m a workaholic already, so I want to do it all and do it right, so that time management, I know for me, is a challenge” (Interview 4).

Spillane and colleagues (2015) echoed Bauer and Brazer’s (2013) suggestion that new principals would be better able to manage their responsibilities through delegation.

Spillane and colleagues (2015) recommended:

By involving others in particular aspects of the principal’s work and dividing up responsibility by type of work (i.e., division of labor), novices could potentially reduce the diversity of work they have to deal with as well as the pressure to master such diverse types of knowledge and expertise. (p. 1077)

Participants in this study discussed trust and their need to be fully aware of all of the daily operations of their school as a barrier to delegation, particularly relational trust, as Whiteman and colleagues (2015) described. Whiteman and colleagues (2015) asserted relational trust, applicable to the perceptions the new principals described, is related to competence. “Competence is the individual’s perception that others can successfully execute their role responsibilities and are able to meet goals and achieve intended outcomes” (p. 581). In their first interviews, Taylor and Rosalind shared concerns about trusting others to complete the work they delegated. Taylor shared, “I just have to trust them to get it done” (Interview 1); Rosalind confessed she struggled with delegating tasks to the staff in her building. She said, “I don’t trust anybody else to do it, because the people I work with, I don’t think they’ve ever done it” (Interview 1).

**Necessary skills and dispositions.** New principals believed the principalship required an emphasis on “soft skills” (Gentilucci et al., 2013) when asked, “What skills and dispositions do you believe new principals need in order to be successful in their role?” New principals acknowledged their principal training emphasized the philosophy of education and school law; however, participants’ descriptions of their principal training, coursework, and internship experiences did not echo the same skills and dispositions new principals said they needed to be successful. Rosalind emphasized communication as a necessary skill: “If you don’t know how to communicate with your stakeholders you’re not going to go anywhere” (Interview 1). In her second interview, Phoebe said, “I think you have to be willing to make those decisions quickly, recognize when it doesn’t have to be answered or decided right then . . . stick with [those decisions].” Taylor discussed the need to change her school climate with limited information about the school she led; new principals have to “be able to build relationships and build climate within the school and not knowing anything about a school.” Finally, in our fourth interview, Alexis said new principals needed “The ability to build relationships. Compassion. Patience. A open ear.” The new principals believed each of these skills was required for their success in the principalship.

*Emphasis on cultural leadership: New principals’ focus on cultural leadership eclipsed their focus on instructional leadership.* New principals intended to and did focus on instructional improvement and leadership early in their principalship; however, the focus on instructional improvement was quickly eclipsed by new principals’ emphasis on cultural leadership. While task orientation and the struggle to manage other

responsibilities contributed to new principals' minimized focus on instructional leadership, new principals also learned that in order to leverage instructional improvement, a focus on building school climate and culture was necessary. Existing research confirms new principals' challenge balancing instructional improvement with their other responsibilities. Shoho and Barnett (2010) stated, "Beginning principals in this study expressed accomplishments and frustrations about leading their schools' instructional improvement programs and devoting enough time to achieve curriculum standards, improve instruction, and assess student learning" (p. 582).

Participants' responses to the question, "What do you believe are the daily tasks of the principalship?" illuminated the transition of the focus from instructional leadership to cultural leadership. In the first interview, new principals shared that instructional leadership and monitoring was a daily task of the principalship. Alexis's response exemplified this sentiment when asked this question. She said, "Being in classrooms, monitoring student performance and teacher instruction" (Interview 1) were the daily tasks of the principalship. Taylor believed working with teachers instructionally was also a daily task required of principals. She said, "building the capacity of teachers, you know, that is a big thing" (Interview 1). While new principals included instructional monitoring and leadership in other interviews throughout this study, instructional leadership was not the focus of their responses, or of their daily work, as had largely been the case in and indicated by Interview 1 responses.

New principals emphasized cultural leadership as being an aspect of their daily work. Caleb stated, "You have to deal with the small micropolitical things that go inside

of your buildings every day and how are you going to manage those pieces?” (Interview 2). Rosalind said, “There’s no daily tasks—well, there are many, but—oh man, I think the main task would be being visible” (Interview 3). Finally, Phoebe shared her belief her work was about creating an environment where all members of the school staff, including teachers, could do *their* daily work. One of the daily tasks she identified was to “provide an environment where people can do what they’ve been asked to do” (Interview 4).

New principals found cultural leadership to be vital to leveraging instructional improvement at their schools and to positively impacting their school climate. Phoebe shared she needed to promote the school culture, as “the culture allows for that sort of growth, allows for that sort of instruction, so that teachers feel safe to take risks, that kids understand their expectations, what do we expect from them within their classroom” (Interview 2). Additionally, Alexis asserted the unity of cultural and instructional leadership working together to improve the school academically. She said you have to “show them that you care about them as you’re trying to coach them to become better, so really being that instructional leader with the culture piece on the background” (Interview 2). Shoho and Barnett (2010) confirmed new principals should focus on cultural leadership in their first year of the principalship before making changes to the instructional program.

In particular, most new principals understood that their role during the 1st year (unless specifically charged by the central office or superintendent) was to learn and understand the school culture and personnel before attempting any major change initiatives, especially involving curriculum and instruction. (p. 576)

Overall, new principals, despite their desire to focus on instructional improvement, were largely unable to make this the case during their first year in the principalship. Their inability to focus on instruction was first challenged by their inexperience with managerial tasks and the various responsibilities of their role and second, eclipsed by the need to focus on building and improving the school's culture out of necessity and in order to leverage the cultural change they desired. Nelson and colleagues (2008) stated, "the accounts the principals provided of their attempts to improve instruction suggest the principals' practice is grounded more in management than leadership" (p. 699). This finding echoed participants' experiences that instructional improvement may be more about the management of other areas than about their abilities related to instructional leadership.

### **Research Question 2**

*How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter support their socialization into the principalship?*

Existing research acknowledges the socialization of new principals into the principalship (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Crow, 2006; Oplatka, 2012; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). While the socialization process begins in principal preparation programs, new principals largely socialize into their role in their first year in their new role. In general, principal socialization occurs as new principals interact in preparation programs (Giddings, 1897) and with their colleagues (Crow, 2006). This study focused on the socialization principals experience in their first year through the formal and informal interactions (Greenfield, 1985) and as a result of organizational socialization

(Crow, 2006). While existing research addresses the socialization new principals experience, the focus of this study was on the impact of the surprises and challenges new principals faced on their socialization into their new roles.

The findings from this study suggested two themes that correlated to the second research question and was derived from a triangulation of the data collected, existing research, and the theoretical framework. The first theme that emerged is that new principals largely socialized through interactions with individuals and groups in their school setting, through formal and informal interactions. While new principals interacted with other members of the larger organization, new principals' socialization occurred mainly as they interacted with teachers, families, and stakeholders. The impact of these interactions supported the development of a second theme. The socialization new principals underwent resulted in an improved school culture, based on the perceptions new principals had of the progress they made in their schools. These two themes addressed the second research question and will be explored further in the following pages.

*Socialization within the schoolhouse: New principals socialized largely within the school setting with parents, students, and families as opposed to within their organization.* New principals emphasized examples of their socialization within the school context with parents, students, and families. The new principals in this study were often surprised by their ability to quickly gain the support of students and families of their leadership and collaboration with teachers was necessary to drive instructional change, as illuminated in the first research question. New principals' socialization, either

through formal or informal interactions (Greenfield, 1985) with new principals, experienced colleagues, and district personnel was limited. New principals in this study shared one of the challenges they faced was limited support and guidance from district personnel; often the guidance that was provided stifled their ability to socialize with stakeholders at their individual schools.

