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Epiphanies of the Principalship: A Study of Passages

in Educational Administration

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In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

—————————————

by

Donna J. Raines

May 2004

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ABSTRACT

Epiphanies of the Principalship: A Study of Passages

in Educational Administration

by

Donna J. Raines

This scrapbook of biographical sketches serves as an exhibition of portraits in the elementary school principalship through experiencing a gallery of leadership interviews. Perspectives have been framed in compositions that represent the practical realist, the idealist, and at times even a surrealistic perspective of the elementary principal. Critical incidents were shared from individual participants representing catalysts for momentous change; themes of personal realizations, barriers to effectiveness, and challenges in the career of an administrator also contributed as dominant elements of the final work.

A qualitative research method employing interviews explored the variation of colorful experiences that 23 elementary administrators encountered over the tenure of their careers. Each interview file was imported into the NUD*IST program. These files were then systematically coded and analyzed. The thick and rich descriptions provided opportunities for professionals to identify with the comments from practitioners and therefore established the applicability of the study.

During a time when the entire nation is engaged in adjusting to the impact of a single catastrophic event, it is appropriate to stop and address the little explored regions of the routines that daily exert constraints on time, and shape consciously or unconsciously how principals are affected as a result of their career choice of administration.

This study might be of interest to institutions that prepare instructional leaders for elementary school principalship. It could also assist superintendents and supervisors in public education by making them aware of what they might contribute to the success of their students by establishing an ideal relationship with their principals combining latitude, trust, and support. Finally, it could serve to validate or confront practitioners as they resolve issues of their own practice though vicariously experiencing the events and situations shared by their colleagues and peers.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated:

To administrative professionals in the principalship who have made sacrificial emotional deposits into the lives of young children and teachers. To those who have frantically raced to meet the commitments of their own personal schedules due to the demands of still one more agenda item to be accomplished late in the school day.

To Pat Vance, a faithful friend who always encouraged me to pursue my highest ideals, who enabled me to strengthen my resolve to stand alone for truth amidst the more popular belief that "perception was reality."

To my home team players, Mickey and Sydney Raines, who tiptoed through the house to minimize distractions, who shoved plates of nourishment in my direction while my glazed eyes targeted the flashing cursor of the monitor screen, and who never mentioned my absence while coursework, library runs, and data gathering persisted to cause adjustments in our lives.

To my first teacher, James LeRoy Loveland, who, while walking hand-in-hand with his three-year-old through our own backyard, aroused my curiosity and inspired an insatiable love of learning. Who sacrificed immeasurably to provide the formal education he so desired for himself.

To my mother, who modeled a strong work ethic, the preciousness of others, and the integrity that has guided my footsteps--whose early demonstrations of resourcefulness and perseverance served as reminders to bring me this far.

Finally and most significantly, this work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Who has demonstrated once again that "*I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me*!"

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> After yet another day of crisis management or battles with the bureaucracy, many principals must wonder about the whole concept of leadership. What they do to get through each day seems far removed from the visions of dynamic, inspirational leadership they once nurtured. In their darkest hours, they may wonder whether they really are leaders. (Lashway, 1998, p. 1)

Public school administrators are constantly challenged by the overwhelming demands and responsibilities of their professional positions. In this age of increased accountability, principals are expected to perform flawlessly in an ever-increasing number of arenas. A study conducted by the Educational Research Service determined that of the 403 school districts with an enrollment of 300 or more students, almost half had a shortage of certified candidates for the principalship positions they were trying to fill (as cited in the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1998). Individuals certified for the principalship were often choosing not to apply for vacancies in administration (Cooley & Shen, 1999).

Public Agenda, a nonprofit opinion-research group in New York City, surveyed 909 principals during the summer of 2001 (as cited in Stricherz, 2001). Commissioned by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds and with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points, the study determined that 88% of the superintendents and 83% of the principals agreed with this statement, "There are too many mandates and too little money to carry them out" (p. 5). In the same survey, 84% of the superintendents and 65% of principals said, "Special education exacts too much time and costs too much money" (p. 5). The study concluded that school leaders "felt stymied by district bureaucracy" as 54% of superintendents and 48% of principals said they had to work around the system to get things done (p. 5). Of the administrators surveyed, 81% of the superintendents and 47% of the principals said that bureaucracy and politics had contributed to their colleagues leaving the profession (as cited in Stricherz).

Leadership preparation programs have a long-established curriculum to prepare aspiring principals for active duty. Professional and state agencies have identified a great number of competencies on which a principal should be evaluated (Murphy, 2002). In recent years, millions of dollars have been budgeted to provide inservice training and leadership academies across the state of Tennessee to increase the potential success of public school leaders; yet, little has been done to create an understanding of the position and its effect on the individuals who serve in the capacity.

Graduates would likely agree that principal preparation programs have aspired to be comprehensive in the breadth and depth of their subject. However, it is the illusive, affective dimension that often determines the level of success attained by an individual who steps into the principalship. Goleman (1994) determined that emotional intelligence accounts for approximately 80% of one's success in life.

In recent years, the requirements for accountability and proficiency in additional areas have crowded the rubrics formatted to evaluate a principal's performance. These competencies have also been compounded by hidden agendas and expectations that are often not communicated. Maintaining aging buildings with the assistance of companies awarded a contract because of their low bid is difficult and provides a minimum of cleanliness and service (Chapko & Chapko, 2001). Inadequately trained staff with neither a vested interest in the building nor an understanding of the need for sanitation of student facilities creates a less than satisfactory environment while risking security because of the turnover of employees. Expertise in grant writing and ability to network within the community to secure funding outside the local school budget are required to be competitive in securing resources for technological advancement. Developing individualized programs for students who cross the boundaries of the traditional school structure and gain "buy-in" from staff and parents is another challenge. Keeping abreast of the policies and laws that define personnel issues, test security, parents' rights, students' rights, special education law, school finance, evaluation procedures, fire safety,

violent intruder lockdown procedures, and others are ever increasing (Stricherz, 2001). Staying current in these areas is vital. Finally, the expectations of central office supervisors who do not always understand the school improvement process mandated by state and accrediting agencies make it difficult to navigate and develop support for needed change (Knudson & Wood, 1998). Detailed descriptions of such demands and expectations are often conspicuous by their absence in principal-preparation textbooks. Little has been written to communicate the emotional intensity of daily interactions, the passion, and stamina that are required of school leaders as they experience occasional professional epiphanies, where epiphanies represent an intuitive grasp of reality through an event (Merriam-Webster, 2002).

Virginia Wolf (as cited in Sheehy, 1995) called such little epiphanies "moments of being, when a shock pulls the gauzy curtain off everyday existence and throws a sudden floodlight on what our lives are really about" (p. 17). The challenge for principal-preparation programs and school systems is to design meaningful opportunities for renewal and to offer administrators valuable information that may be transferred successfully to their leadership skills. Only when leaders have opportunities to reflect and share their common experiences do they begin to recognize what is process and personal bias and to sort it from rational judgment.

In a televised Town Meeting in Grundy, Virginia, David Baldacci (2002), novelist and author of *Wish You Well*, commented on his book written about life in 1940:

> Today we look so much to the future and forget that the past and its experiences and situations are relevant to us today. We all have difficulty adjusting to change, and that makes us all common in our perspective; it makes us human. (n. p.)

Reflection assists elementary-school principals in developing coping strategies for the stress and high expectations of their positions. The ability to step back and review a situation or anticipate the outcomes from a decision as an objective observer rather than a participant is a skill that lowers frustration level and increases effectiveness. Time set aside for reflection becomes increasingly important in order to operate more effectively over the duration of one's career (Barth, 2001). It is critical that principals become enlightened regarding life stages,

critical incidents theory, and the importance of reflection in order to maintain the stability and consistency required to lead effectively.

History and Context

Western culture from antiquity to the present has sought to divide human life into ages and stages. Sheehy (1995) recorded:

> The need to find some order and predictability in the variousness of the human life cycle has inspired philosophers, poets, and playwrights from the Greeks and Hindus up through Shakespeare and on through the psychoanalysts Jung and Erikson to today's New Age bards. (p. 3)

Ball and Goodson (1985) discussed the professional's life and career stages. They developed the idea that "Schools are often seen as places of class warfare operating on pupils, but teachers are processed by schools too . . . teaching does something to those who teach" (p. 204). As cited in Ball and Goodson, Goffman developed the idea of a "moral career" by identifying the stages in a teacher's career (p. 3). In addition, Sikes' (as cited in Ball & Goodson) studies concluded that teachers' perceptions and experiences were altered by personal development and the aging process. Measor (1985) used life histories to study the critical incidents in the classroom around which pivotal decisions revolved. Whereas Measor's research was distantly related to this study, little has been done to define the effect of the principalship on the individual administrators and to determine the transformation experienced by individuals who pursue this career path.

Beynon (1985) stated with regard to teaching, "The experience of the principalship also needs to be better understood. Conflict and micropolitics that have long been ignored need to be examined and coping strategies clearly recognized" (p. 4). A second area of interest related to this study is grounded in the critical-incidents technique, which has had many applications since its development. As early as 1954, Flanigan (1980) wrote concerning a process through which employees were interviewed with regard to describing effective and ineffective behaviors on the job. These "critical incidents"(p. 327), as they were labeled, contributed to the development of a

job analysis and performance appraisal system. Flanigan defined this process as "a structured interview technique that focuses on tough cases and, specifically, the most important event (critical incident) in that case" (p. 327). A later critical-incidents technique asked employees to relate a situation in which the leader did a significantly good or bad job in order to evaluate the leader's behavior and its influence on others as an assessment of leadership potential (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1993).

Corporate researchers responsible for data gathering and analysis agree about the definition of what critical-incidents technique analysis should do. As described in Emmus (1999), the critical-incidents technique can be defined as a set of procedures for systematically identifying behaviors that contribute to success or failure of individuals or organizations in specific situations.

More closely related to the nature of this study is the definition supplied by Flanigan (1980) regarding critical-incidents technique as*:*

A method for getting a subjective report while minimizing interference from stereotypical reactions or received opinions. The user is asked to focus on one or more critical incidents which they experienced personally in the field of activity being analysed [sic]. A critical incident is defined as one which had an important effect on the final outcome. Critical incidents can only be recognized retrospectively. (p. 327)

This theory has more recently been applied to midlife crisis and life stage developmental theories. Sheehy (1976) explained:

The more I interviewed, the more I noticed similarities in the turning points people described. Not only were there other critical points than at midlife, but they came up with a relentless regularity at the same ages. . . . At specific points along the life cycle they would feel stirrings, sometimes momentous changes of perspective, often mysterious dissatisfactions with the course they have been pursuing with enthusiasm only a few years before. (p. 14)

In the ocean of mastered competencies desirable for exceptional leadership and other objective data gathered to ensure the success of school leaders, little is taken into account of how the pressures and nature of the position affect those who daily respond to these demands. There is a need for heightening the awareness of any specific emotional requirements that might need

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to be developed along with any array of coping strategies that might be required for the administrative professional attempting to maintain a healthy balance and positive perspective throughout his or her career. As suggested by Barritt (1986), the rationale,

> [I]s not the discovery of new elements, as in natural scientific study, but rather the heightening of awareness for experience which has been forgotten and overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped research can lead to better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice. (p. 20)

Purpose of the Study

As administrators grapple with the increasing demands related to their leadership while resources diminish, it becomes increasingly important to determine the most effective ways to prepare and assist aspiring principals to deal with the stressors inherent in their careers. The purpose of this study was to develop a more indepth understanding of the elementary-school principalship and the events that served as catalysts to momentous changes (both professional and personal) to career administrators, the impact of those events, and the stages that might be identified as unique to this position of educational leadership. This was accomplished through the use of interpretive biographical interviews with veteran and novice elementary-school principals from Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.

Research Questions

This study was designed to develop a better understanding of the impact that a career in elementary-school principalship has on the individual. A secondary focus was to determine if there was any pattern to the extraneous pressures that cause elementary-school principals to change their priorities in making decisions or in daily operations. The following research questions served as the focal point of the study:

1. From the perspective of the elementary-school principal, what critical incidents occurred that affected his or her professional and/or personal attitudes and perspectives during his or her career?

2. What, if any, are some career stages that may be identified in the elementary-school principalship?

3. What are some perceivable barriers that prevent elementary-school principals from implementing research-based practices?

4. From the practitioner's perspective, what are the most significant challenges faced by the elementary-school principal?

Significance of the Study

During an era when an entire nation has experienced a major paradigm shift because of a single catastrophic critical incident, it seems almost imperative that Americans take inventory of their lives, rationales, and their purposes. There are numerous issues and events in the daily execution of duties in the life of the elementary-school principal that instantaneously or by degrees over a period of years may change the core and fiber of this professional. These changes may affect judgment, physical energy, motivation, and even the spirit of the individual who has chosen this career path.

Supervisory personnel need to be aware of and able to recognize patterns of behavior that are predictable over the course of a career in the elementary-school principalship in order to effectively coach and assist the professionals they collaborate with each day. Principals, seldom making time for reflection, need to be aware of how critical incidents affect them personally and professionally. A full understanding of this position in terms of how it acts upon the individual is necessary in order to plan for adequate support of these critical-decision makers. The findings of this study could be useful in establishing an awareness of a recent need to reconfigure the job

description that is implied by the title "principal" in order to maintain stability in the professional (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002).

Limitations of the Study

The timing of the interviews might have been a factor. If the participants felt rushed or were extremely tired in the late afternoon, they might not have put as much thought into their responses. Principals might have failed to respond with candor to the interview questions in an effort to impress the interviewer or to make their schools or systems look better. Efforts were made to provide a comfort level for the principals to ensure they understood that all responses were to be held in confidence and with anonymity.

I have insight into the topic of the elementary principalship as the result of my years of experience; however, I was extremely conscientious to present the information true to each participant's perspective and I established a very structured review pattern with peer debriefing to eliminate the opportunity for contaminating any information with personal overtones.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to 23 elementary-school principals in the regions of Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.

Definitions

Biographical interview--An interview that combines aspects of a research interview, a clinical interview, and a conversation between friends. What is involved is not simply an interviewing technique or procedure, but a relationship of some intimacy, intensity, and duration. (Levinson, 1978, p. 15)

Critical-incidents technique--A structured interview technique that focuses on tough

cases and, specifically, the most important event [critical incident] in that case. (Flanigan,

1980, p. 327)

Epiphany--(1) A sudden *manifestation* or perception of the essential nature or meaning of

something; (2) an intuitive grasp of reality through something (as an event) usually

simple and striking; (3) an illuminating discovery, a revealing scene or moment.

(Merriam-Webster, 2002)

Quantum change--A vivid, surprising, benevolent, and enduring personal transformation.

(Miller & C'de Baca, 2001, p. 4)

Overview of the Study

The introductory chapter of this study included the history and context, a statement of the

problem, the significance of the study, and definitions of the unique terms used in the research.

The research questions answered by the study and the limitations and delimitations of the study

were also included. A discussion of the changes and the increased expectations of all

stakeholders on the elementary-school principal was presented. The idea of using related

research to glean wisdom and experiences from the perspective of veteran and novice

practitioners was also explained.

The chapter contained foreshadowing of the importance of reflections, reactions, and

resilience in the emotional constitution of the elementary-school administrator by highlighting

research that is discussed more fully in Chapter 2. A description was given of the importance of

the affective side of this position. This awareness might foster the desire for supervisors and

institutions that train prospective leaders to be instrumental in supporting the best practices that

enable practitioners to maintain stability throughout their professional career.

Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature including an overview of standards for

today's principals, new paradigms for leadership, and a look at stressors affecting principals. In

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addition, literature was reviewed concerning a principal's progression from the experienced

classroom teacher to that of the building level administrator. Chapter 2 also presents aspects of

coping with change in leadership positions, and gives details of critical incidents and the

reflection and reviewing process. Chapter 3 contains a description of the methods and

procedures used to acquire data, the participants, and methods of data analysis. Chapter 4

presents an analysis of data collected and Chapter 5 contains conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Interviews with elementary-school principals may reveal some comparisons and contrasts between expectations of those holding the position many years ago to the expectations of today. In a review of literature, it seems logical that one would include such new standards as they exist in this century for the professional administrator, along with research on life passages and coping with change. This chapter also reviews the literature related to critical incidents and the importance of opportunities for reflection by the practitioner.

The Principalship Today

Many agencies over the years have committed to defining the principalship by means of lists of standards. The State Department of Tennessee developed a list of competencies that was the criteria for the Career Ladder Evaluation Program for administrators across the state, whereas The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1993) published a document that itemized other standards. The policy board standard provided a knowledge and skill base that was divided into functional, programmatic, interpersonal, and contextual domains in order to address the "clinical gap" between classroom and practice (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, p. x).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2001) and the Interstate Schools Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (Ohio Principals Organization, 2002) crafted model standards for school leaders. The NAESP standards were published in a guidebook for those who care about creating and supporting quality in schools titled *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do*

(NAESP). This publication revealed indicators of quality in schools and defined instructional

leadership using the following six standards:

1. Balance Management and Leadership Roles. Strategies:
   a. Create and foster a community of learners
   b. Embody learner-centered leadership
   c. Seek leadership contributions from multiple sources
   d. Tie the daily operations of the schoolhouse to school student learning goals

2. Set High Expectations and Standards. Strategies:
   a. Articulate a clear vision that reflects the beliefs, values, and commitments of the school community
   b. Ensure that all students have adequate and appropriate opportunities to meet high standards
   c. Develop a school culture that is flexible, collaborative, innovative, and supportive of efforts to improve achievement of all students

3. Demand Content and Instruction that Ensures Students' Achievement. Strategies:
   a. Hire and retain high-quality teachers and hold them responsible for students' learning
   b. Monitor alignment of curriculum with standards, school goals, and assessments
   c. Observe classroom practices to assure that all students are meaningfully engaged in active learning
   d. Provide up-to-date technology and instructional materials
   e. Review and analyze students' work to determine whether students are being taught to standards

4. Create a Culture of Adult Learning. Strategies:
   a. Provide time for reflection as an important part of improving practice
   b. Invest in teachers' learning
   c. Connect professional development to school learning goals
   d. Provide opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and think together
   e. Recognize the need to continually improve principals' own professional practice

5. Use Multiple Sources of Data as Diagnostic Tools. Strategies:
   a. Consider a variety of data sources to measure performance
   b. Analyze data using a variety of strategies
   c. Use data as tools to identify barriers to success, design strategies for improvement, and plan daily instruction
   d. Benchmark successful schools with similar demographics to identify strategies for improving students' achievement
   e. Create a school environment that is comfortable using data

6. Actively Engage the Community. Strategies:
   a. Engage the community to build greater ownership for the work of the school
   b. Share leadership and decision making
   c. Encourage parents to become meaningfully involved in the school and in their own children's learning

d. Ensure that students and families are connected to the health, human, and social services they need to stay focused on learning. (NAESP, pp. 6-7)

The introduction to the publication noted the need for an expanded role for principals and its definition by NAESP (2001) standards. It also included profiles of schools that were setting examples and a self-assessment for the beginning, middle, and end of the year along with questions for further reflection and how to obtain resources from the NAESP's website.

The ISLLC standards model was drafted by 24 state educational agencies and representatives from all major professional organizations (Ohio Principals Organization, 2002). This model also included six standards. Each standard was broken down into areas of knowledge that were required learning for the standard--the dispositions or beliefs and values needed to accomplish the standard. Finally, there were long lists of performances that should be visible to an observer of an accomplished administrator.

The purpose of the NAESP guidebook, according to Murphy (2002), was to change the focus from management to instructional leader. The publication was part of a four-part strategy to gain professional buy-in that would then be applied in principals' preparation programs, administrators' training, and principals' evaluation. According to Murphy, the following six principles guided the development of the standards:

1. They are anchored on valued ends or outcomes rather than on functions and tasks.

2. They privilege student learning and demand success for all youngsters.

3. They shift the center of gravity in school leadership from management and administration to learning and school improvement.

4. They underscore the collaborative nature of school-based leadership, stressing the importance of access, opportunity, and empowerment for teachers, parents, and all members of the school community.

5. They establish an integrated and coherent framework for action. Instead of the usual laundry list of everything a principal might do, they present a tightly focused set of ideas that help refocus the principalship on learner-centered leadership.

6. They are designed to shape and direct action of those who are in a position to do the heavy lifting in the reshaping of the principalship. (n. p.)