**Socialization with stakeholders.** Throughout this study, the socialization with stakeholders emerges as a key aspect of new principals' first year in their role. The categories that emerged from the data illuminated a transition from new principals' positional relationship development (their role as a principal in relation to stakeholders), to socialization with stakeholders between the first and second interviews. By the third and fourth interviews, the categories of vital relationship development and success with students and families emerged. The development of vital relationships and success realized with these relationships affirmed new principals' position within the school setting and a genuine rapport with stakeholders. The transition between these categories illustrated the process new principals underwent in socializing in their school and community context. Furthermore, the emergence of these categories in each of the interviews and focus groups demonstrated the importance of these relationships to new principals.

The process of socialization discussed by Giddings (1897) emphasizes "appreciation" as one of the first steps. He states, "The first business of life for every conscious individual is to get used to the world that he lives in" (p. 2). As new principals begin to socialize as the principal in their particular school context, collaboration with

students, families, and staff is vital to that process. Grodzki (2011) asserted socialization with teachers, parents, and students played a particularly important role for new principals in their development.

Early in their principalships, new principals in this study discussed the importance of socialization with stakeholders. Rosalind shared, “Communicating with all stakeholders is—I think one of the key components of the principalship” (Interview 1). Cognizant of being the first White female school principal at Fort Cape Elementary School, Phoebe interacted with stakeholders intentionally to build positive relationships and a trusting rapport. Phoebe acknowledged in her final interview she had been accepted as the principal of Fort Cape. When asked if the stakeholders at her school accepted her as principal, she responded, “I definitely think the parents have, and I was nervous about that being the first White woman here. I was nervous about that but I do think they have. I think that the teachers have.”

The theoretical framework of the socialization of new principals emphasizes this process which is largely the result of informal interactions with stakeholders. Crow (2006), citing Greenfield (1985), discussed the organizational socialization of new principals as impacted by interactions new principals have with stakeholders. He asserted, “Beginning principals essentially make sense of their roles by themselves or by using informal feedback from teachers, students, parents, and other administrators” (p. 312). One of the most significant surprises new principals in this study faced was Alexis’s work with a family struggling through custody issues. When asked, “What surprises have you face in your time as a school principal?,” Alexis consistently



described the custody issues with one particular family. By the end of the study and near the end of her first year in the principalship, she shared her biggest success was helping the family through the court proceedings and custody arrangements. She recounted, “I walked out [of the courtroom] and then I got a phone call that afternoon from the mom, and she said, ‘We heard you loud and clear, we appreciate you coming, we appreciate you supporting our child, and supporting us’” (Interview 4).

The impact of the socialization of new principals with families, students, and staff was positive for each of the new principals in this study. The impact of new principals’ socialization with staff, families, and students is discussed further in the findings related to the second theme in response to this research question.

**Isolation resulting from limited organizational socialization with district personnel and experienced colleagues.** Existing research conveys the isolation of the principalship and the challenges new principals faced directly as a result of this isolation. This isolation is counterproductive to the socialization processes new principals must experience to orient them to their new responsibilities and role in the first year. The participants in this study discussed the minimal interactions they had with central office personnel and other experienced colleagues in their first year. Cross Keys County Schools’ new principal induction program was largely abandoned in recent years, in part due to staff turnover in the district offices. Previously, new principals experienced a yearlong mentoring and professional development institute where they were oriented to their responsibilities and new roles. Aside from new principals’ participation in this study and the focus group conversations, new principals in Cross Keys County Schools are

largely isolated from one another and their interactions with central office and district personnel are very limited.

New principals must be socialized into their role as a principal within the larger context of the school district. While Taylor's interactions with her supervisor led to her questioning her ability to continue in the principalship, Phoebe's perceptions about the emphasis placed on paperwork and deadlines sent a message that those expectations were vastly more important than collaborating with stakeholders and building relationships. Crow (2006) discussed the challenge of socialization new principals experienced: "The lack of mediated entry creates burnout, stress, and ineffective performance as beginning principals develop quick fixes and unreflective practices—responses that are counterproductive to the type of effective leadership needed in a complex society" (p. 318).

One of the surprises Taylor discovered about the principalship was the minimal support she was provided. She asserted the new organizational structure of Cross Keys County Schools intended to support principals; however, the structure did not provide her with the increased support for new principals that she anticipated. Taylor shared the lack of support of new principals was one of the biggest surprises of the principalship. She said, "I know [Cross Keys County Schools] had something at one point and I was thinking when I'm going in here that I was going to get more support as a new principal than I have been" (Interview 3). While the lack of support was not the only factor in Taylor's dissatisfaction with her new role, this lack of support and isolation negatively impacted her views of the principalship so significantly that she questioned her decision

to serve in the principalship. Bauer and Brazer (2013) reinforced this notion that isolation and lack of district support impacts the job satisfaction of new principals:

New principals may be better supported if school districts communicate with them regularly and openly about their needs and the degree to which those needs are being met by whatever support the district provides. This kind of dialogue would, in and of itself, constitute greater social support, but it would also focus other means of social support in ways that are most needed. In the process of give-and-take and adaptation to specific needs, new principals would likely feel less isolated, and their job satisfaction would improve. (p. 172)

In this sense, the lack of socialization of new principals with existing colleagues and district personnel created a challenge for new principals in this study. The challenge of these limited interactions minimized new principals' socialization into their role and stifled their socialization experience into the principalship.

New principals discovered collaboration with mentors from their internship experiences or the leaders under whom they served as assistant principals was beneficial in their first year since they did not have the opportunity to participate in formal interactions (Greenfield, 1985) through a new principal induction program. As Browne-Ferrigno (2003) shared, the socialization process started in principal preparation programs and internship experiences. She stated, "Whether called internships, practica, or clinical practices, the purpose of field-based learning guided by leadership practitioners is to begin initial socialization into a new community of practice" (p. 495). Both professional socialization (Crow, 2006) and formal training (Giddings, 1897), as included in the theoretical framework, are critical to the socialization process and thus the success of new principals. Socialization in the context of experienced principals, in part, occurred

during principals' internships or assistant principalships. New principals still sought out their experienced colleagues for advice in order to build confidence during new principals' first months on the job. Rosalind shared, "And even if they don't assign [a mentor] to you, I think as a new principal you have to do that for yourself" (Interview 1).

Throughout this study, all new principals shared they communicated with their previous principals or internship supervisor for support, advice, and encouragement. Grodzki (2011) echoed this practice when new principals sought out informal mentors: "They felt little guidance was provided, with no formal mentorship in place. Individuals found help where they could and formed their own informal mentorship networks with trusted colleagues" (p. 25). While the internship and assistant principalship experiences are only the beginning of the socialization process, the new principals in this study continued the relationships they built early in their administrative career and internships in order to adapt to the principalship. The challenge of isolation supported new principals' desire for socialization and resulted in intentional collaboration with experienced principals to ensure their success.

*Stakeholder collaboration: New principals' organizational socialization occurred through their interactions with stakeholders and supported the development of an improved school culture.* New principals consistently discussed the focus they placed on developing an improved school culture and leveraged their ability to focus on instructional leadership through their interactions with stakeholders. This aspect of their leadership is acknowledged in the first research question in the transition from instructional leadership to cultural leadership, as was necessary in leveraging positive

instructional change, a goal each new principal had early in their principalship. Cultural leadership emphasized the interactions new principals had with stakeholders, particularly teachers, as new principals' focus deviated from instructional leadership. The emergence of the theme of socialization through interactions with stakeholders and the development of an improved school culture resulted from new principals' focus on socialization with families and students as well as with school staff.

To revisit the theoretical framework and new principal socialization, organizational socialization, defined by Crow (2006), "is context-bound and includes the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to conduct the role in a particular setting" (p. 311). New principals, despite previous learning in internships, assistant principalships, and other roles must be socialized into the particular schools they lead. This is a complex and challenging process, one in which Nelson and colleagues (2008) suggested new principals needed additional training and support. Their findings suggested new principals often lacked the ability to be successful in formal and informal interactions with stakeholders, despite the importance of the "human-relational aspects of leadership" (p. 697). When effective relationship-building occurs with new principals and they are effectively socialized into their schools, the impact of this relationship is vital in positively impacting school culture. "When systems emerge in response to the values, beliefs, and purposes identified by the school community, a meaningful and unique school culture develops and the systemsworld facilitates the organic growth of the organization" (Nelson et al., 2008, p. 697).

New principals acknowledged they must be knowledgeable of the school's existing structures and practices in order to leverage positive change and impact the school's culture. Visibility was one practice new principals in this study employed to not only increase their awareness of the school's operations but also to increase access to them for the benefit of stakeholders. While task orientation and learning the principalship challenged new principals with time management, new principals still prioritized visibility due to the positive impact they perceived it would have on school culture. Phoebe shared, "I feel like being more visible has been very helpful and I do perceive myself as a principal who is out and accessible and friendly and you know, inviting" (Interview 2). She leveraged positive relationships with school staff members because she believes "being out there and being visible and being active and rolling up your sleeves is what the principal has to do every day" (Interview 3). Rosalind shared she believed one of the daily tasks of the principalship was visibility (Interview 3); Alexis shared a necessary skill for new principals was visibility (Interview 4). Visibility resulted in stakeholders' access to the principal and was a new and welcomed change in the schools they now led. In addition, visibility afforded new principals the opportunity to learn about the school and its stakeholders and was necessary for them to lead effectively.

Caleb learned as a new principal he needed to "learn how to delegate better and build teams"; he also shared that he needed his staff members to trust his ability to execute the plans he put in place, even when other staff members were previously responsible for some of those tasks (Interview 4). Taylor shared one of her biggest surprises was learning who to trust. She shared in her first interview,

I think that's what surprises me most is like trying to figure out, you know, how—who can I trust, but at the same time I know you have to have that confidence . . . can I trust everyone that I need to trust so that we can continue to move where we need to move.

Existing research confirms the importance of socialization of new principals in being able to bring about positive organizational change. According to Grodzki (2011), “when unfamiliar or difficult situations arose, these individuals who were not effectively socialized did not have enough relevant information and knowledge to make sense of their situations and to act confidently and effectively” (p. 23). Effective socialization is necessary for new principals. While new principals in this study did not identify the practices they employed as bringing about their socialization into their schools, they acknowledged trust-building and visibility as leveraging an improved school culture and vital to their ability to lead effectively.

**Summary.** This research question aimed to identify how the surprises and challenges new principals experienced resulted in their socialization into the principalship. While new principals in this study did not undergo significant surprises or challenges, the impact of the surprises and challenges they acknowledged was more nuanced in their impact on their socialization processes.

For each of the new principals in this study, the challenge of a lack of socialization with district personnel and experienced colleagues forced them to identify an informal mentor they could approach for advice and guidance. Effectively, new principals socialized themselves into the role of the principalship through these informal interactions as a result of the district's formal mentoring and principal leadership

development program being abandoned. New principals were surprised to find they had to seek out individuals in their schools they could trust to collaborate and effectively execute delegated tasks. While the challenges of task orientation and the role of the principalship had to be overcome, new principals still sought opportunities to be more visible. This visibility enabled them to learn more about their organization to effectively lead positive change. Visibility also enabled new principals to learn individuals whom they could trust, contributing to new principals' overall efficiency and effectiveness as they were better able to confidently delegate tasks and better collaborate.

To revisit the theoretical framework, the impact of socialization through formal and informal interactions and in the context of their particular organization (the individual schools they led) also contributed to new principals' identity-building and the self-view of themselves as a principal. Surprises and challenges also impacted participants' self-view and emergent professional identity as a school principal. This aspect of the theoretical framework and the impact of the surprises and challenges on the identity-building of new principals will be further considered in the discussion of the third research question.

### **Research Question 3**

*How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter influence their emergent professional identity?*

New principals begin to build their professional identities as a principal during their first year in their new role. Stets and Burke (2000) asserted that "one's identities are composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization



or identification in terms of membership in particular *groups* or *roles*” (p. 226). The development of the emergent professional identity, as discussed in existing research, is unique and built based upon the new principals’ acknowledgement of their role (the principal) within the group (socialization with stakeholders, including district personnel, colleagues, families, staff, and students). This unique identity as a school principal in the context of the new principals’ individual school differs from those identities built in previous roles. Furthermore, their emergent “professional identities are socially negotiated with the audiences whom one encounters” (Whiteman et al., 2015, p. 579). This consideration of the impact of others on the professional identity built by new principals acknowledges the theoretical framework of the impact of the socialization of new principals on their identity-building and self-view.

This research question aimed to identify the impact of surprises and challenges new principals faced on the development of their emergent professional identity. The impact of the surprises and challenges new principals encountered had a stronger impact on new principals’ emergent professional identity than on their socialization into the principalship, as discussed in the second research question. The findings discussed in the themes derived from the data collection indicated the surprises and challenges new principals experienced impacted new principals’ self-view and their emergent professional identity.

The fourth and fifth themes that emerged from the data collection respond to the third research question and were derived from a triangulation of data collection, existing data, and the theoretical framework. The fourth theme discusses the power assertion and

positionality of new principals based on their increased confidence in their abilities. The fifth theme considers the affirmation of new principals' core values. Those core values were typically established in previous roles; their principalship afforded them the opportunity to further clarify their core values and emphasize them in their new leadership role. These two themes addressed the third research question and will be explored further in the following pages.

*Increased confidence: New principals wielded power and asserted their positionality as a result of increased confidence in their abilities.* Throughout new principals' first year in their new role, new principals in this study wielded increased power and asserted their position as principal of the schools they led. Their assertion of power and position intensified as the year progressed due to increased confidence they had in their abilities. Confidence building emerged even in new principals' first interviews. As of the second interviews and first focus group, new principals started developing their identity and confirming their positionality within their schools. In the third interviews and second focus groups, new principals discussed the building of their self-confidence and finally, at the conclusion of the data collection, new principals asserted their power. The transition between categories across time illuminates the transformation new principals underwent as they struggled to build confidence in their abilities that resulted in assertion of their power as the principal of the schools they led.

New principals discussed the challenges they faced in addressing issues with staff members. Often those challenges were in the new principals' abilities to lead staff members towards instructional improvement. In other examples, new principals struggled

to assert their power against the influence other staff members exercised throughout the building. As new principals acknowledged their own role as the principal of the school (their emergent identity as a school principal), they were better able to exert the influence necessary for leading their schools. Whiteman and colleagues (2015) asserted, “The exploration and use of professional identities as a lens for understanding principals’ roles are important because of the relationship between identity and practice” (p. 579). New principals acknowledged their identity in an effort to exercise the practice of leadership.

**Impact of surprises and challenges on power assertion.** The surprises and challenges new principals faced forced them to redefine their role and self-identify as the leader of the schools they now led. Caleb shared the challenges he faced in changing the mindset of staff members; these challenges impacted his view of the principalship. He shared, “I think it just manifests itself more that you’re the leader now” (Interview 3). While initially Caleb focused on collaborative leadership as he found he needed to assert power in order to create change, he developed the sentiment of being responsible as the sole leader of his school. This mindset is what Spillane and Lee (2014) would name “ultimate responsibility.” Furthermore, Caleb’s experiences illustrate the theoretical framework and the relationships between socialization and identity-building. Socialization occurred in the development of Caleb’s relationship with staff based on his challenges. The outcome of that socialization was Caleb’s development of his own identity-building as a principal.

As other principals in this study had similar experiences as they felt challenged to hold teachers and staff members accountable, they leveraged their power as leaders

through their socialization with those members of their schools. Existing research acknowledges the importance of the relationship of principals with teachers “. . . since [new principals] still need to develop their leadership capabilities, the principal-teacher relationship seems to be embedded with unique characteristics during the early career stage of the principalship” (Oplatka, 2012, p. 139).