New Paradigms for Leadership

There is nothing "elementary" about the principalship of the 21st Century. The magnitude of the changes over the past decade was reported in the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1998). Today's elementary-school principals work an average of 9 hours a day, 54 hours a week and lead larger schools than those cited in the previous 10-year study, with an average enrollment of 425 students. The typical elementary-school principal of the 21st Century supervises more people (an average of 30 teachers and 14 other staff members) than in past decades (Ferrandino, 2001).

A dramatic shift in gender has been displayed in the representation of novice principals with fewer than five years experience. Women now comprise 65%. The attrition rate from 1988 to 1998 stands at 42% and could reach as high as 60% as the "baby boom" generation reaches retirement eligibility (Ferrandino, 2001, p. 440). The current trend is for principals to apply for an early retirement option at the earliest possible opportunity. Unfortunately, this comes at a time when it is estimated by the U.S. Department of Labor that the need for educational leaders will increase with rising school enrollments through 2005 (Ferrandino).

Stressors of the Principalship

In a commentary by Boris-Schacter and Langer (2002), *Caught Between Nostalgia and Utopia: The Plight of the Modern Principal,* educational leadership professors from Cambridge, Massachusetts, stated that principals "reported a disjunction between their actual work and what everyone perceives their work to be" (p. 36). Many efforts have been made to redefine the role of the principal from decision maker to decision sharer, from information communicator to collaborator, and from team director to team facilitator. However, these efforts have rarely provided the resources for transitioning to this changed position. Instead, the principal is "stuck between the nostalgia of the parents and the utopia of the researchers and reformers" (Boris-Schacter & Langer, p. 36.).

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) elaborated that although principals are "the 'strategic knot' that binds together the often chaotic realities of site-level improvement, few have had formal preparation for, or successful experiences with, new responsibilities" even before things became decentralized (p. 28.).

State standards, high-stakes testing, students' violence, school security, budgetary restraints, unions' demands, technology expertise, intense legal issues, and changing family demands are only some of the responsibilities that have recently been added to observing instruction, modeling teaching, implementing professional growth activities, and new instructional initiatives to name a few (Richmond, 2002). Over the last 30 years, research has supported the importance of the principal's role in school improvement (Kennedy, 2000). Portin, Shen, and Williams (1998) cited a 1998 study by The Association of Washington School Principals that noted, "Legislators, school boards, and district administrators proposing changes that will affect the principal's role should realize that many principals are severely limited in their capacity to take on additional duties" (p. 6).

In Boris-Schater and Langer's (2002) *Education Week* article, the authors discussed the "plight of the modern principal" (p. 36). Through interviewing thousands of principals across the United States over a period of a year and a half, they summarized the stories they collected and drew some important conclusions. One finding was that "Individual circumstances affected the principalship, as did gender, a person's stage in life, and whether or not someone was responsible for a partner, a parent, or children" (p. 36).

Another stressor of the principalship was alluded to in the research of Pfeffer and Sutton (2000). In *The Knowing-Doing Gap*, these researchers discussed why "Knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fails to result in action or behavior consistent with that knowledge" (p. 4). The study itemized eight guidelines for an established culture that allowed individuals to fail, drove out fear, and encouraged an atmosphere of collaboration and cooperation rather than

competition. Other significant factors that affected the knowing-doing gap included measuring what mattered and how the leaders spent their time and allocated resources (Pfeffer & Sutton).

Another element of stress inherent in the elementary school principalship was best described by Schon (1987):

> Uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict--escape the canons of technical rationality. When a problematic situation is uncertain, technical problem solving depends on the prior construction of a well-formed problem--which is not itself a technical task. When a practitioner recognizes a situation as unique, she cannot handle it solely by applying theories or techniques derived from her store of professional knowledge. And in situations of value conflict, there are not clear and self-consistent ends to guide the technical selection of means. (p. 6)

Adult Passages

The progression from experienced classroom teacher to that of a building level administrator is a common step in the career path of the majority of administrators. Many principals choose to move no further from their classroom and from contact with students than their buildings' leadership positions. Those who remained at this post to serve for a number of years might communicate any changes that had taken place within the core of their being, their leadership, their values, their relationships, and philosophical perspectives as a result of the unique demands of their position. Because promotion to the principalship is usually not achieved before several years of classroom teaching experience have been successfully completed, it is reasonable to assume that adult-life-stages research could have application to careers in this leadership position.

Sheehy (1976), along with Levinson (1978), developed several studies that opened up a fresh area of research pertaining to the adult life cycle and predictable crises of this time in life. The first account was a 10-year study that dealt with phases and transitions in the adult male. In 1969, a study team headed by Levinson submitted a research proposal to the National Institute of Mental Health. Two years were spent interviewing individual participants to form a view of adults' development (Levinson).

Levinson's (1978) study took root in a comparison of the intellectual differences between Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. According to Levinson, Jung was critical of Freud's emphasis on adult problems and controversies that were overshadowed by childhood development. Freud, on the other hand, had focused too strongly on the pathological, clinical perspective. Jung's theory was more social in its perspective and dealt more specifically with "ethnography, mythology and creations from many cultures and historical periods" (as cited in Levinson, p. 4). Levinson then brought the work of Erikson into the mix as a bridge between Jung and Freud and used these three theories to build a theoretical base for his social science approach.

Levinson's (1978) study began with interviewing 40 men who were between the ages of 35 and 45 years. He drew his sampling from workers in two corporations among four categories: hourly workers, executives, academic biologists, and novelists. His biographical interviews were the core of the research method and as part of this process each man was asked to respond to pictures that were selected from a Thematic Apperception Test that is often used in personality diagnosis.

Levinson (1978) established eras and transition years in the male life cycle that included preadulthood, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. He developed the middle adulthood years with greater detail than the first two stages, along with subheadings that related to the changes in biological and psychological functioning, the sequence of generations, and the evolving of careers and enterprises. It is the transition years from early adulthood and middle adulthood in which this study will examine any parallels to the career stages of the principalship.

Another concept developed by Levinson's (1978) research team was that of life structures. The three perspectives that he introduced as a part of these structures fit well within the parameters of the critical-incidents theory that will be examined in this exploration of elementary school administrators' experiences. Levinson's first perspective was the effect of the sociocultural world on the individual and the meaning that it has for him or her. The second was the inner self, both conscious and unconscious, that is developed in childhood that still influences

the actions of the adult. The final perspective was that of the man as a participant interacting with the world through transactions (Levinson).

School principals are automatically placed in a social and historical context by virtue of their positions and their struggle to make a "unique contribution" (Levinson, 1978, p. 43) as their life's work. The choices that principals make daily and how they deal with the consequences were parts of the life structure that Levinson chose to analyze in his study. Each choice constituted a relationship that was "saturated by self and world" (p. 43). Levinson described the difficulty of transition from one adult life stage to another:

> The task in every transition is to create a new Young/Old integration appropriate to that time of life. Especially with the change in eras, there is normally an increase in the Old qualities of maturity, judgment, self-awareness, magnanimity, integrated structure, breadth of perspective. But these qualities are of value only if they continue to be vitalized by the Young's energy, imagination, wonderment, capacity for foolishness and fancy. The Young/Old connection must be sustained. (p. 212)

According to Daloz (1999), the solution for balancing this polarity was to first acknowledge that change had indeed occurred and then ask, "In what ways am I older and in what ways young[er]?" (p. 56).

Fewer adult-life-stages studies exist regarding the differences experienced by females. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) pointed out that women defined themselves more by their relationships with others than men did; they needed to be more connected and placed less focus on separateness. This may have had a negative impact on the female perspective even in the principalship. According to Mezirow (2000), "Our culture conspires against collaborative thinking and the development of social competence by conditioning us to think adversarially in terms of winning or losing, of proving ourselves smart, worthy, or wise" (p. 11).

A frequently cited study related to adult life stages is the work of Havighurst (1980). In an article written for *Educational Research*, Havighurst discussed the development of life-span developmental psychology as it expanded after 1970. Prior developmental studies dealt

primarily with children and adolescents up to 18 or 20 years of age. Several changes in the structure of society caused the need for "adaptation and adjustment by adults during the final quarter of the 20th Century" (p. 3). The population of adults over the age of 65 increased. The working population shifted from predominantly engaging in the "extraction of goods, through agriculture, mining, fishing, and forestry to one of goods-producing through industrialization" (p. 3). Havighurst explained, "We have moved beyond this era to a population of service providers" (p. 3). During this time, Congress passed the Lifelong Learning Act of 1976 and during this decade, Goulet and Baltes (as cited in Havighurst) defined human life-span developmental psychology.

Buehler (as cited in Havighurst, 1980), while working in Vienna, began collecting life histories from the elderly and proposed several basic life tendencies. They included: need for satisfaction, adaptive self-limitation (adjustment), creative expansion, establishment of inner order, and self-fulfillment (p. 4). Buehler (as cited in Havighurst) considered the age periods as follows:

Ages 18 – 25: dominated by the young person's tentative self-determination of an adult occupational role, in response to the need for adaptive self-limitation.

Ages 25 – 45: by self-realization in occupation, marriage, and family development, in response to the need for creative expansion

Ages 45 – 65: the drive for establishment of inner order takes the form of critical self-assessment in the mature years

Age 65: the need for self-fulfillment . . . period of well-earned rest (p. 4).

Erikson (as cited in Havighurst, 1980) became another pioneer in 1950 in this work of adult life stages. His work primarily focused on eight psychosocial tasks that needed to be resolved to avoid problems for later life periods. Havighurst described the Kansas City adult life study that was conducted by the Committee on Human Development at the University of Chicago. Its main concentration was on "personality and aging" (p. 4). Neugarten (1968) also reported on this work and confirmed "human personality does change in visible ways as people grow older" (p. 138).

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In Levinson's (1978) conclusion, he described several approaches men have to midlife transition, one of which mentioned that:

Other men form a life structure that is reasonably viable in the world but poorly connected to the self. They perform their social roles and do their bit for themselves and others but their lives are lacking in inner excitement (p. 243) …But for the great majority of men—about 80% of our subjects--this period evokes tumultuous struggles within the self and with the external world. Their mid-life transition is a time of moderate or severe crisis. Every aspect of their lives comes into question, and they are horrified by much that is revealed. They are full of recriminations against themselves and others. They cannot go on as before, but need time to choose a new path or modify the old one. (p. 199)

McCoy (McCoy, Ryan, & Lichtenberg, 1979), from the University of Kansas, pooled then-current research to develop a "topography of adulthood" (p. 226) that included the following age stages:

Ages 18-22: Leaving Home,
Ages 23-28: Reaching Out,
Ages 29-34: Questions / Questions,
Ages 35-43: Midlife Explosion,
Ages 44-55: Settling Down,
Ages 56-64: The Mellowing, and
Ages 65 +: Retirement. (pp. 229-230)

In summary, McCoy et al. described the process:

As an individual moves through the stages of adulthood, each stage confronts the person with central developmental tasks. Mastery of the tasks means progress for the individual; denial spells regression and difficulty with later tasks which build on previous mastery. The challenge to adult educators is to provide the learning necessary for adults to handle these life tasks. An educational advantage is the "teachable moment" which a developmental task typically signals in the learner. (p. 226)

There are many changes and transitions that occur in the career of the elementary school principal.

Coping With Change

In 1980, the College Entrance Examination Board of New York first published Aslanian and Brickell's study titled *Americans in Transition.* One conclusion among the 18 listed was that learning activities often preceded, accompanied, or followed life transitions for adults

coping with change. In a later work (Aslanian & Brickell, 1982), the researchers summarized

their findings in a series of points that related adults' learning to coping with stress. Most adults

in the study used their knowledge in some way as a means to an end. The new information was

not approached solely for the pleasure of learning, although many adults found joy in the

process. According to the authors, "Neither the process nor the possession of knowledge is the

reason most adults learn" (p. 161). The knowledge must have usefulness for the adult to be

motivated to acquire it. Aslanian and Brickell explained that adults sought out educational

opportunities as a coping mechanism to address change in their lives:

> Adults never outgrow their need to learn. Change touches the life of every adult, although
> it touches life at some points more often than at others and it touches some lives more
> than others. Whenever change comes, early or late, and to whomever it comes, rich or
> poor, learning is one way of dealing with it. There are no types of adults, black or white,
> educated or not, blue collar or white collar who do not use learning to accommodate the
> changes in their lives. (p. 162)

Aslanian and Brickell (1982) explained how the timeline of training is somewhat

regulated by companies and by institutions such as the military. For example, one must be

inducted into the armed services or hired for a position before the opportunity for education

exists. In other situations, training precedes a transition such as in parenting classes or

retirement planning. In still others, learning may take place in order to cope with a transition

that has already taken place. Adults seem to learn in proportion to the amount of time that is

devoted to a particular area of their lives. If they spend 80% of their lives in a career placement,

then 80% of their learning will relate to changes and transitions that involve their careers.

When adults have to juggle several areas of responsibility, they tend to learn several things

simultaneously and can point to something specific that initiated the learning. Aslanian and

Brickell added:

> Every adult who learned because of a transition pointed to a specific event in his or her
> life that signaled, precipitated, or triggered the transition and thus the learning. It will
> take specific life events to convert most of them from latent learners into active learners.
> Decisions to learn may be pending for a long time, but the timing of their entry into the
> learning arena will be determined by particular events that permit—or force them, to
> enter it. (p. 164)

About 90% of learning is triggered by events that occur as a part of the adult's career and family. Whereas adults may choose to learn about something that assists them in their transition, the topic may not be related to the event that triggered the need for learning (Aslanian & Brickell, 1982).

In the conclusion of her findings, Merriam (1978) discussed the patterns of development that are apparent in the career context. Her findings stressed that the individual assessment process and introspection that occur during this time of life "may precipitate a crisis if one finds a disturbing discrepancy between what one had hoped to accomplish by middle age and what one has actually achieved" (p. 50). Nevertheless, people often manage and cope with change very well. Tough's (1982) work on *Intentional Change* established that 16% of all intentional changes were in a person's environment whereas 42% were changes in activities or how one spent one's time. The remaining 42% were primarily changes in the inner-person.

Critical Incidents

"Awakening, enlightenment, epiphany: all of these concepts involve the light necessary not to see with our eyes, but with the spirit that binds creation" (Dyja, 2001, p. 300). In a study conducted by Measor (1985) entitled *Critical Incidents in the Classroom: Identities, Choices and Careers*, the researcher examined the biographies of 48 teachers to see if he could identify "key events around which pivotal decisions revolve" (p. 8). The life-histories study involved secondary teachers in art and science from whom common patterns and different responses were recorded. Measor established that individuals build identities at certain points in their life cycle through recounts of these critical incidents. Although Measor's study related to both critical-incidents theory and career stages, it focused primarily on the factors related to aging as they correlated to teacher authority. Little has been written with regard to the critical incidents or career stages as they relate to the principalship. Just as "teachers are processed by schools"

(Riseborough, 1985, p. 204) even more so is the principal acted upon by the environment and relationships of the elementary school.

Critical incidents are unique in that they evoke changes in a matter of minutes rather than the small step-by-step progression that is characteristic of most life changes. Miller and C'de Baca (2001) called the experience "quantum change" and in their book by the same name, added this description:

> They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes that were once the guiding forces of the lives of these (people) are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them. (p. 3)

Miller and C'de Baca's description of quantum change isolated it from the category of critical incidents in that the "hallmarks" of this type of change limited it to those that are "vivid, identifiable, distinctive and memorable, inner transformations that have a benevolent quality and were enduring in nature" (p. 4).

Miller and C'de Baca's (2001) study began with a lengthy list of individuals throughout history whose biographies and autobiographies contained real-life examples of quantum-change events that served as transformational points in their lives. Then in 1989, the researchers placed an advertisement with a rather loose definition of quantum change in an Albuquerque newspaper. The ad requested that anyone interested in participating in the study should call a published telephone number for a confidential interview. After an overwhelming response, 31 women and 24 men relayed stories that were as recent as one month prior to their response to the newspaper advertisement--up to an experience that had happened 39 years before. The researchers remarked how psychological journals have filled library shelves with studies related to the gradual changes we are all accustomed to, yet very little was recorded that related to the "sudden broad transformation except in art or biography or religious writings related to conversion" (p. 6). Miller and C'de Baca described a person as "being in a state of conflict" (p. 7) whereas a more enlightening description for this phenomenon was shared by Loder (1981):

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Something disrupts the way in which the person has been perceiving reality and making sense out of life. This triggers the inner search for a new way of organizing reality, and sometimes in this circumstance "an insight, intuition, or vision appears on the border between the conscious and the unconscious, usually with convincing force." The experience is frequently accompanied by a great emotional release and a deep sense of relief. Then, with time, the person integrates and interprets the experience through language and symbols, and new patterns of thought and action emerge. (p. 32)

Reflection

It has been said by some that the continuous improvement cycle of implementing change embraced by the educational reform movement is like trying to repair a plane while flying it. Without opportunities to reflect and "sharpen the saw" (Covey, 1989, p. 287), principals cannot reasonably be expected to grow as decision makers. Mezirow (2000) explained:

Meaning becomes clarified when learners become more critically reflective of their assumptions and those of others in assessing contested meaning; when they are able to validate beliefs empirically or participate more fully and freely in discourse to arrive at tentative best reflective judgment; and when they gain insight on how to more effectively take action and do so reflectively. This is a transformative learning process. (p. 350)

It is critical for adults to have numerous opportunities to reflect, as it is in these moments of "reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing believing, feeling and acting" that the "most significant learning" takes place (Mezirow, p. 13).

In a recent study entitled *Reflective Practice: Developing Habits of Mind*, Coombs (2001) discussed the reflective practice of six selected principals. The participants were interviewed as to their educational philosophy and orientation to work. In addition, they were observed during a staff meeting, a student assembly, and in a session in their office. Coombs focused on three forms of reflection that included anticipatory, retrospective, and contemporaneous.

In her book entitled *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, Cranton (1994) discussed the types of events that triggered critical self-reflection. The events included a discussion with a friend, an unexpected occurrence, a change in work context, a recently read book, or a sudden insight. Cranton stated that these kind of events initiated reflection in adult

learners in some situations but not for others, adding, "There can be no standard recipe—no way to say 'hand out one critical incident exercise, carefully add small group discussion, and simmer for one hour'" (pp. 77-78).

Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000) discussed the importance of "maintaining the reflections-and renewal process" (p. 105) in their work and supported Dewey's (1910) definition that described reflective thinking as "a process of hesitation or a state of doubt that leads to the act of searching, hunting, inquiring to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity'" (p. 12). Dewey suggested that conflict could be resolved by applying five phases of reflective thought including: "suggestions, problems, hypothesis, reasoning, and testing" (p. 12). Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) stated, "The capacity to reflect is developed to different stages in different people, and it may be this ability which characterizes those who learn effectively from experience" (p. 19). Dewey also identified three attitudes that he listed as prerequisites for anyone to be successful in their reflection: whole-heartedness, open-mindedness, and responsibility. Dewey stressed that an individual must be committed to finding a solution, be able to explore alternatives in response to a problem, and take ownership of being a portion of the problem before progress can be made to effect a change. Schon (1983) also discussed the importance to professionals of renewal process and reflection:

> Usually reflection on knowing-in-action goes together with reflection on the stuff at hand. There is some puzzling, or troubling, or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal. As he tries to make sense of it, he also reflects on the understandings which have been implicit in his action, understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, restructures, and embodies in further action. (p. 52)

Schon (1987) later delved into the topic of reflection as it related to the field of education. He articulated the quandary that administrators often find themselves in when "situations are problematic in several ways at once" (p. 6).

The importance of reflection is supported by the literature reviewed. It is through this process that continued professional growth takes place (Valli, 1997). Osterman and Kottkamp

(1993) described the cycle as "a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance" (p. 69).

Summary

The 21st Century principalship has had its role expanded to encompass more competencies than ever before. Fields of specialization are ever increasing and quality performance is the expectation in every domain. Because of dwindling resources and with agencies increasingly vying for public funds, the expectation for grant awards increases. Special interest groups, supervisors, and the demands of the public at large add to the stressors inherent in the principalship.

The adult stages of development that may or may not correlate with the performance of the principal and his or her perceptions were also examined. The idea of how individual critical incidents might influence the philosophy of the practitioner and how reflection on these situations might be used as learning, coping mechanisms was further examined in this research project.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter presents the process and sequence used in the completion of this study. It includes the research design, selection of participants, development of the interview schedule, format for taking fieldnotes, data collection and treatment, and data analysis and procedures.