Taylor also experienced the challenge of adopting the identity of the school’s sole leader. Taylor worked to hold teachers instructionally accountable. This accountability not only reformed the role she played as a principal which deviated from previous experiences, but also transformed the role the school principal played in instructional leadership at Country Terrace Elementary School. Her approach was more direct than previous leaders at Country Terrace who had been largely “hands off” instructionally. These experiences new principals faced illustrate the theoretical framework and the impact of socialization on their identity-building and their self-view as the “ultimate” leader.

The surprises Phoebe faced influenced her need to assert her leadership at her school as well. Phoebe experienced a redistribution of power at Fort Cape Elementary School when she reorganized the power non-instructional staff had over decision-making. Phoebe also shared in each of her four interviews her biggest surprise since entering the principalship was the skillset of staff members. She shared, “the biggest surprise for me has been the quality of instruction that the children receive in the building” (Interview 1) and “the biggest surprise for me is that teachers don’t know their curriculum. They don’t have good pedagogy” (Interview 3). These surprises forced Phoebe to intensify the

support teachers received and reallocate the time of the school's curriculum facilitator; thus, these surprises about the principalship forced Phoebe to assert her positionality and power to impact change within the building.

**Development of self-efficacy.** Existing research, although limited, considers principals' own self-efficacy. For new principals to exercise their leadership, they must feel confident in their own abilities to do so. As Stets and Burke (2000) assert, “. . . self-efficacy is associated more closely with the behavioral enactment of identities” (p. 233). Self-efficacy is linked to the identity-building of new principals.

Even as of the first interview, Taylor felt confident in her ability to lead Country Terrace Elementary School. She said, “I see myself as—I'm very confident in knowing that I have the ability to do it, to make the change . . .” While each of the new principals shared there were gaps in their preparation to serve in the role of principal, they also shared successes and feelings of accomplishment in each interview. Taylor, the only principal to express feelings of doubt in her decision to assume the principalship, still felt confident in her ability to serve effectively.

Grodzki (2011) acknowledged socialization as critical to the development of new principals' self-efficacy. “In order to develop positive perceptions of self-efficacy, individuals need requisite knowledge, but also need to feel supported, recognized, and valued by the organization when engaged in these socialization processes” (Grodzki, 2011, p 32). Phoebe echoed this: “We always see ourselves I think through the eyes of what we believe others see” (Interview 4). New principals' feelings of self-efficacy were

shaped through the context of their emerging roles as leaders of their organization and the perceptions of others.

*Role clarification: New principals clarified and executed their core values.* Early in new principals' experience, new principals shared their commitment to their core values remained and was clarified when they entered the principalship. While core values did not emerge as a category in the discussion of data collected aside from the first interviews, new principals frequently acknowledge their core values in decision-making and in their approach to stakeholders. Emerging from the socialization process, new principals' relationship with stakeholders afforded new principals the ability to communicate their values to stakeholders. New principals in this study shared the core value of student-centered decision-making and willingly adopted dispositions and skills necessary to their role to ensure students received the very best education available. Gentilucci and colleagues (2013) acknowledged the various roles principals play in order to impact students: "new principals viewed their role as collaborators, communicators, counselors, and motivators not because of a job description or title but because they were intrinsically motivated to serve others and 'make a difference' in the lives of students and staff" (p. 84). Rosalind said, "you're here for the best interest of the students, I mean that's what we're doing, the job we do, to make sure that we serve all our students" (Interview 4).

**Core values realized.** New principals discussed that while their specific roles changed, their core values remained firmly grounded in those they assumed in previous leadership positions. Rosalind shared her essence was still the same, but as a principal she

is better able to demonstrate her core values differently than she did as an assistant principal (Interview 2). Whiteman and colleagues (2015) asserted, “Identity is not a label we or others place on us . . . it shapes and molds our practices. Identity also provides the motivation for our actions in the role” (p. 579). The identities new principals assumed as leaders provided them an opportunity to acknowledge and rely upon their values more than in previous roles.

While new principals stated their core values remained the same, the experiences of the principalship afforded them an opportunity to assert their values. According to Stevenson (2006), “there are spaces within which school principals can assert their agency and can promote the values that underpin their identities as both educators and leaders of learning communities” (p. 417). Even early in the year, Caleb acknowledged the surprises he faced (following his predecessor as principal of Wisteria Elementary School), “pushes me towards my core values even more, to ensure [building foundations] for kids” (Interview 1). New principals had opportunities in their first year to execute and demonstrate the values they previously acquired.

**Commitment to core values challenged.** Existing research also acknowledges new principals struggle to maintain their commitment to their core values when experiences and challenges may confront their values (Crow, 2006; Crowie & Crawford, 2008). For new principals in this study, the challenge of maintaining a focus on instructional leadership echoes this existing research. Interestingly, new principals did not acknowledge the surprises of the principalship as having a significant impact on their view of the principalship. When new principals were asked, “What surprises have you

faced in your time as a school principal?,” they did not acknowledge significant surprises; however, for the most part, the challenges and surprises they faced changed their focus from instructional leadership to other tasks and impacted how they felt they spent their day. This deviation from instructional leadership demonstrates new principals’ lack of acknowledgement of departure from their core values, which the participants discussed early in this study was on instructional leadership. Instructional leadership remained a core value for the participants; however, they did not acknowledge this core value was not a focus of their leadership as they previously intended. Taylor shared, “[My identity] hasn’t changed. I think it’s pretty much the same. I still consider myself to be an instructional servant leader” (Interview 4); however, she struggled to lead her teachers instructionally and had limited time to visit classrooms and provide instructional feedback. New principals struggled to maintain their focus on instructional leadership even though they acknowledged it as a core value.

**Further discussion and summary.** These two themes emerged from the data collection related to the impact of the surprises and challenges on new principals’ emergent identities. The surprises and challenges new principals faced impacted their identities more than did surprises and challenges on the socialization process they underwent. As new principals entered the principalship, they gained increased confidence in their abilities and as a result were better able to wield power in their roles. Furthermore, new principals were able to clarify their core values even though their identities as leaders changed from previous leadership roles they had held.



To revisit the theoretical framework, new principals' socialization processes led to their emergent professional identities. The development of power by new principals required acknowledgement of the existing social structure within the building and created a place for themselves in that context. Stets and Burke (2000) specified the development of role-based identities: "The emphasis is not on the similarity with others in the same role, but on the individuality and interrelatedness with others in counter-roles in the group or interaction context" (p. 227). While each school the new principals in this study led had a unique social setting, they each had to navigate within the existing social structure to assert their power and negotiate their role. As Stets and Burke (2000) acknowledged, new principals' individual identity was tied to their connections and interactions with stakeholders.

Solicited and unsolicited feedback was provided to new principals; new principals used this feedback to define their own success. Taylor shared she grew aware of the perceptions staff members had of the principal. She said, "they're going to look at you to see what flaws they can find in you anyway, and they're going to look to see how you treat, and how you react to each person and each individual" (Interview 4). Taylor's thoughts demonstrate stakeholders observe the actions of the principal and new principals should maintain focus on their goals, values, and beliefs, regardless of the circumstance. While new principals' identities are defined in the context of the organization, they were also based on their reliance of their core values. It should also be noted that schools exist with their own set of expectations for the values they expect their leader to exude. Crowie and Crawford (2008) discussed, "the schools to which they were appointed each have

their own accepted norms and values and these exert pressure on the new principals to adapt to the norms of the culture of the new school” (p. 678).

The socialization of new principals and their emergent identities were also shaped by their positionality in the context of the role their predecessor played at their individual schools. As they were often viewed in comparison to their predecessor, these perceptions impacted new principals’ emergent identity. Phoebe shared her successes as the building leader of Fort Cape Elementary in the context of her visibility as compared to her predecessor. Rosalind asserted the school culture had improved from the poor working conditions created by her predecessor at Johnstonville Elementary School. Taylor struggled with asserting her influence over instructional leadership due to her predecessor’s lack of focus on teaching and learning. Caleb shared the plans he sought out to accomplish in his first year were tempered by the need for his staff to heal from the decision-making and processes his predecessor enacted. These comparisons are based on the perceptions new principals had of their predecessors’ leadership and also the perceptions stakeholders had of the school’s predecessor and of the school’s culture as a result of his/her leadership.