Research Design

The purpose of this study, through a constant comparative method of data analysis was to develop a more indepth understanding of the elementary-school principalship and the events that served as catalysts to momentous changes (both professional and personal) to career administrators. In addition, I explored the impact of those events and the stages, if any, that could be predicted as being unique to this position of educational leadership. Through this method, a more indepth understanding of the extraneous variables that influence the practice of the elementary-school principal, professionally and personally, might be revealed.

Creswell (1998) defined the qualitative research method as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 115)

The need to pursue individual perceptions of life experiences together with the thick, rich description required to delve into the affective side of the principalship was one reason that a qualitative method was my inquiry choice.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) shared a list of characteristics of the qualitative inquiry method of which I felt the following were very pertinent to the type of research I wished to conduct:

1. Qualitative design is holistic. It looks at the larger picture, the whole picture and begins with a search for understanding of the whole.

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2. Qualitative design looks at relationships within a system or culture.

3. Qualitative design refers to the personal, face-to-face, and immediate. (p. 42)

Having earlier responded to a course assignment to conduct an oral history in which interviews were completed during the development of a mini-ethnography, I became aware that through the interview process I was able to evoke the emotions and feelings of individual participants. I determined that a qualitative approach would best access the type of information I needed to pursue this study. The opportunity to interview a retired principal, who discussed his experiences as a minority leader in a small predominately white community, enabled me to formulate questions that drew out some very revealing and intriguing information. The information shared was so profound that it made a significant impression on me and changed my view of reality with regard to the principalship. It was at this point that I began to formulate questions through which respondents might reveal such jewels of wisdom and truth to others in the profession.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) described four stages in the constant comparative method that fit well within the sociological parameter of this project. First, through the interview process, data were gathered and coded according to broad generalized categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My own tacit knowledge of the principalship proved useful as judgment in assigning codes. Next, following each interview, data were transcribed and entered into the NUD*IST program where the categories were expanded until there was a point at which some of the categories and their properties integrated. The third stage was delimiting the theory and the final step was writing the theory (Glaser & Strauss). As described by these researchers, the process and steps are continually in a state of flux:

> Although this method of generating theory is a continuously growing process--each stage after a time is transformed into the next--earlier stages do remain in operation simultaneously throughout the analysis and each provides continuous development to its successive stage until the analysis is terminated. (p. 105)

A qualitative research design, approached from the biographical tradition, allowed me to present a representative picture of the principalship through the eyes of the practitioner (Barritt,

1986). The reality of the principalship was revealed as described by participants who derived its meaning from socially constructed interactions with their world (Merriam, 2002).

Covey (1989), in his discussion on character and communication, discussed the art of empathic listening:

> Empathic listening is so powerful because it gives you accurate data to work with. Instead of projecting your own autobiography and assuming thoughts, feelings, motives and interpretation, you're dealing with the reality inside another person's head and heart. You're listening to understand. You're focused on receiving the deep communication of another human soul. (p. 241)

The exploration and discovery that are the outgrowth of a qualitative approach to research facilitated my delving into the individual life experiences of the participants in this study. A grounded theory methodology employing the interview process allowed me to include interpretations of the gathered data while preserving the voices of the participants in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

It is imperative to design an atmosphere of trust by sharing information in a natural setting. Once rapport is established, general topics may be approached in order to enable the participants to reveal their perspectives while allowing individuals the latitude to direct the conversation along their own pathways. A demographic survey (see Appendix A) was administered to each participant to establish background information including such areas as: number of years of service, number of schools served, and level of certification. Four introductory questions relative to choosing the principalship as a career choice and career preparation were explored. Eight questions dealing with experiences, opinions, and feelings were then presented to each participant (see Appendix B). I kept in mind that qualitative research is based on an emergent design and these open-ended questions were likely to trigger other inquiries as led by the individual participants of the study. The interviewees were generally in command of each session to allow them to present their own unique realities in the context they pursued for each line of questioning. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Member checking, whereby each interviewee reviewed the transcribed interview for accuracy of

information and presentation, was used to solicit the impressions of the candidate in the study. Each participant had an opportunity to comment on the transcript and discuss his or her impressions on the effectiveness of the questions and the climate for the interview as well as any other suggestions that might produce a setting that is more conducive for information gathering. These comments and suggestions contributed by the participants were considered for modification of the interview guide and process of interviewing.

One of the perceivable benefits of this interactive process is the transformative learning that takes place during the participants' formulation of the narratives they share. Transformation through a process of narrative thinking has several distinct qualities:

1. It occurs interactively on personal and social levels.
2. It occurs as a by-product of personal story sharing.
3. It requires that the learner think both generatively and critically.
4. It requires the sharing of particular experiences and the collaborative development of abstract concepts.
5. It includes a moral dimension as the narrator weaves a criticism of the past and implies an idea of a better future.
6. This transformative process engages us not only mentally but emotionally, spiritually, and physically. (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, pp. 151-152)

Selection of Participants

First, Directors of Schools (the Tennessee legal term for superintendents) were sent an informative letter requesting permission to request interviews of elementary-school principals in their district (see Appendix D). Although the letters contained a self-addressed envelope and a form letter to communicate their intent, the first responses were slow. Two directors chose to respond by e-mail. I then began making preliminary phone calls as an introduction to my participation request during which many directors gave immediate verbal permission and suggested individual administrators from their district to approach regarding an interview appointment. I immediately followed up on these referrals (see Appendix E) and only one principal declined to participate.

As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), in order to provide maximum variation, the information gleaned from each interview was reviewed to determine what unique situations in the principalship had been overlooked. The interview schedule was designed to include unique situations and experiences in the principalship as well as by the referral method. Each interview took place after the previous interview was concluded and analyzed. All participants were provided an informed consent statement (see Appendix C), that clearly stated the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary, that they could discontinue their participation at will, and that their answers would be held in strictest confidence (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). A wide range of responses was gathered; each was designed to extend the information already obtained. Interviews were purposefully focused and information-rich with the descriptions they provided. The selected purposeful sample included 23 elementary-school principals from public schools in Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. A chain referral technique was used to allow interviewees the opportunity to suggest other information rich participants for the study as confirming and disconfirming cases were sought (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Maximum variation was achieved by pursuing extreme or deviant cases, such as those where a person left the principalship under duress, in order to examine the emotional stress related to the position. Participants were career principals the majority of time beyond their classroom experience in a public school setting.

Data Collection and Treatment

All interviews were conducted in the natural setting of the principal's office or adjacent conference room with the exception of three. One interview was conducted in the home of the participant, the second in the home of the interviewer at the request of the participant, and the third was in the conference room at the central office of the school district. In all situations, the environment for each interview allowed for the comfort and relaxation of the participants. The initial moments of the visit were used to record descriptive information relative to the

individuals, their interaction with others, and a visual description of the physical characteristics of the setting and climate. Significant rapport and trust within the environment of the interview was established to ensure that the participants felt secure. I ensured that indications at the onset of the interview confirmed my mature judgment so as not to jeopardize participants' level of comfort and to allow thorough openness and trust when revealing information for this study. According to Glensne and Peshkin (1992), it is important that a variety of data-gathering techniques be used. A survey expedited the collection of demographic data and thick, rich description was extracted from an abundance of tape-recorded material. Interviews were recorded and then quickly transcribed in order to preserve the accuracy and richness of details.

Participants may have become so involved emotionally in their responses that they forgot that I was recording as they discussed their answers to my questions; therefore, it became important to have them review each transcription for its accuracy and allow them to share any reflections as we worked to ensure that the information was clear and accurate according to their perspectives. Although confidentiality was assured, participants had the opportunity to decline to answer any questions or ask me to stop taping at any time. They could also choose not to participate further at any point in the study.

The study involved a recorded interview that was transcribed verbatim to preserve impressions and thick and rich description. Although several prepared questions guided the interview, I permitted the participants to take the discussion anywhere they felt led; on several occasions, their responses triggered a second or third question on a given topic. The questions included demographic questions, experience questions, opinion questions, and affective questions.

After each interview I reflected on the process to determine if any questions needed to be added or reworded in forthcoming interviews to uncover further information. Upon sharing the transcribed information with the interviewees, I asked them if there were questions they thought of that they wished I might have asked. They could have, at this point, shared any other

information that needed to be included or suggested where I might need to focus to gain information in areas that had not yet been investigated. I generated many comments that were labeled as my own reactions and thoughts of what I heard and observed at the time.

Data Analysis and Procedures

A constant comparative method was applied to the data (Grove, 1988). Field notes were recorded during the interviews in a way that did not obstruct the flow of conversation. These notes were expanded into a Microsoft Word document and saved as a text file with line breaks. Each file was then imported into the NUD*IST program and the coding process began. After reading through the transcripts several times looking for categories and themes to emerge from the text, I began to formulate ideas for free nodes and coding commonalities. Using NUD*IST 4.0, I created in excess of 60 nodes that were assigned to various passages of the transcripts (Creswell, 1998). The tree had a number of basic roots or themes that encompassed the 60+ nodes. All of the field notes were cross-coded along with the respective interviews. Numerous reports were generated that included free-node reports and a report of index searches for cross-referenced themes by use of the union and intersect command options. These overlap reports were also used to determine any correlations between and among the free nodes.

Trustworthiness

As truth-value is deemed the most important criterion (Krefting, 1999), multiple realities were constructed as relayed to me through the interviews of the participants. Through peer debriefing with a colleague who had previously conducted a qualitative study (see Appendix G) and feedback gained from each interviewee, the accuracy of the portraits painted of these life experiences were determined. This method ensured the necessary trustworthiness. It was very important that I established "truth value" by representing multiple realities through interviewing purposefully selected participants who represented the diverse population of stakeholders within

the elementary-school-principalship community. I shared and sorted information gathered from my interviews with colleagues and others who had familiarity with the educational setting or educational issues that emerged to determine if they could immediately identify with the descriptions.

It became important to communicate intermittently with my advisor and the members of my doctoral committee for their suggestions and impressions. As addressed in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model, I felt that sufficient descriptive data were presented to allow comparisons that addressed the issue of applicability.

Consistency

Consistency was another area addressed in an effort to establish the trustworthiness of the research. In qualitative research, it is critical that uniqueness be emphasized; therefore, the variation of the results is more to be expected than an identical replication of results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed variability that is trackable and is sufficient to establish consistency or dependability, such as fatigue of an interviewer or knowledge and insight that is gained over the course of the study. In addition to these variables, qualitative studies should include the extremes or outlying members of the culture. Rather than interview educators of similar experience, I chose to include both genders of administrators along with novice and veteran members of the profession.

Neutrality

A further criterion to establish trustworthiness is neutrality. According to Sandelowski (1986), this freedom from bias should be evident in both the procedures and the results. As someone who entered this arena with principalship experience, it became important that I worked hard to eliminate any preconceived notions of what might be discovered in order to maintain that the criterion of neutrality was also met. By spending extended spans of time for the interview,

the neutrality of the findings was best preserved. Significant factors that could have resulted in a bias held by the researcher were disclosed in the limitations section of this study so that the reader would be aware of any slant that might be present in the writing. In addition to the criteria mentioned previously, the strategies of credibility and dependability were employed. Credibility was increased through prolonged interviews. Triangulation provided multiple perspectives and minimized any distortion caused by the researcher's perspective. Dependability strategies included keeping very specific descriptions of the methods used in the research that allowed step replication.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

From 5-foot-2 and 98 pounds soaking wet to a formidable 6-foot-2, 280 pound stature who framed the entry barring passage through his office door, the variety of physical forms that embodied the 23 elementary school principals interviewed were as unique in their descriptions as the facilities that housed them. The title *Elementary-School Principal* conjures up an immediate portraiture for the general public that usually involves the highly visible aspects of the job description. Greeting traffic, monitoring the loading and unloading of the big yellow school bus, emceeing awards assemblies, and hearing the leader's amplified voice with routine announcements from the hallway speakers construct just a few of those images. After interviewing 23 principals from the 2nd year novice to those tenured in excess of 30 years experience, it is time to put away the sketch pad and pick up the palette of paints that will not only add brilliant color to the job description but texture and variation on the subject of administration. Each individual participant in the study, or artist, if one will apply the analogy a step further, has added to the data by sharing specific responses to guided interview questions. Each self-portrait, no matter how stylistic and unique to the individual, is still unified by common strokes, supporting themes that became more vivid and were reinforced through the additional interview opportunities created.

Selection of Participants

The participants chosen for this study were novice and veteran elementary-school principals working in Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. An emergent sampling design was used to include 23 principals selected serially as the focus of the interviews were continuously adjusted to include as many atypical data sources as possible. Fourteen males and nine females comprised the group of administrators interviewed as participants in this study.

The interview process spanned experience ranging from fewer than 2 years to beyond the 30-year mark of distinction. Participants ranged in age from 32 to 63 years. Almost all interviewees had served as elementary-school principals for the major portions of their administrative careers. One male and one female served in schools that included a predominant population of handicapped children requiring special education services. All participants were administrators of a kindergarten through fifth grade or a kindergarten through sixth-grade program with the exception of two schools that included a preschool class in their program. Ten of the schools were suburban, five were considered urban, and eight participants identified their schools as rural. The interviewing process continued until a point of redundancy and sufficiency of data was achieved in the collection of information. As part of the interview process, each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym to ensure the confidentiality and accuracy of the information gathered. All of the statements shared by study participants are personal commentaries that were used with their permission.

Interview appointments were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee. All but three interviews were conducted in the school office of the principal. One was conducted in the home of the participant, the second in the home of the interviewer at the request of the participant, and the third was in the conference room at the central office of the school district. The environments chosen by the participants allowed them to feel at ease and respond with relative candor. The interview began with an overview of the study and an explanation of the informed consent form and demographic survey. After the overview, an introduction to the use of the tape recorder was made and the assurance of confidentiality through a brief discussion of the data collection and NUD*IST software input was shared. The participant was informed that he or she would receive a copy of the transcript with all personally identifying information removed and an opportunity to respond to its validity and react to the ideas expressed by the interviewer. Each session concluded with a debriefing in order to enhance the experience for the participants involved and to be sure they received some gratification for having contributed their

time and experience to the study. The tape was played on my return trip to the office to increase the opportunity for reflexivity. First impressions, and later short phrases that captured the "essence" of the visit, were recorded in a journal along with some graphic organizers that helped broaden my realm of thinking while also clarifying relationships and beginning thoughts regarding emerging themes and categories. The tape, after initial review, was then sent to a professional transcriptionist who typed the interview verbatim and emailed a copy saved as a text document with line breaks. A header was added to more clearly identify the data, and the interviewer reviewed each tape to be sure that the transcript was accurate. On occasion, static on the tape obscured the accurate translation; however, only a very few words were inaudible after numerous replays of the troublesome sections that were continuously rewound and replayed until the accuracy of information was achieved.

Each of the 23 transcripts was initially read through as soon as it was typed and then reread several times with notes and markings made to retain initial impressions. As I read, I kept the specific research questions in mind and around the time of the fourth or fifth interview, I began to narrow the data collected. This was done to focus the study and ensure that enough information was gathered to provide data at a level of sufficiency. The transcribed and verified interviews were then unitized by coding into the NUD*IST (student version 4.0) computer program. The first set of categories was expanded to the identification of 61 free nodes as new information of successive interviews was analyzed. I then combined overlapping categories into a new branch of the NUD*IST tree and these new more encompassing categories within the interviews transitioned into major themes. These themes provided descriptive, inferential information that was then applied to the four research questions that originated as the primary purpose of the study:

1. From the perspective of the elementary-school principal, what critical incidents occurred that affected his or her professional and/or personal attitudes and perspectives during his or her career?

2. What, if any, are some career stages that may be identified in the elementary-school principalship?

3. What are some perceivable barriers that prevent elementary-school principals from implementing research-based practices?

4. From the practitioner's perspective, what are the most significant challenges faced by the elementary-school principal?

Critical Incidents

Little has been written to communicate the emotional intensity of daily interactions, the passion, and stamina that are required of school leaders as they experience occasional professional epiphanies. Virginia Wolf (as cited in Sheehy, 1995) called such little epiphanies "moments of being, when a shock pulls the gauzy curtain off everyday existence and throws a sudden floodlight on what our lives are really about" (p. 17). In response to questions that focused on critical events or epiphanies that might have enlightened the participants and caused changes in their personal view of the reality of their positions, the results were varied in the range of effects that such incidents had on the individual practitioners.

Tragic Episodes

Several respondents in the study took even catastrophic events in stride and placed them in a context of learning. Mrs. Long relayed her reaction to a kindergarten student's tragic bus accident that happened just a short distance away from the safety of the child's own front door:

> . . . the bus ran over her pelvis with the tires of the bus. When I went to the hospital that evening--I went just immediately when I heard-- they ushered me to the back of the emergency room where they tell people the bad news. I walked up and the doctor was telling those parents she was going to die. And I thought I was going to faint right there in the door. And there again, it's just mustering the courage to get through those kinds of things and leading people through it that gives you a real strength. But, it is just those kinds of things that if you thought about it, you would think that'd be horrible…and it was horrible, but you realize you can get through it. I think that's what makes you strong … the realization that you get through things and that you can help people get through it.

Mr. Andrews mentioned two accounts that demonstrated the same sentiment--realizing a grave situation and yet drawing upon his ability to see purpose even in tragic circumstances. The first episode occurred while he was serving as an elementary-school principal in a foreign country:

> Over there, we had teachers that were on bus duty; they ride the bus with the students, and this teacher was pregnant, and [she] lost her baby. We took her off the bus duty five months before her pregnancy terminated, but she had-- she delivered at eight months in the hospital. The baby was still alive, but the husband did not want her to stay in the hospital, which they recommended . . . [so] they brought her home and the baby died. He [the father] blamed the school and blamed me. In that society, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." I had a daughter who was just a young girl. She was nine years old, and I really had a fear there, but we were able to settle it. We went to his home and he did not . . . after he thought it through, it was his fault-- and they don't like to admit fault in that culture--but he did. He asked for forgiveness that he made the statement "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." And that changed me in a way; you just perk up, and your listening changes.

In the second incident that Mr. Andrews related, it was perhaps even more obvious, oddly enough, that principals seemed to feel obliged to place a positive spin on everything that occurs as a part of the school experience:

> I did have a mother to be killed here in front of the school, while bringing her child to school. It was nine o'clock; the crossing guard had just left. There's a double lane of traffic here in front of Newman Elementary (pseudonym). The little girl jumped back and the mother went on into the car. One lane stopped, and the mother continued on, but the truck in the second lane did not stop. We dealt with that in counseling with the family and with students here. This was a traumatic thing I think that, again, just alert, we were able, we, myself, my guidance teacher--and we brought in other guidance people. We were able to work with our parents and our students here in this loss. Things did come from this. We got traffic control better, which, of course, helped the school; we got some obstacles in front of school cleared away like trees, and we made the community more aware of the traffic and the speed limit in front of the school.

Principals, in relaying their comments relative to tragic episodes, often seemed to lose their clarity of thought as their articulation deteriorated with ever so slight stammering and sentence segments that were disjointed. It seemed as they shared these recounts of their reality, that they were reliving each event in their own mind with the emotional impact of the original impression. Their countenance, so intensely focused, reminded me of times having spoken with

war veterans who got lost in their own retelling of an experience and who emerged with a feeling of catharsis and closeness to their confidant.

Clarity of Thought

Other types of realizations were experienced as a result of clustered events. Mrs. Bear shared the clarity of thought she experienced as a result of several parent interactions and stated that male and female parents seemed to relate to her differently. She indicated that female parents gave her more trouble because they saw other women as being more vulnerable and saw her as a bossy female. She explained:

> It's just some females see women with suits on or with our credentials and think: Who does she think she is? …. And they will get huffier with me, but the males give you more respect. Not all parents, not all women feel that way. The more they get to know you and you interact with their children, it's okay. Sometimes a new momma will think …who does she think she is? Once they get to know you, they're not as apt. People do that in a very mobile school. We have a mobile group. When the parents first come in, I try to be friendly and down to earth with them. That doesn't mean that always works. However, occasionally, we meet one of those that has that little, chip, it's like they've been... they're just ready [for you] to knock it off their shoulder. . . . Now most of the dads, they're not a problem, they're calmer…I always do the "like to have a Coke?" thing. It makes them feel like they're part of the family. They're close friends. They don't feel like they are in a lawyer's office or something. Do you think that they just look at us like we are up on a pedestal sometimes?