The socialization with stakeholders and the principals’ role within the social structure of the organization based on the culture their predecessors created supported new principals’ emergent identities based on their perceived successes and actions in their first year in their role. Lee (2015) discussed succession challenges facing new principals and shared “the unique challenges the principals . . . did face, however, involved living up to the legacy of their predecessor” (p. 271). For the new principals in

this study, this involved either the perceived legacy or the legacy their predecessor left behind. In a more nuanced sense, Caleb and Rosalind consistently expressed their frustration with their responsibility to address issues not rectified by their predecessors.

In their first year, new principals' identities begin to be formed. As this study asserts, new principals' identities are formed in part due to the surprises and challenges new principals faced. While these are not the only factors in the development of their professional identity as school principals, they are one avenue by which new principals clarified their values and asserted their power. New principals may be unable to anticipate the surprises or challenges they may face as they assume their role; however, their ability to overcome those surprises and challenges allows them to realize their goals and serve the schools they lead, particularly as they gain confidence and are able to clarify their core values.

### **Research Questions Conclusion**

The first research question, "*What do new principals believe the principalship is like as they begin their work?*" provided a context for which new principals shared their perceptions of the principalship and areas of previous preparation for the principalship. The acknowledgement of these perceptions and potential gaps in their challenges gave this study an avenue to approach the potential surprises and challenges new principals might face. The answer to second research question, "*How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter support their socialization into the principalship?*," could be briefly summarized by an acknowledgement that the surprises and challenges new principals face did not largely impact their socialization. On the other hand, new

principals' socialization, largely limited to their school's stakeholders, resulted in an improved school culture. The answer to the third research question, "*How do the surprises and challenges new principals encounter influence their emergent professional identity?*," can be condensed into two findings: the surprises and challenges new principals faced and their actions to overcome them afforded them an opportunity to assert their power and clarify their core values.

New principals' socialization, the result of formal and informal interactions (Greenfield, 1985), and organizational socialization (Crow, 2006) impacted their identity-building and self-view (Stets & Burke, 2000). The theoretical framework acknowledges the connection socialization has on identity-building. The themes are largely connected to the theoretical framework in consideration of the research question. New principals' socialization with stakeholders had a significant impact on the development of a positive school culture. Whiteman and colleagues (2015) suggested the identity-building process is fluid and impacted by the context in which the principal leads. They stated, "Obviously, students, their families, teachers, district administrators, community leaders, and state and federal policymakers influence the role expectations of principals" (p. 579). Through the socialization process and new principals' acknowledgement of their role and stakeholders' acknowledgement of their leadership, new principals built their emergent professional identities. This identity acknowledgement resulted in new principals' increased confidence in their ability to exert the power of their leadership and finally, to also clarify and execute their values.

### **Recommendations for First-Year Principals**

This research aimed to explore surprises and challenges new principals may encounter with the goal of sharing those findings with new principals. The findings from this study acknowledge the need for new principals to identify a mentor and for new principals to anticipate the challenges and surprises they may face in their first year. New principals already have many challenges to overcome in their first year in their role. By reviewing the experiences of the five principals in this study they may be better able to anticipate the surprises and challenges they may face and mitigate the impact of those surprises and challenges by having prior acknowledgement of their impact or eliminate the surprises and challenges altogether.

This research also considered some of the skills needed for new principals to be successful in their role. Petzko (2008) acknowledged there is little research that identifies the critical skills and dispositions new principals need to be successful in their first year in their new role. This research contributes to the body of existing research on the skills and dispositions new principals need to be successful and may provide new principals an opportunity to acquire those skills in roles prior to assuming the principalship or by identifying mentors who can guide new principals in acquiring those skills. New principals should be intentional about identifying the areas in which they are missing requisite skills and seek to fill those gaps. As the new principals in this study acknowledged the importance of the informal mentors upon whom they relied, new principals should consider identifying an experienced colleague on whom they can rely for guidance and support in their first year.

### **Recommendations for School Districts**

School districts should consider a formal induction program for new principals and transition planning for new principals who enter the principalship. Currently in Cross Keys County Schools, there is not a formal mentor program or induction program for new principals. As the new principals in this study acknowledged, they were left to find their own mentors and forced to identify those experienced principals to whom they could go for guidance and support. Crow (2006) discussed one of the first processes of socialization is “anticipatory socialization”; this process affords prospective leaders the opportunity to begin the socialization process before assuming the principalship. This could be in the form of a new principal induction program early in the first year in their new role or even as a way to prepare aspiring leaders for the principalship. Cross Keys County Schools has left their new principals without these formal processes; school districts should consider formal induction planning with the goal of orienting new principals to the principalship in alignment with their mission and vision instead of leaving new principals without this necessary support.

School districts should consider a succession plan if those are not in place. New principals’ socialization with stakeholders and their identity-building is impacted by the perceptions the new principal and stakeholders have of the principal’s predecessor. While this can contribute positively or negatively to the new principal’s leadership, school districts should be more intentional about the succession process to minimize the impact of the predecessor’s actions on the next principal. For further discussion on the challenges of principal succession, consider the findings as asserted by Lee (2015).

### **Recommendations for Principal Preparation Programs**

Existing research acknowledges the need for new principals to be better prepared for the principalship. More specifically, this study identified that often the processes of socialization and identity-building happen as a result of experiences new principals have in their first year. As Petzko (2008) asserted, “The need for attention to human relations and improvement of instruction emerge as priorities” (p. 238) for principal preparation programs. New principals focused largely on cultural leadership and building relationships with stakeholders, even though they originally aimed to focus on instructional leadership. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) asserted leadership preparation programs should emphasize socialization into the principalship. This study confirms principal preparation programs should identify the necessary skills needed to minimize the challenges of socialization for new principals.

While instructional leadership fell into the background of new principals’ leadership, improving instruction is still vital to the principalship. Instructional improvement, coupled with the daily tasks new principals, were responsible for required managerial skills, often missing from principal preparation programs. Nelson and colleagues (2008) shared, “. . . the accounts the principals provided of their attempts to improve instruction suggest the principals’ practice is grounded more in management than leadership” (p. 699). Principal preparation programs should include skills related to socialization processes and managerial leadership, as those two areas emerged as necessary to new principals’ first year in their roles.

### **Further Research**

There is a limited body of research that discusses the experiences of new principals following the era of No Child Left Behind. While this study contributes to that research, the context of this study and the need for additional understanding related to the skills and dispositions new principals need to be successful should be considered for future research. Further research should be conducted on non-Title I schools and schools of various levels. Although this study was intended to include new principals of various levels (elementary, middle, high), the challenges in recruiting new principals at middle schools and high schools resulted in this study's focus on only elementary schools; each of the elementary schools in this study were also Title I-identified.

The context of the schools the new principals led should be considered. "School context mattered: Some novices assumed the principalship in situations where the legitimacy of their school was under threat wing to poor student performance, district probationary policies and declining student enrollment" (Spillane et al., 2015, p. 1075). While performance data was not the focus of this study, the schools the new principals led were low or underperforming schools. In addition, the new principals led Title I schools which also presented additional challenges that new principals of non-Title I schools may not face. This study was also geographically limited to only five schools in a school district in the southeastern United States. To better assert the impact of surprises and challenges on the socialization and identity-building of new principals, the schools participants lead should be diversified based upon location and school demographics, and at a variety of levels.



Furthermore, existing research on new principals has limited findings on the skills and dispositions needed for success in the principalships. Petzko (2008) acknowledges this need. While this study contributes to that body of research, it also identified the need for formal socialization processes for new principals. There is still further research necessary to identify the skills and dispositions the principalship requires and that new principals have to assume early in the principalship in order to be successful. This will provide information to school districts and principal preparation programs so they can create better supports around those areas to further mitigate new principals experiencing surprises and challenges that can make their first year even more difficult.