One principal described an "awakening" that occurred as the result of connecting with a specific piece of research. Mr. Wesley explained this event:

> I probably had an epiphany of sorts…I had a sense of clarity about my mission and how I could make a difference 10 years ago. And I had this deep desire for that clarity and I didn't have it. I hadn't had it up to that point in terms of being a difference maker. I knew I could manage and I could be a decent administrator, but I didn't have that deep sense of commitment to making a difference in thinking. So, that's where I was 10 years ago. At that point, I decided that I needed some answers to questions, so I sought them out. I found it in brain research. When I did some reading at the time my first real epiphany about this came with--- Geoffrey Caine and his wife, wrote a book *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain*. That book just made me "ahh-hah" over and over again on what I could do as a leader and how I could influence folks that work with kids to help build that bridge from *Schools Without Failure* to a sense that I could make that work, truly make that work, in the minds and hearts of the people I work with.

A sensitizing epiphany, that changed the way in which he related to his students, came to a principal the first year he began in administration. He realized, too late for one child, that there are extreme differences in each child's family situation. The traditional one-style-fits-all is no longer a viable assumption. Mr. South seemed almost apologetic in his tone as he relayed:

> I'll never forget when I first started; we were having to do the old roll book. And it had every line you had to put down. I had to have the address, had to have how many miles they [students] lived from home, had to have the parents' name written down. I asked one little girl where her dad was and she said she didn't know. So, I said, "Is he dead? Is he deceased?" And she said, "Well, I guess you'd call it illegitimate." So. I would not ask, (after that) you know. When I have a child in here and I'm calling home, I ask, "Okay, now, who will probably answer the phone? Is it Nanny, or Grandmom, or Mamaw?" [He redirects his aside to me]: They are, they're different people you know? I think that has changed so much and we need to stay abreast of the new family and lifestyles and things like that.

Epiphanies Triggered by Other Means

Other administrators credited their epiphanies to an individual person who influenced their thinking in a way that forever changed their thoughts regarding their leadership. Mr. Young described the effects of working under the supervision of a more right-brained superintendent:

> In all my 31 years, I've never met anyone who was as "outside the box" as Dr. Gill Minors, (pseudonym), and I've never met anyone who encouraged others to be outside the box as much as he does. And it's almost, you know that's become a cliché that Gill lives in . . . I learned more during his short tenure here about how the brain works and how little we, as educators give attention to that. And he even had a profound influence on me in terms of the part that low-risk plays, both for students and for teachers…he used to say "drive out fear" and you'll get a lot farther…and, I don't think I'm very good at that, but at least he, he's got me thinking about it and looking…I mean, I'm better than I would have been…He used to talk about critical mass. We celebrate the small percentage who are doing what you want them to do, concentrate on getting them resources, don't worry about the naysayers, and more and more people will join, and pretty soon you'll have the critical mass to accomplish whatever it is you're trying to do.

In another situation, Mr. Flash described an unexpected result that blindsided him in the early years of his career where legal ramifications for financial mismanagement made him keenly aware of this accountability issue:

A couple of my experiences go back to my early years at Davis School (pseudonym) where I served as principal of that school program. When I took over …I had requested an audit because the facility had never been audited. Low and behold, did I unearth a can of worms because the bookkeeper had been stealing, embezzling money for years. So, I had my rights read to me by the TBI, FBI and then had to reconstruct books for three of four years and that was an experience I will never forget.

In an interesting situation relayed by Mr. Flash, a lady with no insurance coverage was involved in a traffic accident with one of the school's vehicles. The lady appeared at the school one day asking if he would accept payments of $15 dollars per week for the damages so she could get her license back. Mr. Flash told her that he didn't have the authority to do that but she could come to the board meeting and plead her case. Unbeknown to Mr. Flash, the woman's agitated husband followed him back to his office. Mr. Flash continued the story:

> She went to back out to the car and her husband showed up. When her husband showed up, I explained to him because he was just…same story—you are keeping her from work, whatever. Well, I excused myself as quietly as I could and went back in my office and I shut the door. All of a sudden, I heard a big *bam* on the door. Well, I called my assistant principal at the time, and told him, as chicken as I am, I will open the door if you'll come down the hallway. Well, the man was lying in the floor claiming that I had knocked him down with the door and he had a neck injury. . . . Anyway, we called the police and the police came and they took him away with a backboard, rescue squad, and what not. Now the amazing thing of this is, the door opens to the inside. It does not go past the doorframe, so the door *could not have hit the man*.

Regardless of the intensity of some people's comments that pellet against a normally toughened hide, occasionally the badgering takes its toll and a principal will react with a little less than the professional restraint expected. On one occasion, Mr. Flash had endured enough and responded accordingly:

> I did lose it two years ago. I had a visitor, which the gentleman, and I use that term loosely, was a dentist. He and his wife were separated and his fifth-grade son had threatened to kill somebody here at school. In light of the circumstances and all, I sent him home for a day. His daddy came in and just laughed at me and said, "I can't believe you're doing this," and he went on and on and then he got belligerent. So then, all of a sudden, I lost it and said, "Don't let the door hit you on the way out." And he said, "What did you say?" And I said it again. It just popped out. And his reaction was, "I'm going to call the superintendent," and I said, "That's fine." And when he left, I called the superintendent. He never did contact him, but I just had all I could take that day, and it came out, you know? …So, you're dealing with an irrational community at times.

Mr. Johnson's experience as an interim principal sparked a realization regarding the change in relationships that occurred with the staff he supervised. He related how he began to regard them differently as a result of his new position:

> As a staff member, working with peers, you view each other one way, and you have a certain pattern of relationships. I was on that staff and then I became the principal of that staff, and then I went back as a teacher on that staff. So I got to see it from a number of perspectives. The relationships really do change. Whether we like it or not, there is a management rank and file, a relationship that is different from the relationship you have peer to peer. I'll use the words I used then: "These people are trying to run numbers on me all over the place." And they were people I knew and did not think of in that way. It was a little bit shocking. It was certainly disturbing or uncomfortable, because I thought more of them than to think they would do some of the simple devious stuff that I saw them doing. And then I had to go back and work with them, of course, after I was principal.

Later, Mr. Johnson elaborated on a rude awakening that occurred as he was leaving the ranks of teachers to become a principal. A colleague advised him:

> "…don't become one of those old *administrators*, keep being that same old nice guy that you always are." There's a real tendency to buy that; you don't think in any other terms. But I did change that pretty rapidly. And [now] the way I think about that is: If you change jobs, you need to find out what you have to become, or do to be successful at the job you just accepted. If you continue to act like a teacher, you're not going to do well as an administrator. So, one of the things I never say anymore is that little routine about "Gee I hope you don't change." You darn well better change. Because what you have to do is succeed at the new set of needs or demands that are facing you. And if you don't you fail. To be a good teacher, do those things that are necessary to be a good teacher. When you become an administrator, do those things that are necessary to be a good administrator.

Occasionally a critical incident can revolve around change, especially as it relates to an entire community. Mrs. Long illustrated her experience with the implementation of a multiage program in her second year of administration. Mrs. Long explained:

> . . . it was the type of incident that can cause an educator to wake up in a cold sweat from worrying about the possibility that at a school board meeting an angry parent might defame you, while you must sit silently without offering a rebuttal.

Mrs. Long survived the nightmare, but she admitted it took years to recover from the public embarrassment for her staff, and her program began to be challenged at every turn. She recalled:

Our school hit a crisis with multiage. And the whole school was in crisis, and working through that definitely shaped and changed and taught me a lot of things if you can look at crises as gross experiences. We as a school came together and worked through so much that we would not be the school we are today had that not happened. Because we had to work through, with our parents, we bonded with people, what we chose to do… (She stopped mid-sentence and regrouped)and when the schools around us went through this, they would have group meeting of parents. I recognized right away that groupthink is not something that you want to face. Especially if it is accusing, and I don't know, it gets ugly. I promised our superintendent that if he would not make us do that, we would have individual parent conferences and we would open the doors to anybody who wanted to come in, and we would sit down and talk for as long as they wanted to talk and answer any questions. And I attended 60 parent conferences within a very short period of time that were very probing about our school. We had to answer questions over and over again about what we were doing--explain ourselves. Instead of that being a negative, it wasn't--It was a positive when we got finished. Because we did a good job and we— instead of those parents turning against us, they all went away [thinking]: "Why this is okay." And it really became a strength instead of a negative and it showed me not to be afraid when you think things are going wrong. Sometimes they can turn around. If you'll use them, you can turn them around to make it work for your benefit. The teachers came together, the whole community came together, and we were a different school after we finished…from that whole process. I don't regret those days at all. I really feel like it did us a whole lot of good.

As the principals spoke, relating incident after incident, the mood was never overly excited or intense. It was as if these situations that might seem bizarre or unsettling to the average middle manager had just become a blur among the myriad of unusual occurrences that principals encounter within a routine schedule. Other themes emerged through the constant comparative analysis of data that began to reinforce this premise as each interview unfolded.

Career Stages

There is no finite definition, no rubric currently set forth by which to determine the appropriate career stage that someone falls into because of his or her age or due to his or her years of experience. Throughout the interview process, I investigated the possibility of designing a hierarchy that paralleled the specific life stages that Sheehy (1995) described in her book, *Passages: Mapping Your Life Across Time*. I attempted to design several different rubrics as a means to determine: (a) influence of levels of experience and a change in leadership style,

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(b) levels of experience and breadth and depth of individual responses, or (c) levels of experience and knowledge base and human-relations skills. I could not come up with a pattern of data that would fit any definite scheme without there being as many exceptions to the definition as there were examples. Some principals, regardless of age or experience, were masters in the area of implementing change and yet could not get a handle on how to resolve personnel conflicts within their buildings. On the other hand, an inexperienced principal might be very good at relationships and yet be clueless as to what direction was needed in the area of curriculum. The following topics represent discussion segments that gave representation to all levels of experiencing the elementary principalship. As the same issues were discussed by principals whose experience spanned the gamut from 2 years to 30 years and beyond, some conclusions might be speculated, but they were inconclusive. The only major difference that was significant by the data collected through the interview process was that veteran principals were more resigned to saying, "This is how our system works and so here is how I have to work within the system to accomplish what is best for the students in my school." Novice principals still had a bit of wonderment and naiveté as to how to plan the work and work the plan. Other than this issue that may have identified only an attitude of maturity, neither the language nor the described practice of the novice or veteran practitioners could be identified as to their level of experience based solely on any criteria in their responses. Each section that follows shares data recorded by all levels of practitioners and yet the issues and relative emphasis they are given are more consistent with the job description of the elementary-school principalship as offered by the interviewees than any common factors such as years of experience, rural, urban, or suburban school setting, age, or gender of the participant.

It appeared that this was one more example where educational issues did not fit the industrial model. In a concentrative effort to quantify the career of the elementary principal into a neat table of stages, the only commonality found was the uniqueness of each school, each program, and each administrator's experiences. The world of business is built upon consistent

schedules, with standard words like "nine to five," "40-hour week," and "overtime." The world where educating children is the service or outcome cannot be standardized. Children are unique, with unique needs that cannot be measured with a ruler, a scale, or calipers. Consequently, the business of dealing with their education is rarely as simple as two plus two.

Principals enter their careers from a variety of background experiences and from numerous chronological age groups. There is no specific progression or order of events to impact their preparation. In the medical field, a student progresses through graduate school to an internship, to a residency, to clinical practice, and on to private practice. In educational administration, there are high school teachers, coaches, and guidance counselors who enter the elementary principalship arena. There are individuals as young as 25 and as old as perhaps 50 who begin in the principalship. There is no way to standardize the myriad of variable combinations that contribute to the subjective influence of these experiences on the administrator. Consequently, each career becomes very unique. In answering a question relative to his philosophy, Mr. "O" succinctly summed up the disparity, "When I became a principal, I never knew how it was going to be, what it was going to be like. I know I'm different than any other principal and every other principal is different from me."

Because of the nature of the extreme variability of experiences that accompanied novice principals, I chose to track their careers across the tenure of their lives in a way that allowed for the uniqueness of each participant's entry level. I chose to address the change of perspectives that occurred as each interviewee journeyed through the principalship by quoting the words of individual participants as they reflected on their own experiences, their relationships, their leadership styles, and their process. Mrs. Long, a veteran principal, remembered how early in her career, irate parent conferences challenged her:

> I had to learn personally how to work with people that are extremely confronted, how to work through a situation where people are extremely confronted with you … the first time that happened, it blew me away. I had a parent that would call me—now this may seem very simple to any other person—but I had a parent early in my principalship that would call me almost weekly and just cuss me out. That was the biggest gift to me

because I learned how to be able to listen to that and not let it upset me. I could work through it. It helped me to grow into being able to work with confronted people without getting upset myself. And, you helped me with that. Because I remember, and you will not remember this, I'm sure. But you told me one time that when you work with people who are confronting you, that if you can concentrate on 'what can I do next to help' instead of getting all balled up into the ego of it, is to say to yourself, although that is happening, 'What can I do to help with this situation?' And concentrate on that. That helped me to just give me something to hang on to when you get in a real emotional situation, you don't let your emotions cloud clear thinking. And I can do that now; I can have somebody cuss me out totally, hang up on the phone, and my blood pressure doesn't even rise (laugh). And that has helped me probably more than anything. Because working with people's children, you are working with emotions so many times and if you don't learn as a leader to cut to what's important and lead that person into good decisions and good rational thinking, you've got a mess on your hands. And, that, that as far as just getting through the day, that one thing has really been helpful to me.

Mrs. Daisy entered the principalship as the youngest person in her building and faced the challenge of leading others who were older and more experienced than she was. She stated that in order to make her leadership work, she had to try a more pragmatic approach involving group process as a team leader rather than taking an authoritarian role. She added:

I don't know the exact terminology--definitely it's a teamwork atmosphere; we're all in this together and everybody's going to pull their own weight and we'll get the job done. My age--I was 27, and I came into a situation where I was the youngest person in the building. A good majority of folks here were old enough to be a parent. Because of that, it would have been difficult to come in with a strong type of leadership where you're going to do it this way … I felt my age forced me to bring in the team, to kind of collaborate. Now that I've got a little experience, I don't know that I'd do it that way.

Mr. Young spoke of his change in leadership style as being one that he was still not fully comfortable with as it kept altering based on the expectations of each new superintendent that passed through. He described that he had little opportunity to develop his own style as a transformational leader because of the constant shift of tides. He expounded:

I came here in the middle of the year. As most people realize, you don't want to come in and try to make changes too quickly. So, I used all of the rest of that year to try to keep things on an even keel and learn the culture, and learn the people and so forth. And then at the close of my first full year, I told folks, "I'm going to meet with you individually and tell you what I would like for you to teach next year." What they were hearing was it was going to be fruit basket turnover within the school. My first superintendent told me after that, "If I had one reservation about you as a principal, it was that I was afraid you couldn't be a son of a bitch if you had to." Pardon my French. After saying that, he said,

"You've answered that question. I figure you know how to be a son of a bitch." Now, contrast that with the next superintendent who said, "drive out fear."   I didn't have fruit basket turnover to create fear. I did what I thought needed to be done and I was trying to maximize the resources that we had. I still think I did the right thing. But you can see the difference in what was reinforced by one superintendent to the next one. That was an epiphany of sorts. You know, to go from one superintendent who was patting me on the back because I could be a son of a bitch, to another who is saying "drive out fear" and interestingly enough, when that second superintendent left, the next one that came in was very much like the first.

Mr. Wesley talked about how he prided himself on one unchanged element in his leadership over the years relating to his consistency of values:

I look back at my very first year and one thing that I'm particularly proud of is that I've stayed true to my principles. We're here because of the kids and therefore we should, as educators, have a desire to be better for kids every day. And to be able to do that, we have to know how the brain works in its optimal sense so that we're in tune with the research that tells us how to practically function in a learning community. I felt that way 20 years ago, but with not as much clarity. What I have now that I didn't have then was experience and wisdom. I have much to learn in this life, but I have learned a lot about human nature by being involved with folks in this endeavor. . . . being an effective leader is feeling like you're part of this dynamic. You are a contributor, but you're also a participant.

Mr. Edwards reported that he considered his current style of leadership was consistent with his early years that were rooted in his religious beliefs:

I guess you go into it and the first year is the honeymoon. You think that everybody is hopefully going to pat you on the back, but you realize early on, that probably before the year is out that you're going to make a decision that is going to make everyone unhappy at some point. You just have to have thick skin and not expect praise; expect to do your job and be real principal-centered early on. I guess Stephen Covey is one of the things that I've adhered to--primarily because of my own religious beliefs. . .

Although his leadership style had changed, Mr. "O" stated that his philosophy remained the same:

I think my style of leadership has probably changed but my philosophy hasn't changed. My philosophy of leadership is that I don't ask people to do things that I don't do and have never done and I try to set examples. If I ask the teachers to be here on time, I try to be here on time. If I ask the teachers to stay until the 3:30 bell, I'm here. I'm very seldom away from the school. I'm here at 6:45 in the morning; I'm here until 4:00 in the afternoon. I try to, I guess, lead by example. I can't ask them to do anything I'm not willing to do myself.

Mr. Blue explained that over the years the accountability movement had more impact on his leadership style than he would have liked. He had become adept at empowering teachers and allowing them to be collaborative in decision-making, but now, as he described it, the accountability issue had almost caused a marked change in the language of his leadership:

> I really believe in empowering teachers. But I think that has probably changed, more than anything, because of the testing and the accountability. It's caused me to be more of a dictator. You pretty much have to say, "We're going to work on language, we're going to work on editing skills," you know, narrow it down. Probably when I first started off, I would have told you that whatever is best for the child is what we need to do. But I think what I've changed to is, I'm more for the children, I'm for the parents, I'm for the teachers, I'm for my community, I'm for my family. I think you reach a point where you have to say, "Okay, I'm going to do what's best for the whole . . ." You can't just look at one thing; you have to look at the whole picture.

Mr. South commented that his leadership style was more situational as it changed everyday based on the situation and he saw his role in middle management as the "shock absorber" for edicts from above and complaints from outside the school. He explained:

> I think I've often referred to principals as being the 'shock absorber' between the parents, administrators, and teachers. We're getting into all the different ends. I've had principals who were not good shock absorbers and if the administrator came down hard, they came down hard on the teachers…

When asked to think back to their years as a beginning administrator, several practitioners remembered that they began more autocratic and task-oriented and moved in later years to be more developed in their relationships and they implemented more Theory Y practices of trust. Mr. Zack shared the variation he experienced in his leadership:

> I began as a principal very autocratic. That was my nature; but I think that's one of the reasons why—the person who helped me get into administration—saw that. I liked to take charge, whatever the situation was. And we juggled those things. However, as I've learned more, I've learned to trust people's advice.

Barriers to Research-Based Practices

As principal preparation programs graduate leaders with much of the same knowledge base and foundational coursework to certify for the elementary principalship license, a question is raised as to what are some perceivable barriers that prevent practitioners from implementing

learned research-based practices and applied theory to their daily routine? The interviews

revealed several themes that addressed concerns elementary principals have had procuring

needed resources of time, personnel, materials, funding, and opportunities for training that kept

them current in supervision of curriculum trends.

Instructional Leadership Issues

Curriculum innovations were the most prevalent concern by principals at all levels of

experience. Some had moved from a high school position to accept a principalship at the

elementary level and admitted that they knew little of what to propose to improve the current

program. Others reported that they were not familiar enough with their system's textbook

adoption series to make recommendations to teachers regarding implementation. Still others

were interested in knowing comparatively what was on the market and what curriculum was

parallel with best-researched practices. Miss DeDe, a novice principal, indicated that she was

somewhat envious of her husband who was an administrator of another school outside the district

when she realized that she was not on the cutting edge with her level of professional knowledge.

She began:

> Currently, I don't feel that I've kept up to date. I was discussing that with my husband. I said, "How do you still know all these things?" I was coming home the other day thinking, "I don't know what I'm doing. You talk about some of these things, and I've got useless information floating in my brain." I just don't feel comfortable. Tomorrow, we're going to be out of school for election day, and I said, "I'm just going to get all my books and just sit down and refresh myself with what's going on and try to hit the library and get some periodicals because I just haven't kept up with" –like I said, when I get home—I'm doing the kid thing, I'm in the homework mode—and not my own homework. So, I feel kind of left behind, where he (husband) is more current on these things. I don't know how to keep up, that's one thing I'm struggling with.