### **Researcher's Reflections**

I explored my motivation for this research in Chapter I; my motivation for this research will be further reflected upon in the following conclusion. My findings from this research informed my understanding of my first year as a principal; however, my reflections are based on more than two subsequent years in leadership. I wonder if my participants' responses might change if I asked them after their first year about the surprises and challenges they experienced. Had I been asked about experiences that shaped my first year in leadership at the time, I may not have been able to identify those two experiences in the midst of my first year as a principal. Time may also need to pass for new principals to better understand the impact of their experiences and how they shaped their leadership, as well as how their experiences as a first-year principal differ from their second and future years in their role.

As I reflected on lessons learned from this research about my own leadership, I also reflected on my experience as a researcher. In the future, I will be a more informed and experienced researcher following this study. My findings, as I collected data throughout each timespan, confirmed existing research. Had I been more confident to ask my participants to describe in more detail their thoughts on some of their more salient comments or provide more specific examples, my findings may have been able to further contribute to existing research. In addition, one area that was not explored at length was the experience of first-year principals in a Title I school, as all of my participants served Title I schools. Serving as a first-year leader in a Title I school provides additional challenges and opportunities that may have been important for participants to explore in this study. Reflecting on this research, this may have given me additional insight into issues of power, diversity, social justice, and cultural responsiveness as first-year principals experience them.

### **Conclusion**

When I started this research, I was in my first year as a principal. During my first year, I faced two very significant experiences. These two experiences not only shaped my identity as a principal as I was forced to confront my values as an educational leader but also required me to assume “ultimate responsibility” (Spillane & Lee, 2014) early in the year. These experiences impacted how I viewed myself as a leader, and I believe, how others viewed me. My experiences, discussed in Chapter I, provided me the motivation and interest in this study. My interest in the study of new principals derives from the surprises and challenges I experienced in my first year of the principalship, two school

years prior to the year in which this study took place. If the findings from this study had been available to me before the beginning of my first year as a school principal, I may have been better equipped to overcome the challenges of leadership and there may have been fewer surprises.

My experiences as a first-year principal were so influential on my identity-building and socialization my initial proposal even included the use of phenomenology as a foundation for my research. Fortunately, my dissertation committee influenced my deviation from this decision as they could perhaps see what I could not. The two events I experienced were unique to me, and other new principals did not necessarily experience one or two events that so significantly influenced their principalship—at least not that they shared with me. While other new principals may experience significant experiences or events, the first year in the principalship is not necessarily a phenomenon and there may not be a “basic structure of experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26). Based on collective understanding of my first year and the five first-year principals in this study, the first year in the principalship is very often unique and the impact of a single event or even a summation of all events on the degree of socialization or identity-building that occurs varies.

Additionally, I originally planned to use bracketing throughout the research findings in order to confront the trustworthiness of my findings and my interpretation of data. In particular, bracketing was to be utilized when findings resonated with me or I found my own experiences influencing my interpretation of the data. The experiences the new principals faced were very different and they did not share significant surprises or

challenges. As a result, I decided to present the data without my experiences included. Based on my first year in the principalship, “personal experiences” would have been bracketed out and discussed in the context of the research findings (Creswell, 2016, p. 263). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that “the researcher usually explores his or her own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions” (p. 27). My first year in the principalship, as I realize now after concluding the research and analysis for this study, was unique, just as the experiences of the new principals in this study were unique to them. My emphasis in this study on the surprises and challenges in the context of socialization and identity-building new principals experience directly resulted from two events that marked my first year in my new role as the school’s leader.

The themes generated from the data collection, framework, and existing research echo throughout my own experiences. For me, the surprise of the emotions of being the school’s ultimate leader paved the way for me to have confidence to better lead instructional change for each individual student who walked in the doors of the school I led when I was first a principal. I could not do that solely as an instructional leader but more impactfully as a cultural leader. While I had hoped to focus on instructional leadership, like the participants in this study, my experiences *confirmed cultural leadership often eclipses instructional leadership*. As I was quickly socialized into the needs of my school (as one of my themes assert, *new principals socialized largely within the school setting*), I hoped my socialization into my school would, like my participants, result in *the development of an improved school culture*. For the individuals impacted by

my decision-making and my advocacy of their needs, I believe I accomplished that goal. The challenge of being forced to confront my core values confirmed my focus on social justice. As the participants in this study, I *clarified and executed my core values*. These experiences significantly impacted my first year, and I believed when I first embarked on this journey all new principals had similarly significant experiences that defined them as a school principal.

Now at the end of this research, I realize not every first-year principal has the same experiences I had. The surprises and challenges new principals face have varying degrees of impact on their leadership and their identity as a leader. The surprises and challenges new principals faced that they shared with me were more nuanced in their impact on their socialization and identity-building. Regardless, these findings asserted that the surprises and challenges new principals face do impact new principals. They impact their ability to effectively socialize within their schools and the larger organization, and they impact the view new principals have of themselves and the identities they begin to develop. Principal preparation programs and school districts should acknowledge and be prepared to support aspiring principals and new principals through those surprises and challenges and through the process of socialization and identity-building. The impact of surprises and challenges new principals face must be minimized. Principals will continue to be needed in schools, so an understanding of the induction of a new principal, the experiences they may face, and the potential surprises and challenges will be vital to ensuring their future success. For the new principals in this study, the success of our students is a core value they shared throughout this study. That

core value is the reason I am a school leader. Our students' success is why, even 2 years later, I accepted the impact of the challenges I faced in my first year and how my identity as a school leader was forever changed. New principals' success means our students' success.

## REFERENCES

- Bauer, S. C., & Brazer, S. D. (2013). The impact of isolation on the job satisfaction of new principals. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23(1), 152–177. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA345073119&v=2.1&u=gree35277&it=r&p=AONE&asid=3e54df71c2745aae86d84f68253ddb8e>
- Bauer, S. C., & Swilver, L. (2018). The impact of job isolation on new principals' sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout and persistence. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 56(3), 315–331. doi:10.1108/JEA-07-2017-0078
- Biklen, S. K., & Casella, R. (2007). *A practical guide to the qualitative dissertation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Browne-Ferrigno, T. (2003). Becoming a principal: Role conception, initial socialization, role-identity transformation, purposeful engagement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(4), 468–503. doi:10.1177/0013161X03255561
- Browne-Ferrigno, T. (2007). Developing school leaders: Practitioner growth during an advanced Leadership development program for principals and administrator-trained teachers. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 2(3), 1–30. doi:10.1177/194277510700200301
- Browne-Ferrigno, T., & Muth, R. (2004). Leadership mentoring in clinical practice: Role socialization, professional development, and capacity building. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(4), 468–494. doi:10.1177/0013161X04267113

- Burke, P. J., & Stets, J. E. (2009). *Identity theory* [Amazon Kindle version]. Retrieved from <https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B0055NCUAK>
- Bush, T. (2018). Preparation and induction for school principals: Global perspectives. *Management in Education, 32*(2), 66–71. doi:10.1177/0892020618761805
- Cheung, R. M., & Walker, A. (2006). Inner worlds and outer limits: The formation of beginning school principals in Hong Kong. *Journal of Educational Administration, 44*(4), 389–407. doi:10.1108/09578230610676596
- Creswell, J. W. (2016). *30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cross Keys County Schools. (2017). *Teacher and principal pipelines & challenges* [PDF document]. Retrieved from Meeting Materials.
- Cowie, M., & Crawford, M. (2008). “Being” a new principal in Scotland. *Journal of Educational Administration, 46*(6), 676–689. doi:10.1108/09578230810908271
- Cowie, M., & Crawford, M. (2009). Headteacher preparation programmes in England and Scotland: Do they make a difference for the first-year head? *School Leadership and Management, 29*(1), 5–21. doi:10.1080/13632430802646354
- Crow, G. M. (2006). Complexity and the beginning principal in the United States: Perspectives on socialization. *Journal of Educational Administration, 44*(4), 310–325. doi:10.1108/09578230610674930
- Crow, G. M., & Glascock, C. (1995). Socialization to a new conception of the principalship. *Journal of Educational Administration, 33*(1), 22–43. doi:10.1108/09578239510077034