A colleague with a similar range of experience in the principalship noted two hurdles that she

identified as potential barriers: personnel with "old-school mentality," and lack of teacher

incentives. She commented:

> I've been fortunate that I don't have a lot of resistance when we do want to try things. Some of that I will take credit for because I do have a sense that you don't just come in

and say, "Okay, you've taught for 25 years, put all that stuff away, you're going to do this now." That's not the way to handle it. That can be a barrier at times, that old-school mentality of, "This is the way I've always done it." And I'm fortunate that I don't have a lot of that. Everyone here is pretty receptive to new things or at least willing to give it a try. There's a lot of things that I . . . wanted to implement and we're pretty much forced to stay after school to do those things. You can offer teacher inservice credit, but in this system, there's no money out there for a stipend or anything like that. We are one of the lowest paid counties in the state of Tennessee. So people at times get a little resentful to have to continuously stay after school to do things when there's no money.

Mr. Wilson, a veteran principal, discussed instructional leadership as one of the areas that he could not see his way clear to move to a priority level. He observed that being a building manager often took time away from the focus on instruction. He explained his concern:

> That's… sometimes one of my weakest areas. I feel like that's probably because we get caught up in everyday demands. I have, most days, including my part time, about 70 people here on staff. We have a lot of needs and from time to time we have a high absentee rate . . . with employees. So, my major task at hand a lot of days is meeting the needs of employees, meeting the needs of classrooms, and then the students. And instruction sometimes goes on the back burner.

Miss DeDe, having fewer than five years' experience, had a ready answer as to why her recent exposure to course work and theory was difficult to put to use:

> . . . time, and sometimes, materials. Fortunately, I don't have that much discipline to deal with, but I would love to be able to lock my door for about a week and sit down and make a plan for my staff, specifically for this school, to say, "This is the direction we want to go in" and go for it. I think sometimes our superiors don't provide us that either and so they're giving us restricted leadership, not freeing us. They come up with something and I wish they would either give us the free reign to do what we need to do in our school, or provide one solitary goal, instead of this is the goal this year, next year we'll have a new goal, next year something else. There isn't a stable set of goals. That's frustrating to me. That could be a new principal type thing. This year I'm starting to say. "This is where I want to go." And I want to be there now. I think just having time to do something like that without having to do paper work, and deal with janitorial salesmen, and picture salesmen, and everything else. You can't do that because your job is the one to be bothered.

Miss De De's experience of interruptions was recounted by many principals as a part of the frustration of the position, whereas many also acknowledged that interruptions were a positive element of the position where banal routines are unheard of.

Fragmentation

Many principals discussed a pattern of events whereby they arrived at the office with a list of priorities to be addressed and deadlines to be pursued during the day. Many had envisioned focusing on strategies that upgraded the instructional program and curriculum with teachers' input such as meeting with the School Improvement Plan committee, or developing an inservice plan directed at brain-based research. Unfortunately, reality often interfered with their plans. As the school day drew to a close, their lists of unaccomplished tasks remained because of shifts to more urgent priorities that encroached on their plans: the fight on the bus before breakfast, the irate parent who showed up without an appointment, the supervisor who came to observe a teacher and then came in to talk to the principal about the results of his evaluation. These activities all took a bite out of time from the principal's predetermined schedule. Mr. Wesley described his experience, "I can have 15 things on a list to accomplish in a given day, and I won't get to the first one depending on what the challenges are for that day." Mrs. Long described her feelings of being overwhelmed by the interruptions to organizing the work and the energy it took to shift gears every few minutes:

> When I taught, you could go in in the morning and you could plan what you were going to do and even though you are working with 25 children and you are interrupted of course, you could still work through a task. There is no way to work through a task in my job without…very seldom do I go 10 minutes without being interrupted to make another decision, and while you're making that decision you're interrupted to make another decision. And I think it's just trying to keep your head through it all. That is one of the hardest thing to do and then try to lead people through challenges like the definite challenges that we go through now, it's overwhelming and sometimes you just get overwhelmed with the overwhelming feeling of it. It's hard to keep your head with all of that going on, and that, to me, is the biggest challenge.

Mr. Flash described that a typical good intention of principals was having plans to hit the ground running in order to attend to their pre-established list of priorities for the day. When they arrived at school, many discovered once again that "the best laid plans of mice and men" were usually foiled. He explained how he handled this reality:

> If you have to do thinking, you come in early, or you do it at home. You do not do it during work hours because--from either children, staff, secretary, school board calling,

different people--you don't get anything done. Whatever agenda you write down on your notes that you get up in the middle of the night and say I need to do this and this today? When you come to school, you can forget it! Because you have a new set of problems by the time you hit the door. If you want something done or you have to think, you come early-early when nobody's here.

Reflection Opportunities

There were many thoughts on the need for reflection time for decision making and long-term planning and how to create it. Even for principals like Mr. Berry, who at first stated, "I've always been fortunate that I can lay it down when I leave, yeah, at 3 o'clock. I don't think about it until the next day." However, a dichotomy became evident when, in a later part of the interview, I asked how he would recommend carving out time for reflection. He commented:

> …a good way is to mow the yard, yeah, you know you can do things, you know, you reflect. I can reflect when I'm mowing or doing something like that or wasting time … and love it because each time you can think things through and … there is never time during the day…

Mr. Berry, like many other professionals, apparently only spoke as though he left his work at the office. When asked if he had time to sit and sort things out when it got really busy, Mr. O shared a common experience:

> ….at least not here. Now at the intermediate, it was a little bit different. It seems like I had more time to dwell on those things. But at the primary level, there's just so much going on, so many people, and the number of students we have. We have an assistant principal, but she's part time and also serves as part-time guidance counselor. So, she has a dual role and a very hard role to play in the school . . . a time just for contemplation and what's gone on during the day, or what's going on during the day, sometimes that happens when I' m on the way home; sometimes when I get home and get a phone call by either an irate parent or someone who's upset with something that a teacher has done or that I've done at school or that happened on the bus. There's not really much time to reflect on some of that. The assistant principal and I discussed that we needed time to sit down and just work on our curriculum itself to make sure that we're doing the things that we need to do to get the teachers and the students where they need to be on the same page with following the SOL, teaching the SOL format, and documentation for it. Those take time that we never seem to have because we're all wrapped up in cafeteria, bus problems, discipline, and trying to get to classrooms to observe teachers at least twice a year and nontenured at least three times a year and it becomes a difficult task.

Although principals apparently recognized the need for reflection, they were often forced to make decisions with the rapid-fire precision of a semi automatic. Mr. Smith aptly described the situation:

> Well, 75% of the job is snap decisions; you've got to be thinking on your feet all the time. In those types of decision-making situations, the thing I stop and look at is what's going to benefit the child or children involved. There's no arguing with that. I don't care who comes through the door, if I've made the best decision for the child, they can't argue with that. So, this is it—step quick on my feet type of thinking comes from okay, we've got this problem, how are the kids going to benefit from it? As far as a major thing, when I do have a bit of time to reflect, for me it's a matter of just sleeping on it.   Just trying to get a good night's sleep, and that's hard sometimes if it's a big problem or decision.

Making decisions, often without having all the information needed, is risky business but because of the number of times they are called upon each day to act as a "Solomon" type, the elementary principals developed their own system or process to prioritize items: those that had to be discussed with teachers, issues that would be better slept on, and situations that could be closed out that day. Mr. Smith described the situation well:

> The day's very busy so there's not a lot of reflection time. You make a lot of decisions very quickly. But with big decisions, I've learned to take my time. I learned early as a principal that on those major decisions you better take your time and think it through. Get input from teachers and staff . . . and then make your best decision. But, a lot of times, to be honest with you, you do have to make a lot of decisions on the spur of the moment. I think as you get experience, you get better at that.

Mr. Blue shared a similar response:

> Reflection is good but sometimes you have to make decisions so quickly, you're reflecting afterwards. You have to feel good about your decision. But, I don't know that I go anywhere. I'll sit in here and I'll talk to somebody, a teacher, the assistant principal, or even the secretary. She's become a close friend because we know the family. Just here, and if it's a decision that I don't feel comfortable with, I won't make the decision real quick. I'll try to weigh out what if I do this? Or what if I do that? And try to see what might be the outcome of all these different directions and then try to make a decision. Once you make a decision, though, you should pretty much stand by it. Actually, once you make that decision it's a relief. Even though you may have to go through some grief, it's a relief. But reflection, probably as a method, we don't do enough of that. It's so important to think about how did I come up with that? How did I make my mind up that way? Would I make my mind up that same way again?

The principals shared many ideas about the best time to reflect on their day's events. Some professionals used their jogging time, about 45 minutes a session. Other professionals found themselves waking up in the night to organize an "ABC" list or they reflected on their day while driving to and from work. Mr. Edwards elaborated:

> Probably the best time's driving to and from work or the times that you're alone and have time to think back and ponder over the events of the day, how they went, how you would handle those differently. Sometimes when you're not sleeping well at night. I guess that's the best time to think on those things."

Most participants admitted that time for reflection came outside of their workday. However, several gave suggestions for building reflection time into the work schedule. Mr. Young discussed the value of administrative retreats or summer conferences away from town to interact professionally. Mrs. Agatha commented on her reputation with the staff for seeking out opportunities for reflection:

> Many of my teachers kid me because I used to be an itinerant teacher and travel. That was one of the best ways for me to solve a problem. I was in the car riding down the road…because it did give me the opportunity to look at it from all sides. There weren't any other stimuli other than getting, you know, following the traffic. But I truly had the opportunity to be in a quiet place and to think about a particular problem. And even now, my teachers, when they present a particular problem, I will tell them that I need time to "get on the road on that one," and then I'll get back in touch. So, yeah, you do need time for reflection.

The most creative idea for finding reflection time went to a principal who indeed found a way to make it happen, despite all odds. Mrs. Collier responded to the need in a rather unique way:

> I have a real closet around here where I can sometimes go. Some days I just have to. I just want people out of my face. And I hate to be so crude, but when I can't stand just one more person in my face! It doesn't happen too often, probably about once every two to three months. I will just be having a really horrible no-good day--but I don't want to be unprofessional to my staff. I don't want to be unprofessional to a parent. I just literally go and I can lock myself in a little dressing room that we have off the stage. I can just go in there, I can take a book, or I can just go and sit and close my eyes for 15 or 20 minutes. I give the cue to my secretary so that she knows where to find me if there's a crisis. But she's the only one who knows. I say, "I'm going to go chill" and she knows that unless it's the superintendent or God, that nobody bothers me. Then after about 15 to 20 minutes, I typically am okay. That's probably my reflection. Typically, I just keep going and I reflect this time of day (5:00 p.m.) I usually try and get out of here by 6:00 or 6:30, so I usually have the last hour or so of my day to kind of think about it.

Mrs. Long commented on the result of having no time to reflect by explaining:

> …you need some time away … you need some time to clear your head. You need some time to get away from it so you just don't get totally burned out and if you don't give yourself some time, I think you start getting negative.

Finally, Mr. Johnson, although lengthy in his description, was rather poetic in his decision-

making process; however it was a very well articulated walk-through of how decisions are made:

> While the world loves men on white horses, or women on white horses, you can make decisions too quick. When I'm faced with one that my intuition, even though it may not be cognitive at that time, when I'm feeling like there's something more to this, when I'm feeling like I'm standing in a minefield and just can't see the mines…what I try to do is not make that decision. Put if off a day, maybe two. If I can, I'll put it off and I'll look at the pieces and try to get a clearer picture of where it all goes and I'll do the legwork about who knows who and who's talked to who, and how people feel, and what is going on. And then through that period, at some point, there's this clarification that takes place. I don't cause it. After I think about it and think about it things just get clearer and all of a sudden I see—aah, that's a better way to go. Instead of actually writing that letter that puts words on pages about what you think and how it's going to be and that sort of stuff, well, maybe I'll just have a conference with the person and maybe we won't connect this issue with that issue—let's just take them one at a time. Let's change our tactic and point of view and let's have a conversation with one of their friends and see how everything's going there, and maybe I can elicit some help from somebody. What I try to do is postpone it until that kind of clarifying thing happens. Sometimes you can't do it. Sometimes somebody is standing there and you just make a decision and I think it was Nemitz who had the quote: "When you're in command—command." It's real simple. And when you're put in that kind of spot—command. Go ahead, take a deep breath, pretend like you actually know the right answer, and then just move right along and don't worry about it. You had to make the decision you did and if they're unhappy, I'm sorry. But, you know, they, like teachers or even parents, can't understand that dynamic. You had to make a decision and every important one that I ever recall making, I made it a little before I was ready and with a little less information than I really needed. Principals don't have as complete of a picture as people think. In fact that's another thing I realized when I moved from the classroom. My actual understanding of all those pieces that go on in the classrooms is less. I have a lot more classrooms; I have a lot more to think about.

Mr. Johnson also made a priceless sport analogy that captured the disparity in the principals'

viewpoint and the teacher's perception of it:

> It's like a quarterback. From the stands, you see the whole play develop. Everything is clear to you. Standing on the field, with all those monstrous guys in front of you, you just get a flicker here and a flicker there, and then you've got to throw the ball somewhere, you, know? So, you add these little flickers up, but your actual view is nowhere near as good as it is from the stands. Yet, you have to make those decisions

based on what it is that's in your view. So, a lot of times, principals labor under that and teachers, especially, do not understand that. They think principals are sitting in the stands, able to view all the things they've done. They know all the good things they've done; all the bad things they've done. And that's really not true. To some extent your information is tremendously limited because you're farther away from the classroom.

Politics

The principals in the study expressed that things are not always as they seem. They disclosed that there are often unstated mores that significantly hinder or threaten the security of those who venture outside the sanctity of the norm. According to the participants, innovation and program change was not always looked upon as a good thing. As one principal so deftly described the situation:

> The functional definition or description of the principalship for the past 100 years is real simple: You damp down conflict and maintain smooth operations. That is what you are judged on. It doesn't matter what they tell you you are judged on. That's what you're actually judged on. You generate three or four significant complaints out of your building, and central office will sit over there and say, "Boy I just don't know what's happening over there at School X. It used to be a pretty good place, you know, in fact he used to really run a pretty good school, but boy, things are coming apart now." And that can happen while your test scores are rising and while everything else on the professional side is very strong because you're not judged on it. That's nice; they love that stuff, see good test scores in the paper, win a prize, get an award, … they love it. But the actual job that you're doing is to dampen down conflict and maintain smooth operations. You keep the smooth lake smooth.

Mr. Johnson used an analogy he created from an old Andy Griffith movie to further define the parallel:

> Remember Andy Griffith was in an interesting movie some time back called *No Time for Sergeants*? It was 20-30 years back. Well, they go into a little vignette that somebody ought to extract and do as a comedy thing for administrators. The major tells the captain, who tells the lieutenant, who tells the sergeant, who tells me. Well [here's] what the analogy is about: We have this smooth calm lake and you are getting ready to throw rocks in it, and we don't like that. Well, once I realized that, I started plumbing the trappings of it. And when I did that, I actually got a clear picture of how it really works. Once I knew how it really worked, I could chart my course in a much more comfortable way because there are some things where there is sound and fury but they go nowhere. And there are other things that are very quiet, but are something like a minefield. You can't see the mines. There are other pieces that if you don't know about, they can be career enders.

Mr. Johnson went on to explain that rather than allowing this threat to stop one from implementing change or doing things that would make a difference for children, a wise principal could figure out what the response might be from central office in a given situation and make it work for their school's benefit. He suggested:

> Let's say you plumb that piece a little further and we understand what our actual job description really is. One, you can never use that to keep from going forward and trying anyway. So, yeah, maybe three phone calls can get a new initiative stopped, and maybe you know that. Well, figure out a way to use what you know to get what you need. Don't use it as an excuse to not do anything.

Later in the interview Mr. Johnson conveyed what he had learned about how to implement new programs in a way that did not make ripples in the "smooth lake." He stated:

> Don't run flags up. You want to try a new innovation—don't name it. If you name it, they, the undefined they, have something to shoot at. Why do that? You may not want to go out and get heavy press on every innovation you try to install. When you do, you will find that there's a core of people somewhere, who don't like the idea and are going to rally against it so why not go ahead and take what you can get, do what you can do, forget the ego and the publicity, make those changes internally that are real, and move along. I've come to those kinds of administrative understandings.

Even the two novice practitioners in the study quickly became aware of the political arena in which they were operating and discovered that the results of errors in judgment were often met with harsh realities. The stories of their experiences were very different, as was the climate, the design, and even the aura in each of their buildings. I distinctly remember the entryway of the newer building as stark. It was spotless; it was pristine and it looked as if no one had ever inhabited the hallway. There were no skid marks trailed from black-soled tennis shoes, no students' work, no logo, no mission statement, no trophy case; in other words, there were no visible means of communicating any message about the school. In contrast, the other, older building was not as clean and it was obvious that craftsmanship in maintenance was not a priority. The holes in the granite flooring remained where the old restroom partitions had once been fastened to the floor. The makeshift display rails in the hallway were rough-cut 2 x 4's with a routered groove that held a cork strip mounted to the wall. The thirsty planks that drank up the paint left an unfinished surface barely washed with uneven stain. It was interesting to note that

the contrasts did not stop with the facilities. Although both principals were relatively new to administration, one had the full support of the board and the other had made a choice rather early to stand his ground for children and to stand up against the political prowess that was traditional in that part of the state. Both administrators were young with more poise and assurance than I had expected. One had an office with windows facing a meadow and a wonderful view of the mountains. The other was more of a cinderblock closet where pieces of furniture were chosen to fit the niches and offsets of an uneven wall. The first principal very quickly relayed a family connection to the political realm of the city's founding fathers. The second principal relayed the tale of his political suicide the first year of his principalship when he chose to stand up against a school board member who had previously made decisions for the school, including which teacher taught which subject and what the custodians' schedule should be. If one were handed the scenarios of both their first year's experiences, identifying them with the correct facility would have been a simplistic assignment without even entering the building; just a drive-by glance at the physical plant was indication enough of the situation. Unfortunately, the interior resources mirrored the political climate as well. The principal described what happened when he decided to take a stand against a well-entrenched school board member:

> Without saying too much, ... the school board member that hired me and I had a big conflict. He and I had a real run-in and ever since, I've learned that what you decide and things that you do aren't just affecting what you do in this little building. Things carry over into the community and to the central office. And the way you handle it can make or break it sometimes. You have to learn to be diplomatic, and it's a real give and take situation. You don't always get your way just because you're the leader in the building. That little situation I guess was kind of an eye opener for me. The nature of the problem was that he, before I came, the board member had a lot of say in what went on…When I came--and I was the person he wanted in the position. To be quite honest, he wanted me because he thought that relationship would continue. When I came, that wasn't the way it was going to be done. I was hired to do the job and I did the best I could with it. At some point it came to a head that he wasn't getting his way. Fortunately, I had some folks back me up and that's the only reason why I'm still here. Because of that, there's been a lot of --you know, I don't get a lot of help. Other principals can call their board members and say, "Gosh, we really need such and such" and they can get it. And I don't. That's the fallout; I'm really left on my own in a lot of ways. It's easier for other principals to get things, or hire someone, or whatever. That relationship has never gotten back to a good one. It's cordial, but it's as cordial as it has to be. It was kind of a catch-22 in that I

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gave up a lot but I gained a lot, too. The people in the building, they have been here, I'd say half of them, they've taught here for 20 years or more. They've seen a lot of things happen in that type situation and they appreciated that I didn't let it continue. I've had their support and that has been easier for me. There have been some positive things that came out of it.

Significant Challenges

The elementary-school principals interviewed encountered many challenges daily in both the professional and personal realm. The situations that were characteristic of their professional posture evolved into themes expressed through an examination of stressors, feelings of isolation, teacher dismissal, implementation of change, lack of preparation, conflict resolution, fragmentation, the role of central office, and finally the challenge of dealing with the emotional carryover into the principal's personal life.

Stressors

There were many significant challenges discussed by the participants in this study; several were mentioned repeatedly. Occasionally, the discussion included issues of stress and how stress physically affected the participant.

Physical Stress. Mr. Young shared a personal experience as a result of monitoring his vitals signs:

> The day influences my stamina and state of mind. I've had an interesting thing going on. At the beginning of the summer I went on the South Beach diet and began running, and I've lost 25 pounds. In the process, I was having the school nurse take my blood pressure on a pretty regular basis. It was 140 over 90 almost every time. Four or five times over a period of weeks, it was just outside of the range of what's considered good. So I went for a physical and the doctor told me he wanted me to get a machine to take my own blood pressure. And, of course, this week is intersession week, and it's been a very quiet week and I've taken my blood pressure twice and it was 117 over 74 one time and 104 over 60 another time. So, my blood pressure has been much, much lower during intersession.