- Crow, G. M., & Møller, J. (2017). Professional identities of school leaders across international contexts: An introduction and rationale. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(5), 749–758. doi:10.1177/1741143217714485
- Daresh, J. C. (1987). *The highest hurdles for the first year principal*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED280136.pdf>
- Davis, S., Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., & Meyerson, D. (2005). *School leadership study: Developing successful principals* (Stanford Educational Leadership Institute). Retrieved from <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/school-leadership-study-developing-successful-principals.pdf>
- Federici, R. A., & Skaalvik, E. M. (2011). Principal self-efficacy and work engagement: Assessing a Norwegian principal self-efficacy scale. *Social Psychology of Education*, 14(4), 575–600. doi:10.1007/s11218-011-9160-4
- Galdames, S., Montecinos, C., Campos, F., Ahumada, L., & Leiva, M. V. (2018). Novice principals in Chile mobilizing change for the first time: Challenges and opportunities associated with a school's readiness for change. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(2), 318–338. doi:10.1177/1741143217707520
- Gentilucci, J. L., Denti, L., & Guaglianone, C. L. (2013). New principals' perspectives of their multifaceted roles. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching*

*and Program Development*, 24, 75–85. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1013151.pdf>

Giddings, F. H. (1897). *The theory of socialization: A syllabus of sociological principles for the use of college and university class*. New York, NY: Macmillan. Retrieved from <https://ia802608.us.archive.org/4/items/theorysocializa00giddgoog/theorysocializa00giddgoog.pdf>

Greenfield, W. D. (April, 1985). *Being and becoming a principal: Responses to work contexts and socialization processes*. Paper session presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Grodzki, J. S. (2011). Role identity: At the intersection of organizational socialization and individual sensemaking of new principals and vice-principals. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 127. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ955450.pdf>

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical research, 1980-1995. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(1), 5–44. Retrieved from <http://eaq.sagepub.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/content/32/1/5.full.pdf+html>

Heck, R. (2003). Examining the impact of professional preparation on beginning school administrators. In P. Hallinger (Ed.), *Reshaping the landscape of school leadership development: A global perspective* (pp. 237–256). Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets and Zeitlinger.

- Holligan, C., Menter, I., Hutchings, M., & Walker, M. (2006). Becoming a head teacher: The perspectives of new head teachers in twenty-first-century England. *Journal of In-service education*, 32(1), 103–122. doi:10.1080/13674580500479927
- Knoepfel, R. C., & Rinehart, J. S. (2008). Student achievement and principal quality: Explaining the relationship. *Journal of School Leadership*, 18(5), 501–527. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ888563>
- Lee, L. C. (2015). School performance trajectories and the challenges for principal succession. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(2), 262–286. doi:10.1108/JEA-12-2012-039
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008) Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 28(1), 27–42. doi:10.1080/13632430701800060
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). Linking leadership to student learning: The contributions of leader efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(4), 496–528. doi:10.1177/0013161X08321501
- Lewis, P. (2016). Experiences of novice principals. *Australian Educational Leader*, 38(1), 26–28. Retrieved from <https://search.informit.org/documentSummary;dn=079281736929238;res=IELAPA>
- Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Louis, M. R. (1980). Surprise and sense making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Journal of Library Administration*, 4(1), 95–123. doi:10.1300/J111V04N01\_08
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Nelson, S. W., de la Colina, M. G., & Boone, M. D. (2008). Lifeworld or systemsworld: What guides novice principals? *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 690–701. doi:10.1108/09578230810908280
- Nettles, S. M., & Herrington, C. (2007). Revisiting the importance of the direct effects of school leadership on student achievement: The implications for school improvement policy. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 82(4), 724–736. doi:10.1080/01619560701603239
- Oplatka, I. (2012). Towards a conceptualization of the early career stage of principalship: Current research, idiosyncrasies and future directions. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 15(2), 129–151. doi:10.1080/13603124.2011.64094
- Petzko, V. (2008). The perceptions of new principals regarding the knowledge and skills important to their initial success. *NASSP Bulletin*, 92(3), 224–250.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- School Leaders Network. (2014). *Churn: The high cost of principal turnover*. Retrieved from [http://connectleadsucceed.org/sites/default/files/principal\\_turnover\\_cost.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-15,792](http://connectleadsucceed.org/sites/default/files/principal_turnover_cost.pdf#page=1&zoom=auto,-15,792)

- Scribner, S. P., & Crow, G. M. (2012). Employing professional identities: Case study of a high school principal in a reform setting. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 11*(3), 243–274. doi:10.1080/15700763.2012.654885
- Shoho, A. R., & Barnett, B. G. (2010). The realities of new principals: Challenges, joys, and sorrows. *Journal of School Leadership, 20*(5), 561–596. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ916118>
- Spillane, J. P., Harris, A., Jones, M., & Mertz, K. (2015). Opportunities and challenges for taking a distributed perspective: Novice school principals' emerging sense of their new position. *British Educational Research Journal, 41*(6), 1068–1085. doi:10.1002/berj.3166/epdf
- Spillane, J. P., & Lee, L. C. (2014). Novice school principals' sense of ultimate responsibility: Problems of practice in transitioning to the principal's office. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 50*(3), 431–465. Retrieved from [http://uncg.worldcat.org/oclc/5599850196&referer=brief\\_results](http://uncg.worldcat.org/oclc/5599850196&referer=brief_results)
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 63*(3), 224–237. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.uncg.edu/stable/pdf/2695870.pdf>
- Stephenson, L. E., & Bauer, S. C. (2010). The role of isolation in predicting new principals' burnout. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership, 5*(9), 1–17. doi.org/10.22230/ijep.2010v5n9a275

- Stevenson, H. (2006). Moving towards, into and through principalship: Developing a framework for researching the career trajectories of school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(4), 408–420. doi:10.1108/09578230610676604
- Stryker, S., & Burke, P. J. (2000). The past, present, and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), 284–297. doi:10.2307/2695840
- Tingle, E., Corrales, A., & Peters, M. L. (2017). Leadership development programs: Investing in school principals. *Educational Studies*, 1–16. doi:10.1080/03055698.2017.1382332
- U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Every student succeeds act*. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/essa>
- van Jaarsveld, M. C., Mentz, P. J., & Challens, B. (2015). Mentorship for novice principals. *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 55(1), 92–110. doi:10.17159/2224-7912/2015/v55n1a7
- Versland, T. M. (2013). Implications for rural ‘grow your own’ leadership programs. *Rural Educator*, 35(1), 13–22. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1022600.pdf>
- Walker, A., & Qian, H. (2006). Beginning principals: balancing at the top of the greasy pole. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(4), 297–309. doi:10.1108/09578230610674921
- Weindling, D., & Dimmock, C. (2006). Sitting in the “hot seat”: New headteachers in the UK. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(4), 326–340. doi:10.1108/09578230610674949

- West, D. L., Peck, C., & Reitzug, U. C. (2010). Limited control and relentless accountability: examining historical changes in urban school principal pressure. *Journal of School Leadership, 20*(2), 238–266. Retrieved from <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA238654456&v=2.1&u=gree35277&it=r&p=AONE&asid=60f5b505234f20b19c1bf2648b07a675>
- Whiteman, R. S., Scribner, S. P., & Crow, G. M. (2015). Principal professional identity and the cultivation of trust in urban schools. In M. Khalifa, N. W. Arnold, A. F. Osanloo, & C. M. Grant (Eds.), *Handbook of urban educational leadership* (pp. 578–590). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- How has your principal training prepared you for the principalship?
- What do you believe are the daily tasks of the principalship?
- What skills and dispositions do you believe new principals need in order to be successful in their role?
- What did you think would be/has been the most challenging aspect of the role of your principalship?
- What surprises have you faced in your time as a school principal?
- How has the most challenging aspect of your role impacted your view of the principalship?
- How do you see yourself as a new principal?
- How did your principal training prepare you to transition from your current role to the principalship?
- How has your identity as a principal changed from a previous role as a result of the surprises you've encountered?