Mr. Smith, a man in his late 40s, experienced the same symptoms of high blood pressure related to his work:

I do have high blood pressure. I do take medication; I have for the last three or four years. I do feel like it's somewhat because of job stress. I do know that during the summer I monitor my blood pressure. It's not as bad as during the school year. I think it takes its toll on you physically…you come in every day, you deal with problems. You're constantly putting fires out. You're constantly dealing with problems and after a while, it does eat on you. It does take its toll; it mounts up. You feel those burdens. You feel the stress.

The discussions stimulated by questions in this category were spontaneous in nature. Mr.

Wesley responded with a question of his own:

I had someone ask me something the other day and I found it kind of made me think a little bit. It simply was a question, "Wouldn't it be nice to be in Mayberry right now?" and I though about that … as a metaphor for not necessarily going back, but to actually think about how our lives have changed in just over a generation in terms of the way we use the moments that we have in our lives. We are definitely under physical and emotional stress as humans.

Sleepless nights and interrupted sleep patterns seemed to go with the territory. Miss Daisy

shared her pattern of insomnia:

I sleep in two or three increments. I usually just turn the TV on because if I start thinking about whatever's kept me awake, I'm up all night. I learned that early on—turn on the TV—David Letterman or whoever's on in the middle of the night and just kind of watch that and try to get my mind off it to go back to sleep. But I have found that major decisions—if I can just sleep on it—the next day almost every time, I just have a different outlook.

Some principals used medication to help them fall asleep as indicated by Mrs. Pearl, a woman in

her early 30s, who described her pattern of thoughts away from the school campus:

…there is not a time when I don't think of school and I know that's not healthy, but there's some aspect of school on your mind at all times. I'll get emotional (and she literally fought to maintain her composure as her eyes welled with tears) because I think of how stressed I get sometimes…

When asked how she dealt with that weight and the interruption to her sleep, she responded with

more levity in her voice:

Simply Sleep and *Tylenol PM* help. And I'll pray about what I'm thinking about. It's pretty constant because the things we deal with are so—there's really not anything we do that's not really serious. It's not something you can come in and just do--and take it lightly. The things we deal with are so completely affecting lives and I think that burden is always on my mind.

Mr. Johnson talked about how the stress does not stop at the office. He conveyed that people

seemed to hang on his every word as though it was gospel and they repeated it as such. He

observed how the "carry over" could become a burden:

> That's a tremendous burden on a principal. To have to think, continually, and it's not just when you're sitting in your chair, but it's anywhere. You are essentially *on* 24 hours a day. You go to a business meeting or a social club meeting, or after church. What you say goes around. Any of that can come back to haunt you. I think it's a tremendous burden and wish I didn't have to live under it.

Accountability. The number one issue that was named by every principal was that of

accountability and particularly the No Child Left Behind Act. Whether it was Standards of

Learning (SOL), *Terra Nova* test scores, or Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), principals were

concerned with the pressure to raise the bar without more resources to meet the demand. Mr.

Berry spoke about this issue:

> I think the biggest stress we're getting now is No Child Left Behind and all the administrative things they want us to do. There's a lot more paper work to this job than there was 10 years ago--even before No Child Left Behind. The expectations are greater; test scores have become such a predominant thing in education. The expectations for that, your kids are to score better. Southern Association, you have to have, that's come down to a yearly thing now…it used to be five. Then, you've got the State Department wanting School Improvement done on top of that… that's kind of a workload to handle on top of discipline and instruction.

Mr. "O" pointed out that the charge of responsibility for achievement has changed over the past

few years and now rests squarely on the shoulders of the building level administrator:

> I think the greatest challenge in the role of the principalship, at least in [state] with SOLs has changed from being school board and state oriented to being the local school. Now it's pretty much up to the principals whether our schools succeed or fail. That's a big role. You can't blame it on someone else. We have to take the load on our back ourselves …

One principal was purposely moved to another school to ensure their progress towards

accreditation. Mr. "O" conveyed how he discussed the issue candidly with his new staff:

> At the beginning of the year I told them pretty much we wanted to be accredited—that I was here and would have an opportunity for a while to be here to see if we could turn things around, and if we didn't, I wouldn't be here. And if I wasn't going to be here, I

was going to make sure they wouldn't be here because that means if I'm not getting the job done, they're not getting the job done. If I don't need to be here, they don't need to be here either. I was just being honest with them because we need some more folks here if we can't get the job finished. That's been my attitude. I'm not rude about it, but just honest with the teachers about it. That's pretty much what I told them.

Lack of Funding. Mrs. Bear described the contrast between the vision she had while training for the principalship and the reality of the position by stating, "I guess I was a dreamer in college. I thought I would have this school that was well equipped and all I would have to do is ask for things, and I would get it." The disparity between her vision and the reality of her situation caused significant stress "having to do a lot with no money, no funds." Mrs. Daisy, a novice principal, explained her frustration about the lack of funds for additional personnel or equipment:

> It depends on funding. That's always an issue. If you go and find some program that is true, good, sound brain-based researched based theory, a lot of times there's some money involved, whether it's additional personnel to help implement, whether it's actual program, you know, hands on things that you need to purchase—that's a barrier here.

Mrs. Daisy seemed a bit envious of school systems with more money to spend than hers; later in the interview, she acknowledged:

> …going back to those barriers—you go to other schools and other systems and you see certain things that they are doing or different conferences and it sounds great. You come back and we don't have the money, the personnel, or the time. That's a stressor.

> In contrast Mr. Ashton noted that money and manipulatives were not the only solution.

He was aware that good teachers were what really made the difference:

> . . .but if you've been in education, we jump on everything that comes along. There are people out there right now—the mail that comes to me . . . everyday I get something-- here's a wonderful program for the low, low price of $14,000! We'll do this, or—you know they're going to make money on it. But there's nothing, there is nothing that will replace a good teacher in that classroom. Nothing. It doesn't make any difference—if you have a good teacher, he or she will figure out a way to do it.

> Mr. Ashton's opinion was supported by statements from Alvarado (2000), Chancellor of

Instruction for the San Diego City Schools. Alvarado concurred, "If you want to improve students' achievement, you have to improve teachers' expertise" (p. 8). He continued by saying

that visitations were a vital part of this process. Visitations that were done with a specific purpose in mind were far superior to someone's "generic observation" (p. 8). He added that there should also be a team of two teachers as a part of the focused visitation so that one could peer coach the other after implementation in the teacher's own classroom was attempted. Those teachers could then share what they had experienced with the other faculty members in the school (Alvarado).

Teacher Dismissal. One area mentioned by principals at all experience levels was the issue of teacher evaluation and nonrenewal of contracts. Some principals found themselves in the midst of a state evaluation system for which they had little preparation. Several were threatened with school board hearings, some had their recommendations overturned by superiors, and others were not prepared for the emotional upheaval caused by separating their professional judgment from the personal relationship. Mrs. Collier divulged an exhausting incident that seemed, as she noted, would never end:

> I think dismissing a tenured teacher and almost getting to a legal court situation. It didn't quite get there, but it was very close. But I was very--I had support. I had the documentation. The teacher did end up resigning in the 11th hour because of that. It was emotionally draining because it was a person very popular among the staff. There was a lot of behind the scenes rumbling, talking, gossip. Just--it was a long year. Basically most people knew by October that something was happening or going to happen so we had to live in this environment until the end of the school year. I can see why people choose not to go after that. It was emotionally and mentally draining on me –and physically draining.

Mr. "O" discussed the relational side of nonrenewal of a teacher contract as his decision was overruled:

> I've gone through a situation where I recommended that a teacher not be reemployed. I was overruled…. It's very stressful deciding whether someone should be terminated or not. If you know the person, which I did, personally, you know their financial circumstances, and their personal circumstances and if they're going through a lot of problems with their family at the time, family illness. You do what you feel will benefit the students. It's very important. It's hard to call those shots because it's hard for me not to be personal because I think I'm a "person" person. But as far as a principal, it's very difficult to decide you should let someone go.

Mr. Young related his lack of preparation that made this portion of his work more challenging:

> I don't remember anything in my training that had to do with the importance of being willing to bite the bullet on the evaluation of faculty and staff, but I think an awful lot of administrators are so reluctant to create conflict and look someone in the eye and say, "This needs to change." The pressure is so strong to go on and put a five, [which represents the top score on the state evaluation model] because we know a score just kills somebody you know? But, if you don't face it… if you fluff over a problem that you see, every year that you do that, you're digging yourself a hole, that when you finally do address it, you'll have all this history of evaluations that didn't point it out, and you've just dug your hole and buried yourself in it. You've made it ten times harder to address when you finally do. …Well, I feel like I have had the courage of my convictions to tackle situations where somebody was a poor teacher. Where I have a big problem is how to handle the marginal teacher…because there I start feeling like I'm that Theory X person--you know, "It's my way or the highway," and who's to say that I'm the right one? But, if I've got a teacher who's, who's compared to the other teachers in the building, she's the ditto queen. And I just how far should I go to say, "I'm monitoring this, this is unacceptable, you will change" or is that too heavy handed? That's a big problem that I've not solved for myself--how to handle the marginal teacher. I mean, the evaluations show that I think she's marginal, but it's not enough to--that's the train wreck that's happening here-- we've got increased accountability, and NCLB and schools that are going on lists and all that, but we've still got tenure and we've still got people that if they're just willing to hand on, there's not really a cure for that.

Teacher Buy-In. A critical aspect of the principalship as reported by participants in the study was the challenge of attaining teacher "buy-in" or getting teachers on board to implement needed change. Mr. Wesley described it as "influencing thinking." He explained:

> I think getting everybody on board with the mission of the school is a challenge all of us face. I've had the good fortune to have the opportunity and the time to help kind of put that together here, and I've put 14 years of experience in this one building. During that time, I've been able to build a framework for thinking about things differently. I think the biggest challenge any administrator has is to influence the thinking of those that work with kids to the extent that they're open to new ideas, new approaches.

Mr. Johnson explained the difficulty that he experienced in trying to move teachers forward and described a more passive-aggressive form of behavior that teachers might adopt. He witnessed staff presenting themselves as superficially compliant and yet not implementing the needed change whether it was a teaching strategy or a curriculum issue. He added:

> People have vested interests in their own processes—the way they do things and want to do things. Another understanding I came to was that a lot of teachers, I think most, teach

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out of their values system, not out of the research base. So you come out of school with this fresh research base and you want to go implement it. And you run up against a wall. Even if they nod their heads and smile and say, "Oh, that sounds wonderful," when you walked into their classroom. . . hmmmm. . . they either pull it out and sing and dance for a few minutes, or you don't see it at all.

The realization that people do not change, even if given a rationale why they should, was new to several principals who were trying to move instructional staff in a different direction. Mrs. Hiker realized:

> I used to think that if you would just tell people what to do . . .if you would just tell them what is the right thing to do . . . kind of like Chen's model of change where the rational empirical part of it—if you just lay out facts and tell people what the facts are, then they will clearly see, "Oh, this is the course that I need to take, right?" And, some people do operate on that model, but more likely than not, people do the best they can do. The children do. The teachers do. The parents do. They're operating from their own paradigm and they're not going to change because you think, or because the evidence shows, that they need to change. They're going through their own life journey, too and they are where they are and to try to impose things, like that power coercive kind of thing. To try to do that is really not effective. And to provide the evidence is really not effective. It's working with people thorough a process.   So it's all process. It's not product. And I think that's something I didn't learn in school because I'm a product-oriented kind of person and I've had to become a process person; that is a stressor for me.

Even presenting a research-based practice to staff did not always ensure that others viewed it as a need to change or that a particular change was an improvement over existing methods. Mrs. Jro shared her experience as she tried to begin a new initiative:

> The people that you manage and that you work with don't buy-in to the same body of research--the information that you have, and sharing with them is a barrier. I think it depends on what the initiative is, but it takes at minimum, a year [for staff support of a new initiative]. I'm just now seeing some things that I implemented five years ago--that I felt were critical five years ago--that we're moving towards now.

Trying to maintain a positive relationship and climate while moving staff toward a specific target was difficult for Mrs. Pearl. She commented on how her teachers who were very "Blue" (personalities described as warm, caring, sensitive, and service-oriented by the True Colors analogy to the *Myers Briggs Personality Inventory*) could not separate constructive professional criticism from personal relationship issues with the principal. It was almost as

though they expected that they were never going to have to change anything they did if the principal truly liked them. Mrs. Pearl shared a more detailed example of this realization:

> I've tried to figure out why people can't separate the personal from the professional. I have a very warm and in True Colors, very 'blue' staff. They tell me they love me; they tell each other that and they pray for each other. They're very encouraging. When I have to talk with them about something about curriculum instruction that I would like to see a change in, I've found that it's hard for them; [they use] comments like, "I thought you liked me." I'm sitting there thinking, "wow," and actually having to verbalize, "You know what, I love you as a person. I think you do wonderful things for children and for others and I've been pleased with this and this, and I still want to come and ask you how your husband is, and how your son is, and that kind of thing." It's hard sometimes for teachers to separate that I'm their supervisor *and* their friend; we can do both.

Four principals experienced renovations and had to move to new school facilities that involved several shifts of equipment, materials, and supplies within a given year. This provided a challenge of flexibility of attitudes and added addition factors to maintaining a positive school climate and a safe and orderly learning environment. Mrs. Hiker's challenge included physically moving her school three times in a period of one year:

> The first year I was a principal, they decided they would renovate the building. They decided that they would leave the children in it while it was being renovated. We had to move three times–from April of the first year, in about a year and five months. We were packing up and moving and redoing our schedule three times. I didn't have the experience to do that as easily as it probably would have been done by somebody else. It was just really hard.

Feelings of Isolation. The concern wrinkled deep furrows in her forehead as Mrs. Long looked across a cluttered desk and spoke of many things to which the researcher could easily empathize. As busy as she appeared upon my entering the office, she seemed to relish this quiet opportunity to enjoy an audience of one--one person, who could listen, already signed off on confidentiality--who afforded some relief from arguing with herself behind closed doors. Mrs. Long spoke of her feelings of isolation:

> I think being the sole leader in a school is hard because you, in most elementary situations that we are aware of… I'm sure it's not that way, you know, maybe across the nation but I'm the only leader in my school. I don't have somebody to help me with-- to even discuss decisions with…or just to help share the load. I think, in leadership, that's

hard. You're responsible for things; you need somebody else's opinion, or some support, and I think that's unique to elementary because I know in our high schools there are like, five assistant principals, and [here] everything falls on you, every bus decision falls on you, every curriculum decision falls on you, every maintenance decision falls on you. It's just hard to stretch yourself that thin sometimes.

According to the participants in this study, principals learn a great deal from one another when they have opportunities to collaborate.   Several principals cited the benefits of information gleaned from other practitioners during discussions that took place as part of their formal coursework in a cohort class. Others mentioned how much they gained from the exchange of ideas while riding to class or to a seminar or retreat with a peer. They acknowledged that feeling alone, feeling that important decisions were theirs alone, and not being able to share thoughts or feelings with someone in a peer relationship put them on an emotional island. Mr. Young described his decision to return to ETSU as a remedy:

> I would say that having started back in school myself and being in classes with our administrators, just the talking in class about and applying our experiences to the things that we're learning and having conversations--that's been something that's really beneficial that I wasn't getting until I went back to school. There's not that opportunity in the day-to-day.

The isolation sometimes forced principals to turn their stress inward. Mr. Blue commented:

> … the principalship's a lonely job sometimes. You keep a lot of things inside yourself. You talk about waking up in the middle of the night. Sure, you wake up thinking about something, jot it down, and can't go to sleep thinking of how to deal with it. It's usually not as bad once you get to it. You shouldn't worry, but you want things to go right.

Mrs. Jro contrasted the isolation and responsibility of educational leaders to a parallel position in the private business sector:

> I don't think it's the same way in a business setting where you have colleagues that are nearby, maybe in the office next door. In school leadership, you are very isolated. You're responsible for the vision. And as our boss said today, we're ultimately responsible for everything that happens in that school. That makes you feel lonely lots of days. So, it takes a lot of work and time and energy to build relationships with colleagues and you don't always have that time and energy. I find when I do push that into my day or week that I feel much more refreshed. I'm into personal skills, I feel that's one of my stronger multiple intelligences, so I find I need that to help me feel energized. I think it can be very lonely lots of days.

Mrs. Agatha also admitted feeling the same discomfort and stressed the need to have another colleague as a sounding board by saying, "I think there is a sense of isolationism in being an elementary principal. Because of the smaller staff, you don't have that assistant principal to bounce off of, or the athletic director, or whatever." Principals who had the opportunity to job-share with an assistant principal responded positively to the opportunity for interaction and shared responsibilities. Mr. Flash related how beneficial it was to have an assistant he could relate to:

> It was nice to have somebody to talk to that you could trust. You could put the cards on the table and say what you wanted to and know that it would go no further. You do need somebody to talk to—to keep your sanity. Because you can't talk to teachers and you can't talk to parents and you can't talk to higher administrators because they don't understand the problem that's at hand. So, it's nice to have somebody you can really trust. And there's not many, in my opinion, elementary principals that have that assistant principal at their level that they can trust.

When asked, "If you were going to design, from the school system's standpoint, inservice for elementary principals, what would be some things that you would put on the list?" a principal with only three years of experience replied:

> I would like to see a system of sort of contacts. Somebody you could rely on, possibly a mentoring type program. That's one of the biggest things now; I want to improve this school. But I don't necessarily know who to call on with the resources to give us. So, I would like to see some help, and not just in the beginning, but for any administrator. It doesn't have to be in the state of Tennessee. We're close enough to other systems that are doing positive things. I'd just like to see that sharing thing. Sometimes, administrators might just need time to blow off steam and maybe even gripe a little just to be heard because often we're the one who sits there and hears everybody else's complaints. Yet, we don't have anybody to go to--to listen to our complaints sometimes. They don't have to do anything about it, just listen to me and know where I'm coming from.

At that moment I was feeling the same importance in my role as interviewer as I had many times over the course of this study. Although I was the day's "interruption" to the agenda of "Things To Be Accomplished Today," I felt I was once again a welcome distraction and sounding board to hear the needs of the elementary principals I interviewed. I also felt very privileged in this role with the candidness of their expression.

Role of Central Office

On several occasions, principals shared the things that allowed them to be successful in their attempts to be innovative within their school structure and curriculum. It was not a specific program, it was not an expensive computer lab, it was not gifted children, or even parent support that was brought up time and again. Mr. Flash discussed his experience with 'thinking outside the box' and implementation of new strategies at his elementary school and the importance of support from above:

> The most fantastic thing I've got going is the staff I have and the support from central office. We have tried many, many things like the cluster grouping, ability grouping, putting our MR (mentally retarded) kids in with our gifted kids for certain subjects and things like that. As long as I've been able to explain that to the central office, not for their permission, but to explain what I'm going to try, I've been supported and we've had success in most everything. If it doesn't work, we go to Plan B. If it does work, we just refine it. We've tried many different things here and have not been put down yet…That's what makes part of it, coming to work, an enjoyment every day. You look forward to it and you do see what problems you can solve and who you can help, and you just coordinate your services. The teachers do the teaching and I run the school. And we have not been put down; we've been allowed to try anything. We do a lot of research and thinking before--we don't just fly by the seat of our pants. We've had a lot of success with it.

Supervisors and directors were discussed by principals as not really being in tune with the needs at the building level. Mr. Young experienced two perspectives from supervisory personnel:

> People at central office, sometimes, I think in the hustle and bustle, forget that they're there to provide services to the schools, not the other way around. And, I think by and large our central office does that very well, Most of the people down there, when I call on them, they are saying, "How can I help you?" But, there have been a few people, most of them aren't here any more, thank goodness, who thought it was the other way around.

The participants acknowledged that the scarcity of involvement from central office might be attributed to the busy agendas of supervisors and directors. Mrs. Long's comments exemplified the sentiments expressed by many elementary-school principals regarding their sense of being disconnected from the central office's support and help:

> I sometimes feel like the central office forgets we're even there. That they're going about their business…disconnected from schools. You wonder sometimes if they even remember that the schools are out there, and if they remember what their major job is. Some of the decisions that they make, you're thinking, 'Wow, were they really thinking

about us when they made that decision?' And even just support, sometimes…the lack of it …you wonder what they think their job really is.

Generating his own philosophy was no trouble for Mr. Johnson. With his years of experience, he had many events to draw from to "plumb that piece a little further" as he expressed it. Mr. Johnson explained his understanding:

> Let's say if I were a superintendent, what would I like? Principals who solve their problems and ran a good school where there were very little complaints generated? Or do I want one that continually generates new problems for me to solve, given that I, the superintendent, had a full time job before I have to deal with the problems that that principal created or didn't solve down there at his school.

He went on to apply the same principle to building-level principals with regard to teachers and to teachers with regard to students. His summary statement included all three levels of the learning community:

> After 10 years in the principalship, which is about when I started understanding how that worked, it got a little easier. In fact, a friend of mine and I talk about this thing pretty routinely, and what we've come to is that you can do anything you want, as long as nobody complains. Well, sounds odd to say that, but there's a lot to it.

He then branched off in a constructive direction as to how a principal could not afford to use this as an excuse for not moving forward. He offered suggestions that appear elsewhere in this paper regarding, "don't run flags up."

An interesting story of how a principal can do what he or she thinks meets central office expectations and still end up on the wrong side of the fence was told by Mr. Berry:

> One year the board was talking about there wasn't anybody collecting money for textbooks, lost textbooks. So the next year I go crazy-nuts and make everybody crazy paying for lost textbooks. [He leans way back in his swivel chair with his hand on his chin and chuckles softly as he reminisces] Then, [that year] I get this comment, "Well you guys are tearing all the books up in Southboro (pseudonym). Yeah, yeah, you know, so you've got to understand these systems and how they run.

Needed Preparation

Interviewees mentioned several different areas of their career experiences that they were not as well prepared to handle as other areas: finance, working with paraprofessionals, special

education monitoring, and maintenance issues.   Mrs. Long discussed two facets of the elementary principalship position: working with paraprofessionals and school finance. She explained how she did not feel prepared in either area:

> I think in working with paraprofessionals I was not prepared. Simply because in my adult life I had not worked with paraprofessionals and I was not prepared for…they think differently. They reason differently than professionals do. I had to learn on the job and I maybe made some assumptions and some mistakes that I wouldn't have if I had had some…discussions of it. There's a really different level of approaching the job with the paraprofessionals than professional teachers and other principals, I think. Finance is another one. No short course will prepare you for that either, and I know those things change so much, but maybe just the spirit of school finance--more of the essence of it, what it's all about, and not so much on how to set a budget. But just basic understandings that you need. We have a little, but probably not enough.

Mrs. DeDe, a novice principal who served in a rural area, was somewhat unprepared for all the mechanical interventions she would encounter. She explained with humor, "I've always said this--they need a course in Pepsi machine, snack machine, and coffee machine anatomy." Mr. Wilson's comments represented the view of many veterans on the subject of the mechanical support needed for smooth building operations:

> I think my main role is to provide a safe environment, to provide a climate that is conducive to learning here at our school. Sometimes you feel like you're the only person who's able to carry out any tasks to assist in those areas and you're trying to get help from your board of education, from your maintenance department. I guess, as far as things they don't teach in college, it's dealing with huge facilities, multimillion-dollar facilities and all sorts of maintenance-type problems. Some days you're all alone in trying to figure out some way of making sure this building is safe.

Another area that came up was the imbalance between authority and responsibility. A novice principal noted in her comments:

> I'm held responsible for so many things that I really don't have direct control over. I don't have a lot of control over who is hired or who is let go. Those are the people that are building my reputation as a leader and as a principal and sometimes I don't have control over that and that is very frustrating to me.

> Although principals in general indicated that their course work and foundational theory

was very beneficial, the majority of study participants admitted that becoming an assistant principal or having a strong mentoring program was necessary to be more fully prepared for the

scope of the demands of the position. The principals acknowledged that regardless of the

preparation, experiencing the responsibility in the job itself was what gave the best indication of

the requirements of the practitioner.

Mr. Blue commented on his need to have some experience prior to course work so that he

could apply the theory as he was learning:

> I guess if I had thought about it whenever I went into education, I would have probably
> paid more attention to what was going on in administration. When I was going through
> it, the school law really got my interest. But the other—you know you take the finance
> classes, and you take the other leadership classes, and you're thinking at the time, "I
> don't know if I'll use this or not." I probably would have read more and prepared more.

Emotional Tremors

Another area of challenge was in the area of emotional tremors. There seemed to be

segments of the job that were very hard to "leave at the office." Some principals recognized this

element in their work and had consciously worked out a strategy to try to deal with the mental

and emotional demands of their careers. Mr. Flash warned young aspiring principals of the

challenge they might face in dealing with their emotions:

> I think you try to keep your emotions out of it but it's very difficult at times. Sometimes
> you wonder who's going to believe you and who's not going to believe you. Sometimes
> you wonder are your supervisors going to trust you or not trust you? The biggest thing I
> could share is you need to be fair to everybody and consistent. That way, if you're right
> or wrong, you can fall back on your merits as to what you've done as a record.

Mr. Zack's solution involved a poem that he had once heard:

> I don't even know the name…it's a poem that has meant a lot to me. I think it's called.
> "The Rubbing Bush" or something . . . It's about this person comes home and touches
> this tree before they go in the house . . . the whole premise behind that is to leave the job.
> That's a really important thing for me because when I get home I want to think about the
> job and it's hard to leave it behind. However, for your mental state, for your physical
> state you've got to. For me I've got my name badge [He collected the laminated card
> between his fingers]. For me that's the thing. When I hang this on the mirror in the car, I
> leave; I leave the school. I leave it in the car. Physically I'm leaving, but mentally, I'm
> leaving. I have to change modes. Right now I'm going to think about my family. What's
> going on with our social life? Where are my kids? I have to change gears and it's as
> much for family and for my life outside of school as it is for the school. Because if that's
> all I think about, I get caught up--that's all I think about.

Mr. Flash summed it up in the final line of his response when he stated:

> You think about your job, your profession 24/7. Even at the dinner table now, whenever friends come, the whole conversation deals with nothing but education. They get to the point they say, "Can we not talk about something else?" That's our whole life.

The Calling

With all the stress, isolation, and frustration of trying to do too much with too little, one might ask, where is the joy? Why did principals continue in this career path when they realized that the idealism that they brought to the position was daunted by so many challenges and barriers? The portraits in this gallery of practitioners would not be displayed appropriately unless they were framed in the context of why they chose to continue the journey along this career path. The hearts of the participants can be heard as depicted through their interview comments that dealt with a "calling," a "moral purpose," and a life committed to high standards of character.

Mrs. Collier recounted one of a number of stories that told of the principal's heart and the calling that was a common thread woven in a cloak that gathered children beneath it to share the nurturing warmth of their leader's caring:

> In the past month, I've had a child diagnosed with cancer in kindergarten, I had a tree fall on a first-grade child and she was in a coma, and is in rehab now, she's like a stroke patient. I had a child whose father drowned yesterday from the storm two days ago in a canoe. I've had a family whose father died about three weeks ago, three boys here. And then I had a child whose baby brother died of SIDS. That's been about the past month. So, we have collected all kinds of money for families. We have truly been in a social service mode the past month; to be honest with you we've been social service workers. We've been counselors; we've been to the rehab hospital to read to this little girl. We had a schedule where each teacher signed up and we alternated nights going and reading and reading and reading to her. This staff just rises to the occasion when there is a crisis. They're just wonderful.

Mrs. Collier also wanted parents to have confidence and reason to trust the school personnel in measures of safety:

I really want, when a parent puts their kids on the bus or lets them out of a car here, I don't want them driving off worrying about safety. I want them to really be assured that they're going to be taken care of.

Most principals said they felt that they were where they were meant to be. Of the study's

23 participants, only 4 stated that they would have pursued another career. Mrs. Long's

comments spoke to the reasons the principal position fit her well:

It's a wonderful job--you have to like people and I like people. The days go so fast and I love working with the children, and I just like elementary people. And I like being there and even though there are a lot of things that are stressful during the day, you still want to get up and to go back the next day because it's just something you enjoy doing… It's my social life. It's my life, really.

The ethics and character of individual principals came through with vibrant illustrations. Mrs.

Agatha spoke, as did most of the principals interviewed, about her parents' influence in her life:

I smile because I come from a family of educators, and my mother was a southern lady who taught me how to listen to others, how to respect others, and how others then respect you by your demeanor. There is a little poster behind my desk that says, "What is right is not always popular, what is popular is not always right." I shared that phrase with several administrators because you have to be willing to follow what you know in your heart is best for your students.

There were intangible joys that could only be lived vicariously through descriptions that

were given by principals involved in school activities. Mr. Andrews shared one such experience

of the building of "community" within the school culture:

A month ago, we had a teacher workday here in which we had a whole large pile of mulch. I was out here with a wheelbarrow, rake, and shovel and nine other adults came. We were able to finish that on a Saturday in two and a half hours and . . . we even had four youngsters to come. I enjoyed that. We were all sore and tired by the time lunchtime came, but we finished the job. It was wonderful to see mothers as well as fathers racing and shoveling and hauling mulch. That's one of those intangible things that's the benefit of this job . . . it's not the pay check, most of the things that you'll find in education are those intangible things that we assume, that make it worth while to go to bed tonight and look forward to coming back tomorrow.

Principals, like others, oftentimes take advice when it is given. Mr. Young became frustrated

with a advisory comment that was shared with him by his first principal, "If you don't teach

them anything, just love them" because it did not fit his goal of high expectations:

…but I realized that if you love them, you're going to teach them a lot—if you really love them. Well that served as an introduction to my main philosophy, which is that the compass has to be what's good for the child. And every tough decision that I have--and I would hope that for anyone that goes into administration--that they'll keep that as their compass. Not what's good politically, not what's good career wise or anything else, but when you run into that tough decision, just stop and say, "Okay, what's best for the child?" It's simplistic, and to some it's probably sappy, but I still think that's the compass.

Principals discussed their positions, their staff, and their schools with a fervor that would have been enviable in any profession. Mr. Wesley summed up the emotional catalyst that keeps administrators in top form:

I would say, particularly, emotionally, you have to have fire in your belly for children. I think that's essential to being an effective administrator. Now, it's not the only thing, but if you lack passion for the role you play, it will pervade your culture. It will be obvious. So, it's so very important that you are self-aware. You have to have that awareness-- I'm here to make a difference. If you don't, you can struggle mightily in this deal that we're in, because you're dealing with many variables that are of human nature and you must be prepared to deal with those challenges. This is a people business and there are no templates.

Regardless of the stress, the fragmentations, and the confrontations, most of the principals interviewed could not imagine doing anything else. Mr. Flash explained his position:

I can't say that this profession has always been easy, but I can honestly say that I wouldn't trade one minute of it. I enjoy it. There are parents here that say, "I wouldn't have your job for a million dollars." If I thought it was that bad, I'd change professions. I love it; there's never two days the same; I like trying to solve problems.

The elementary-school principals were exemplary in the character that they communicated throughout the interview process. The integrity, the sense of fair play, their commitment to doing what is best for children in their charge came though in conversation after conversation. Mr. Edwards mentioned the basis of his ethical doctrine and the strong faith that leads him in his career:

I guess Stephen Covey is one of the things that I've adhered to. Primarily, I guess because of my own religious beliefs, and that seems to have tied in and those are some practical points that I've tried to apply to my leadership position ….Yes; it's not all about me. You try to see the needs of others, and hopefully put their needs above your own needs…

Principals often spoke of the needs of others whether it was parents, students, or staff. Mr. "O" mentioned the consideration he gave to his staff members when meetings were planned so as to not encumber them any more than necessary:

> I don't like to have meetings just to have meetings and they [teachers] don't either. I try to think of a lot of them, especially younger teachers who have children at home. There's a babysitter they need to get to and probably the last thing on their mind is what I'm saying or what someone else is saying. We try to do it as expedient as possible and every time it's necessary.

Some principals considered the next wrung of the ladder if financial pressures mounted; however, most dismissed that rationale because it would mean a step away from the children they love. Mr. Blue admitted that he was facing that decision because his own children would be going to college soon:

> Well, I've considered supervision and the more I think about being away from the children, the harder it is to go that route although financially it would help my family…but the more I think about it, when I see these kids and you're out at the mall, or you're at the ball games and they come up and speak to you or hug you or whatever-- that's what I went into it for in the first place. I feel like I was led in that direction and the kids have kept me there. It's the kids.

Summary

The experiences of the 23 principals interviewed centered on several major themes and subcategories of those themes. Critical incidents that participants described as having had an impact on their career were ignited by several means. Some were tragic episodes that they experienced; others occurred because of a clarification of thought that came from reflection regarding a piece of research, influence of a mentor, or an incident involving a student. Epiphanies were triggered by other means such as an unexpected confrontation with the principal's own view of reality with regard to relationships. or coping with a disgruntled community. The second major theme was career stages. In the absence of a neat rubric in which to pigeon-hole each principal by years of experience, the theme focused on the uniqueness of each participant's journey as he or she traveled through the career. This section dealt with the

individuality of the experiences and preparation of the interviewees as they perceived their own development as leaders. Barriers to research-based practices was the third subcategory that included: instructional leadership issues, fragmentation of the work day, lack of opportunities for reflection, and school system politics. The next significant theme dealt with the significant challenges reported by the elementary principals including: stressors, (both physical and emotional), lack of funding, teacher dismissal, teacher "buy-in," feelings of isolation, the role of the central office, and needed principal preparation. The final section was entitled "The Calling" and related the moral purpose to which the principals were committed.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Is it just us, or do you also get the feeling that being a school administrator is like being an endangered species? It seems like principals all around us are coming and going at an increasingly alarming rate. This turnover has forced us to reflect on our careers and to examine the reasons behind this upheaval. (Chapko & Chapko, 2001, p. 38)

Though a review of pertinent literature, interviews with 23 elementary-school principals, member checking, peer debriefing, and my own 18 years of experience in public school administration, certain conclusions, and recommendations for practice have been developed as they relate to the needs and concerns of elementary-school principals. The information gleaned from practitioners and the resulting conclusions might result in greater awareness of the intricacies of the position and realizations for the need to enhance preparation, garner support, and ultimately realign the elementary-school principalship for more effective leadership in the 21st Century.

After listening to more than 30 hours of discussion regarding the experiences and reflections of 23 principals from Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, several issues became apparent. There are inherent difficulties that are a part of this unique administrative position regardless of a person's age, background experience, course preparation, or geographic location. It is a multitask position that requires high energy and tolerance for stress. It is a middle management position that requires a diversified package of skills to move the institution forward.

Each school assignment and the experience of the practitioner is unique because of the wide range of experiences that are brought to the portal at the entry level of the position. The numbers of variables that daily and almost momentarily impact the decision-making process approach an infinite combination of circumstances. It is an extremely taxing position emotionally, attributed to the nature of the business of making decisions regarding children's

lives. The legal and political ramifications of even one poor decision can be devastating to the individual and can have long-term effects on the school personnel and programs.

Conclusions From the Study

The general conclusions from this study concerning the effects of a career in elementary-school principalship on the practitioner are supported by the studies examined in the preliminary literature review and additional research reviewed after the data collection and analysis was completed. The specific findings of this research were organized under four major topics that clustered around the research questions: (a) critical incidents, (b) career stages, (c) barriers to implementation of research based practices, and (d) challenges. Subtopics that emerged from the data analysis process will be addressed as they related to the four researched topics. It was from the information in these subtopics that perceptions and beliefs about the principalship were developed and recommendations identified.

Critical Incidents

Principals interviewed in this study contributed a wealth of data with regard to the types of critical incidents that impacted and reconstructed their view of reality while serving as an elementary-school principal. According to participants, the very nature of the responsibility of caring for primary-and intermediate-age children to ensure their safety, provide a nurturing educational environment, and facilitate programs where all children will learn successfully is often overwhelming. They reported that the requirements for the emotional stamina that was needed to be a positive catalyst for change in this realm was increased as both the local district and legislative bodies stoked the furnace to heighten the flame under the crucible of accountability.

Critical incidents that affected the principals' view of their work or themselves as leaders were collapsed into five categories by situations that included tragedies, influences of a hero or

mentor, an author's presentation of ideas, reflection, and response to change. Cranton (1994) discussed these types of events that triggered and stimulated critical thinking, which in turn "precipitates transformative learning" (p. 78). Principals were confronted with a new way of viewing or approaching what was formerly lost in the routine occurrences of the day. Cranton stated that such epiphanies could be stimulated by "a book, a discussion with a friend, an unexpected event, a change in work context, or a sudden insight" (p. 77). Yet, there is no specific formula as some situations trigger self-reflection for some individuals and not for others.

Career Stages

This research supported the belief that the participants' understanding of their role and their identity in the role of the principal is in a continuous state of flux. Administrators are in a position that is fluid by description because of the nature of the encounters that daily jar their consciousness. In Mrs. Pearl's encounters with discipline, she stated:

> You assume, I have assumed, that if I take that time and know that I'm following policy and doing the right thing as far as procedures, and I also know I'm doing what is the right thing to do . . . then it comes back and no one else around you thinks that was the right thing to do. I remember the first time this happened it was a pretty serious situation and in a matter of ten minutes talking to parents and saying this is what I have decided, I had just all manner of authorities that were calling me and saying, "Why did you make this decision?" including his psychiatrist and their lawyer . . . I feel like sometimes--I know I'm doing it because it's right--but people do not see it the same way. . . .I think I have it figured out and then the next time I make a decision and this happens, it's like, well it wasn't for that reason.

Cranton (1994) explained this phenomenon, stating that "stimulating events are likely to involve being confronted with facts, rules, or principles that directly contradict previously accepted knowledge" (p. 78). Issues of school safety when a parent is killed in front of the school, the golden rule in dealing with irrational parents, implementation of brain-based research and lacking teacher buy-in, and what constitutes transformational leadership are challenges at times. These rebuttals, these contradictions, regardless of their source, have an unsettling effect that can make principals feel anxious in their quest for making rational decisions and building

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support for their schools' vision. This unpredictable bombardment of events is difficult for someone with experience; however, it is very daunting for someone who arrives on the threshold of the elementary-principalship position with an empty tool chest or the wrong box of tools.

The lack of a standard sequence of experiences prior to an entry-level position complicates the issue even further. Career stages could not possibly be mapped across such an unpredictable terrain. This inconsistency in background experiences is born out by the results of this study; no conclusive pattern of career stages could be drawn from the participants at any level or within any age group within the interviewees' contributing data. At the entry level of the elementary principalship, you might have a credentialed individual who, although a seasoned veteran managing discipline at the high school level, has no concept of what to suggest to a first-grade teacher who is trying to help several students over the hurdle of blending three sounds together to read their first words. You might have a former bank teller who has recertified with a masters degree in early childhood education and who cannot effectively address issues of sexual harassment with upper-grade students. Some principals in the study entered administration with as few as three years' teaching experience and often had difficulty communicating or achieving teacher buy-in for change initiatives. According to Levinson's (1978) theory of development, there are a series of developmental tasks that an individual must work though in successive periods. He allowed for the differences in individual experience and therefore chose not to "impose a template for conformity" (p. 41). In the principalship, however, the tasks are not successive for any individual and no specific experiences can be outlined that delineate a passage thorough career stages. The experiences of the 1st-year principal cannot be predicted any better than those of the 30-year veteran. There is very little predictability in the position and certainly no successive periods. The stimulants of change are primarily external and can come from many avenues simultaneously. This defied the logical order of a charted experience through career stages as was originally anticipated by the researcher.

If there were any parallels between the work on the predictability of life stages (Sheehy, 1976) and a career in elementary-school principalship, it would rest in two concepts. One is that people are often looking for purpose as they reach their mid-life years and asking questions such as, "Have I accomplished what I set out to do? Has my life had meaning? Have I made a difference? and Will I be remembered?" Practitioners were very clear on who they were as individuals and why they were serving in the position of leadership at that level. One principal, as he closed on entertaining some thoughts about retirement, informally commented:

> If I had sold cars for 30 years, I might be wondering right now how well I had spent my time on earth, what I had contributed. However, walking away with over 30 years invested in the lives of young children certainly makes a mark as to something I feel I have influenced.

The second notion is that this career track serves as almost a fast track to maturity. The questions and stages of the mid-life period are almost parallel to some of the experiences that are thrust upon the elementary-school principal as described in Sheehy (1976). It creates almost a time warp where beginning principals, no matter what age, are thrust into a stage of development attributed to the issues that confront them each day.