**APPENDIX B****JOURNAL QUESTIONS/PROMPTS**

- How has your perception of the role of the school principal changed since the last interview? How? Why?
- What new skills and dispositions have been required to navigate the surprises and challenges you've encountered?
- What aspects of your principal training have had the most significant impact on your current job performance?
- Describe some of your daily work in the principalship. How has that worked help build your identity as a principal different than a previous role?
- How have your experiences modified your expectations of the daily work of the principalship?
- Describe any challenges or surprises you've encountered that have impacted your view of your efficacy as a principal?

## APPENDIX C

### FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS

- What aspects of your principal training have been most useful to you in your new roles? Least useful?
- What skills and dispositions have you acquired that have deviated from your previous roles?
- Have you had any surprises that have shifted your view of the principal's role? What were they? How have they shifted your view?
- What is the most significant change you have had in your view of your role as principal of your current school?

**APPENDIX D**

**THEMES/CATEGORIES/CODES**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Codes</b>		
Theme 1: Emphasis on cultural leadership: New principals' focus on cultural leadership eclipsed their focus on instructional leadership	Cultural leadership competency	change	feedback	partnerships
		collaboration	flexibility	people
		communication	innovation	relationships
		community	instruction	school climate
		cultural leadership	legacy	skills
		data	marketing	staff
		discovery	morale	values
		families	optimism	
	Disillusionment with staff expertise	accountability	culture change	preparation
		assumptions	ethics	staff issue
capacity		expectations	support	
change		limited skill set	turnover	
communication		power	work ethic	
Emphasis on cultural leadership	appreciation	disposition	opportunities	
	attitudes	energy	other tasks	
	building capacity	experience	patience	
	building confidence	feedback	perceptions	
	building culture	hope	recruitment	
	change	inspiring	relationships	
	community	instructional	students	
	consistency	interpersonal	teacher support	
	cultural leadership	not instructional	values	
	culture	not instructional	visibility	
disappointment				

Themes	Categories	Codes	Codes
Theme 1: Emphasis on cultural leadership: New principals' focus on cultural leadership eclipsed their focus on instructional leadership (cont.)	Instructional leadership	instructional leadership observations	professional learning support Tasks teachers
	Lack of preparedness	assumptions change coaching colleagues experiences	fear feedback goals lack of loneliness prepared relationship tasks time management underprepared
	Leadership preparation	confidence curriculum different leaders discomfort formal training instruction internship	legacy managerial mentor observations other skills ownership perceptions practice preparation previous experience transition underprepared
	Management of responsibilities	access assumptions flexibility fundamentals management	managerial micromanagement mistakes navigating power reflect support trust
	Staff accountability	accountability action-oriented avoidance balance boundaries capacity-building	communication confidence expectations instructional limits rules staff staffing student-centered values

Themes	Categories	Codes	Codes
Theme 1: Emphasis on cultural leadership: New principals' focus on cultural leadership eclipsed their focus on instructional leadership (cont.)	Struggle to focus on instruction	challenges coaching cultural leadership exhaustion expectations improving instruction initiatives	instructional leadership lack of experience lack of instructional leadership management observations other tasks planning priorities staff capacity students support unexpected visibility
	Task orientation	anticipation balance budget building challenge change communication decision-making discipline emotions exhaustion	flexibility future planning instruction knowledge limits managerial new skill people-centered prioritization relationships responsibility self-care staffing strategy tasks time uncertainty unprepared urgency visibility
	Vital relationship development	change collaboration colleagues communication expectations families future	growth instruction lack of support leadership morale positive professionalism proving herself rapport relationships respect support transparency work

Themes	Categories	Codes		
Theme 2: Increased confidence: New principals wielded power and asserted their positionality as a result of increased confidence in their abilities	Assertion of power	accomplishment	expectations	proud
		challenged	experiences	reflect
		challenges	growth	staff issue
		change	instructional	stress
		colleagues	accountability	success
		confidence	leadership	ultimate
		decision-making	legacy	responsibility
		decisions	power	underprepared
		different	prepared	values
	expectation-setting		vision	
	Building self-confidence	challenges	experiences	perspective
		confidence	families	planning
		culture	firmness	power
		decisions	growth	preparation
		delegating	impact	tasks
		documentation	leadership	time management
		energy	organization	
	Confidence building	change	positive	success
		confidence	prepared	tasks
		feedback	questioning	timing
		goals	reflective	underprepared
		growth	self-view	values
		instruction		

Themes	Categories	Codes	Codes	
Theme 2: Increased confidence: New principals wielded power and asserted their positionality as a result of increased confidence in their abilities (cont.)	Identity development	accountability	experiences	perspective
		authority	family support	politics
		avoidance	fear	prioritization
		challenge	flexibility	redefine
		collaboration	followers	reflection
		communication	frustration	relationship
		conflict	instructional	strength
		decision-making	knowledge	support
		delegation	negotiation	tasks
	expanded leadership	people	values	
	Juxtaposition of challenges and contentment	access	culture	modeling
		accomplishment	culture change	positive change
		adjustment	culture success	power
		balance	growth	relationships as
		challenged	instructional	fundamental
challenges		accountability	safety	
challenging staff		instructional change	staff growth	
community	integrity	staff issue		
contentment	listening	staff turnover		
cultural development	management	unfulfilled plans		
Position confirmation	advocacy	flexibility	questioning	
	colleagues	goals	self-view	
	communication	impact	skill-building	
	confidence	learning	strategies	
	decision-making	mentor	success	
	discomfort	opportunity	support	
	experiences	preparation	tasks	
	firmness	preparedness	underprepared	
	first-hand experience	principal's role	values	

Themes	Categories	Codes	Codes	Codes
Theme 2: Increased confidence: New principals wielded power and asserted their positionality as a result of increased confidence in their abilities (cont.)	Shift in perspective	challenge change different disconnect emotions flexibility flipping perspective identity	impact instruction learning lens location managerial many roles mentor	mindset people reflective shift support surprise uncertainty
Theme 3: Role clarification: New principals clarified and executed their core values	Communication of core values	change communication core beliefs firmness	flexibility instruction relationships	student-centered values vision
Theme 4: Socialization within the school house: New principals largely socialized within the school setting with parents, students, and families as opposed to within their organization	Building a global perspective	accessibility awareness climate and instructional communication	community exhaustion groundwork improvement perspective	preparation presence rapport values visibility
	Socialization with stakeholders	access boundaries capacity care for others change coaching collaboration colleagues communication	community conflict district relations families feedback impact interpersonal needs relationships	self-view socialization staff staff perspectives student-centered supervisor support trust



Themes	Categories	Codes	Codes	
Theme 4: Socialization within the school house: New principals largely socialized within the school setting with parents, students, and families as opposed to within their organization (cont.)	Change leadership management	burnout challenges change change in leadership consistency different leadership difficult conversations	flexibility foundation growth improvement individuals lack of confidence lack of surprise	opportunities patience proactive professional purpose vision
Theme 5: Stakeholder collaboration: New principals' organizational socialization occurred through their interactions with stakeholders and supported the development of an improved school culture	Positional relationship development	central office change collaboration colleagues communication confidence delegation experiences families	feedback human resource legacy loneliness mentor people predecessor prioritization relationships	responsibility shift staff rapport success support timing trust vision
	Success with families and success for students	access challenged collaboration community culture change	families families/students instructional accountability	relationships as fundamental students success