Barriers

Barriers to the implementation of research-based practice exist for many reasons, as born out through the testimony of interviewees. Prior experience with elementary-level curriculum through teaching experience was not always a prerequisite to an assignment in administration. This is a crucial element of instructional leadership. According to Richmond (2002), "Principals should know what good teaching looks like and be able to provide supportive feedback to teachers. They must be able to model effective teaching, both formally through demonstration lessons and informally during class visitations" (p.51). Some school systems budgeted more opportunities for training in curriculum for their building level administrators than others. Textbook adoption training was often optional for administrators who sometimes did not even recognize the need for familiarizing themselves with the new textbooks. Even if the knowledge

was present within the expertise of the building-level administrator, funding for manipulatives, supplemental instructional materials, and personnel to launch the new program initiative was not always available. Given that knowledge, funding, materials, and personnel may have been present in the equation, there still remained the biggest barrier to success: time to develop and execute a plan of implementation for change. Principals interviewed in this study stated that there was little time because of the fragmentation of their daily schedule to have collaborative time with teachers to plan the work. Because of the resulting time crunch, the steps to achieving teachers' full support of even a research-based initiative was so condensed that it was usually introduced one day and implemented, with token compliance, the next in most school systems. There were rare sites where a principal had begun, through using a model of purchasing the same text for the entire staff, to develop a community of learners.

According to Aslanian and Brickell (1982), learning must have usefulness for adults to be motivated to acquire it. Adults use this learning to accommodate the changes in their lives. However, school systems often approach educating adults as they do educating children and the two groups have different needs and motivations to learn. Principals in this study cited teacher buy-in as a major stressor and a significant challenge that often thwarted their efforts to move things forward instructionally.

Senge (as cited in Sparks, 2001) pointed out that we are so geared to fixing what is broken, solving problems, so to speak, that we seldom make the profound shift to creating something new. Until we can "influence thinking," as Mr. Wesley stated in his interview, we will not begin to approach successful implementation of new brain-based teaching strategies to improve the education of children. If every time we start an initiative to implement a researched-based practice, as noted by the participants in this study, then the pattern of barriers says we must back up to where the original barrier exists. If it was in the thought processes of staff members we would be better able to design opportunities for "organizational learning" (as cited in Sparks, p. 46) than to face this same barrier each time a new textbook was adopted, each time a new

teaching strategy was introduced, or each time an opportunity to experience learning in a new way was proposed.

Reflection was recognized by principals in the study as a critical component of making thoughtful decisions that allowed them to "analyze real-life situations"(Wilmore, 2001, p. 44) by enabling the principals to define their problems in the context of different perspectives. This was a rare commodity in a leader's day--conspicuous by its absence. In her article entitled *Reflecting on Reflection*, Wilmore stated, "We have no time to reflect on what we are doing, or to internalize what we have experienced. And that's not good" (p. 44). Having no time to reflect also left principals with no time to collaborate or plan the work for implementation of new strategies. This was recognized as a difficult if not impossible task without a plan.

School district politics was also named as a barrier to the implementation of needed change. The elementary-school principalship was seen by practitioners in the study as a position very much influenced by the political climate in the district. Principals who did not have the proper political clout in some regions were recipients of a less-than-balanced portion of the resources in the system. Principals spoke about access to supervisors and superintendents as being preferential, depending on with whom you were associated.

Problems often occurred when principals desired to cross a new threshold that was not the traditional way of doing things. Many principals were aware that you had "better know how the system works." Keeping the lake smooth and throwing no pebbles was the analogy drawn by more than one administrator.

One principal described a situation where he recommended that walls be built in his open space school setting. He was publicly brought to task by the school board member who was responsible for approving the design of his building at the time of its construction 30 years prior and questioned as to how this suggestion would affect his test scores.

Knudson and Wood (1998) discussed the positive change that happens when policies and procedures allow for the "provision of greater freedom for schools to make decisions in such areas as curriculum, personnel, budget, and facilities" (p. 28).

Knowledge of curriculum and more than just the basic components of good instructional practice is a critical factor that remains a monumental gap in the elementary-school principal's expertise. Sometimes it is the proper implementation of the current textbook adoption that is lacking and new materials are not the answer to improved instruction. Sometimes the cover of the book changes, however, the teaching does not. Unless the practitioner knows specifically what to look for in the instructional process, the "way I've always done it" is easily camouflaged by the appearance of the new materials. Teachers are very much aware of how well versed a principal is by the language of learning that is communicated through daily conversations regarding instructional issues.

It was once said that you could expect what you inspect. If the principal's staff meetings revolve only around building maintenance and the bus duty schedule, teachers are fully aware of what subject is not coming to the forefront. If a principal is not aware of the research that presents the difference between exceptional readers and those who struggle or cannot explain the comprehension strategies that are not being introduced into each lesson, it becomes difficult to move forward. If they cannot give even one specific example of how to combine science and reading objectives into a particular grade level lesson, then how can they expect to help teachers embrace the concept of curriculum integration and improve their delivery of service to learners?

This is a barrier to research-based practice that can be overcome by the willingness of school systems to seek out models of good instruction and provide these models, as visuals, in a planned program to keep principals abreast of current researched-based instruction.

Stress

Feelings of anxiety including sleepless nights and high blood pressure were indicative of the stress involved in the day-to-day lives of the elementary-school principals. For some, medication was necessary in order to relieve the tension of work-related encounters and to help fall asleep each night. The intensity of concerns about being sued for any error of action in a long list of libelous decisions has the principal operating under the shadow of a black cloud hanging heavy over many daily encounters. Teachers who were resistant to needed changes for improving students' learning outcomes was a significant stressor for principals attempting to raise the bar of achievement by implementing research-based instructional strategies. Increased expectations for all populations, including ELL and special education categories, to make adequate yearly progress, according to the edict of *No Child Left Behind* legislation, leave principals quaking in the threat of the impending doom. Teacher dismissal and dealing with the marginal teacher were two areas that impacted principals' emotional health. Making decisions that affected people's lives, especially persons that the principal knew well and who regarded him or her as a caring supervisor, weighed heavily on the hearts of administrators when a decision had to be made for nonrenewal of a staff member's contract. The weight of the political climate in the district and how it affected resources and ultimately a principal's effectiveness to maximize students' success was recognized by many participants as a substantial difficulty. The principals' need to break away from the onslaught of interruptions that compounded the fragmentation of their work was an apparent stressor that came through the interview dialogues with extreme regularity. In their article "Caught Between Nostalgia and Utopia: The Plight of the Modern Principal," Boris-Schacter and Langer (2002) offered these options as remedies suggested from 18 months of interviewing principals across the United States:

1. A co-principalship in which either all tasks are evenly divided, or there is a principal for instruction and a principal for management. Each principal can be on site every day or the week can be divided.

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2. A rotating principalship in which a classroom teacher takes on (and tries on) the principalship for a specified period of time, while the principal returns to the classroom, teaches in higher education or conducts educational research.

3. Distributed leadership, a scenario in which some administrative tasks are divided among many members of a leadership team or across the teaching staff in general.

4. Professional-development opportunities fo the principal that are built into the workweek. These include school visitations, meetings with community-based groups, and attendance at principal-support groups. Principals from other schools and communities may "swap" schools for a period of time. (p. 37)

Lack of Funding

Lack of funding for the accomplishment of needed initiatives to make every child successful was another source of stress. The participants discussed the lack of balance between the accountability and the authority inherent in the position that often blocked facilitation of the needed changes within their buildings. Knowing that staff development is needed and without funding the present culture will prevail and that needed change will not be a reality for the school brings an erosive feeling of defeat.

Feelings of Isolation

Feelings of Isolation also chipped away at the principals' esteem. With no one to talk to, no one to share their thoughts and emotions, principals turned a great deal of their private turmoil inward. They sealed it up inside themselves to be mulled over on another day. Even admitting that they needed someone to talk to was difficult for some principals.

Role of the Central Office

The role of the central office, as elementary principals perceived it, got very mixed reviews. Some principals expressed the belief that they had much support in their decisions, whereas others questioned if the central office was in tune with what was happening at the building level. Those principals that were positive mentioned things that led the interviewer to

believe that they had a collegial relationship based on mutual respect for their supervisors, directors, and school board members. According to Ilg (2002), the "ideal relationship" (p.17) included the words trust and communication as even superintendents were aware of the changes in the principalship. Ilg described his adjustment:

> I have struggled in the past five years adjusting to my new relationship with principals. I was comfortable hiring former head coaches like myself because I felt that their coaching skills translated into success at the building level. With the increased importance of proficiency tests and academic achievement and the need to develop supportive relationships, we have hired principals who have a more collaborative approach to decision-making. They have a strong background in curriculum and instruction. They are more facilitative and not as authoritarian as some of our former principals. With the "new breed" of principals, I have had to adjust my style and my role as the superintendent. (p. 19)

Needed Preparation

Principals indicated they felt that there were many areas in which they needed more instruction to be adequately prepared for their position. Principals who had the opportunity to develop collegial relationships during their principalship training thorough a cohort expressed that the configuration increased the practicality and quality of their preparation experience. Principals cited both assistant principalships and their experiences in the Danforth principal preparation program as equipping them with the knowledge and practical experiential experience necessary to cope with the demands of the position. The interviewees offered the following list of issues and areas that needed greater concentration in preparation for elementary school principals through mentoring, district level inservice, or formal course offerings and seminars:

1. Processing qualifications for free and reduced lunch status
2. School safety and lockdown procedure options
3. Conducting an efficient staff meeting
4. Demands of the job on personal time: how to maintain balance
5. Opportunities to attend workshops to keep current
6. Statistical analysis of test scores…how to use the data

7. Conferencing skills in dealing with people/psychology

8. Public image awareness: integrity and fairness

9. Technology integration to curriculum and management programs

10. Bookkeeping and attendance software

11. Politics within the school system

12. Practical hands on experience through shadowing and mentorship

13. Comprehensive knowledge of curriculum for grade levels

14. Liability for special education and IEP implementation and discipline

15. Managing people through interpersonal skills

16. Working with paraprofessionals

The Calling

The final core of energy was generated around the ideas and stories principals shared that demonstrated to anyone listening the passion and commitment they so deeply held for what they trained for and for what they believed in. The information gained was not always positive in nature but it never came across as whining or complaining. The voice of each individual spoke to a higher calling that was an advocate voice for children who needed a champion to rally for them, to gain the attention of those who could make the situation better . . . as the child's own small voice could not be heard in the fury of clambering that surrounds the issues of educational leadership.

Recommendations

Today's principals are like prizefighters. Everyday, the opening bell sounds and they enter the ring ready to fight for their students and their schools. Often, they must fight with only one hand, handicapped by their increasing day-to-day responsibilities and an ever-expanding job description. They must bob and weave to avoid a flurry of potentially dangerous punches: professional development; student health and safety concerns; after-school activities; new federal and state testing requirements; daily phone calls to make and return; and reports to read and be written. (Quinn, 2003, p. 17)

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With the U.S. Department of Labor reporting that 40% of the nation's 93,200 principals are nearing retirement and that the need for school administrators in the next five years will increase by 10% to 20%, it is significant to determine what can be done to make this position a more effective one from which to serve children (Ferrandino, 2001).

Because of the overwhelming nature of the responsibilities inherent in the job description of the elementary-school principal, and the stress that is related to this characteristic, a restructuring of the position may be accomplished in several ways:

1. Consideration should be given to redesigning the job description of the elementary principal in an effort to reduce the stress caused by the increased demands. Possibilities include:

   a. Co- principals with designated grade-level responsibilities.

   b. Having primary and intermediate school configurations to narrow the scope of the expertise required.

   c. Co-principals with a division of labor designed to specialize in management or instructional leadership

   d. Consider hiring retired principals on a part-time basis to act as a sounding board and special long-term planning consultant for new principals in the district.

   e. Lead teacher positions with training and incentives should be developed to assist the principal in creating a team of focused educators in specialty areas to bring the school forward and narrow the expertise.

Because of the principals' increased confidence when participating in an experiential program of training, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Establish a district hierarchy of stages of training and opportunities for advancement to allow for a slower assimilation of responsibilities for the beginning principals in order to gain better proficiency in necessary skill areas with less pressure

2. School systems should work collaboratively with institutions of higher education that provide principal preparation programs to establish principal practicum's and mentors to establish a means of experiential learning prior to full-time employment to allow for further growth and reflection prior to assuming full responsibility for the school program.

3. States should consider financially supporting educational administration programs that include a mentorship component to make the opportunity attractive to cooperating school systems.

4. Institutions that prepare principals should compile research from graduates and their employers to determine the changing needs of practitioners and the strengths and weaknesses of the professionals they certify.

5. A survey of interns would assist in providing multiple data sources for the purpose of improving preparation for aspiring principals by listing training needs as described in this study under *Needed Preparation*.

6. Assistantships should be opened up even if only on a part-time basis to offer opportunities to grow leaders from within. Incentives should be offered such as time release for attendance at professional conferences.

In order to establish a trust relationship necessary to foster an environment of acceptance to new ideas and support, communication and flexibility must be developed at the supervisory level:

1. Efforts should be made by central office to encourage and provide a scheduled decompression time for elementary principals to share in an informal atmosphere in order to seek advice, share concerns, and collaborate on instructional issues. Principals stated that some of the most valuable information they receive comes from professional exchanges that occur during travel to district meetings and conferences. These should be as few as once a month or as frequent as once a week.

2. Central office administrators need to schedule visits to the schools on a monthly rotation with one supervisor visiting at each opportunity. This demonstration of support and interest could go a long way to bolster the esteem of the middle manager. This relational visit could edify and validate the work of the school and could also relieve a portion of the anxiety that comes from the isolation factor. Stress is often relieved by feelings of support when gaining control of circumstances is not possible.

3. Principals should be encouraged to have lunch off campus in order to provide a natural break in the day to reflect and regroup because of the bombardment that is a continuous part of their routine day while attending to the needs of others.

4. Opportunities for stress relief through regular exercise and fitness routines should be encouraged through memberships in health clubs or use of equipment provided by local school districts in a location accessible to administrators.

5. A retired veteran principal could be held on an annual retainer to provide a confidential hotline for consultation and relief of stress via a telephone conversation with individual practitioners needing relief and a sounding board.

In order to address the gaps that principals found evident in their knowledge levels of research and of current instructional trends, opportunities should be made available to promote growth in this critical area:

1. Learning communities among administrators should be designed to model the need for lifelong learning through planned interaction relative to research-based practice that extends to the school staff at each building site.

2. Conferences that relate to the improvement plan of the school should be sponsored by the district.

3. Subscriptions to refereed or juried journals and publications should be a budgeted item and available to the principal and staff of each school.

The barriers related to implementation of research-based practices may be overcome in numerous ways, including the following suggestions:

1. Local strategic plans should include long term planning to launch initiatives that support Peter Senge's (as cited in Sparks, 2001) key discipline of organizational learning are necessary to elevate the thinking of the educational organization and remove barriers to research-based practice.

2. Institutions of higher learning should partner with the local schools to assist in facilitation of change initiatives as a lab setting for aspiring young principals. This would allow for modeling of lasting change from the awareness stage of planting a seed to thorough ongoing assessment and evaluation of goal attainment. Both organizations working collaboratively could benefit.

3. Opportunities should be made to celebrate the work of principals and the school system when achievement of goals is attained.

4. School districts could also assign each principal to a specific grade-level curriculum at first in order to have experts in each grade level to relearn the work of teachers in the classroom. It is often difficult to offer appropriate, constructive suggestions to assist teachers in the part assessment plays in driving instruction unless he or she can actually demonstrate its function in a specific type of example. According to the principals in the study, a limited few were prepared to take on this assignment.

5. Principals need to confront teachers' attitudes that focus on procedures because of tradition as opposed to changing practice to make each child successful.

6. Practitioners must examine creative scheduling within their buildings and with the support from central office administrators to create opportunities for planning and refocusing the work. This redefining of schedules and the resource of time is critical to the school improvement initiative.

Summary

   With the continuous onslaught of responsibility, liability, and accountability, it has become increasingly important to be aware of the plight of the elementary school principal. By virtue of the intensity of ever-expanding demands, leaders are relegated to a position of compromised effectiveness. Children, our most precious resource, require leaders in education who can perform their assignments without the crippling effects of the intense day-to-day pressures visited upon them. Relief must be considered through a restructuring of the position to allow for the changes that have occurred over the last decade. Leaders must be placed in an optimal position to lead learning communities that will nurture children and maximize students' success.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Biographical Sketch of the Principalship Questionnaire

(Demographics)

Date of Interview_____ Date of Birth _____

Place of Birth_____

State in which you reside_____

Number of years teaching experience _____

Type of school (circle one) rural   urban   suburban

Number of years in education (total) _____

Number of years devoted to administration _____

Administrative Training Institution _____

What has your preparation for the principalship included to this point in your career?
_____

_____

_____

_____

Number of schools you served as leader _____

Were these transfers at your request or the request of the administration?

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introductory Questions:

    1) Can you think back and tell me of the time when you first decided that you
       wanted to be an administrator?
    2) Did anything or anyone in particular directly influence your decision?
    3) If you were to begin again, would you choose the principalship as your career?
    4) How might you have prepared differently?

Critical Events That Have Shaped Your Development As A Leader:

Now I am going to ask you to tell me about some critical events or critical incidents that have occurred in your life that have had a profound impact on your development as an educational leader. Can you list the four most significant events that have had an impact on your development as an educational leader?

1) Event #1:_____

2) Event #2:_____

3) Event #3:_____

4) Event #4:_____

Now that you have listed the four most significant impacts on your development as an educational leader, I would like you to tell me a little about each event.

    1) Tell me about Event #1. When did this occur and what impact did it have on your development as an educational leader? How were you changed as a result of this event?

    2) Tell me about Event #1. When did this occur and what impact did it have on your development as an educational leader? How were you changed as a result of this event?

    3) Tell me about Event #1. When did this occur and what impact did it have on your development as an educational leader? How were you changed as a result of this event?

    4) Tell me about Event #1. When did this occur and what impact did it have on your development as an educational leader? How were you changed as a result of this event?

Experience, Opinion and Feeling Questions:

1) To date what has been the most significant challenge you faced as a leader?

2) How would you have done things differently knowing what you know now?

3) a. Could you share with me the things that most influenced how you conducted yourself in the professional area?
   b. What things most influenced how you conduct yourself in your personal life?

4) a. What specific needs and issues do you perceive as being unique to elementary school principals?
   b. What one thing would it have helped you to know going into the principalship that you think was left out of your preparation experiences? Are there others?

5) What advice would you give young aspiring leaders? How should they be prepared emotionally? professionally? personally?

6) Were there any changes in your leadership style over the duration of your career?

7) a. Have your feelings about how you view yourself changed at all since have been in this administrative position ?
    b. Do you feel that supervisors regarded you differently at the beginning of your career as opposed to your current status?
    c. How have your needs and interest changed as you have moved through your career up to this point?

8)   a. Describe the role that physical stamina and your state of mind play into your daily work habits.
       b. What activities do you participate in as outlets outside of the school day that benefits your performance as an administrator?

9) What do you see as the role of the school system in assisting you to meet your personal and professional needs?
    a. How would you design staff development for building level administrators?
    b. In what ways does your school system's culture celebrate administrators?
    c. Does your work situation encourage principals as leaders?
    d. What are your thoughts on the use and effectiveness of such leadership opportunities?

10) Describe what motivates you to continue working as a principal. What are your thoughts about retirement?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
East Tennessee State University
Veterans Affairs Medical Center

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Donna J. Raines

TITLE OF PROJECT: Epiphanies of the Principalship:
A study of Passages in Educational Administration

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in a study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to explore the effects that a career as an elementary principal has on the individual professional through an examination of the perceptions of principals who have held this position for a minimum of 7 years. A secondary purpose is to determine if there are any benchmarks that parallel current research on life stages. Additionally, this study will consider if there is a predictable pattern of experiences that one can prepare for in order to cope effectively with changes inherent in the position. Efforts will be made to gather data that enlightens those who train and those who supervise these professionals as to the reality of the work, drama, barriers, stressors, and joys that are experienced daily in the field. Finally, data will be gathered from practitioners to see what suggestions they have for redefining this position. Candid information gathered through the interview process may lead to new realizations of the twenty-first century job description and the unique needs of practitioners in order for them to function at maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

DURATION: The subject will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Should the subject wish to continue the interview it will be accommodated at their request at a mutually convenient time. Any additional information that is needed for clarification and accuracy will be taken over the telephone and will last no more than 30 minutes. The duration of the entire project will not exceed the period from May 2003 to May 2004.

PROCEDURES: The procedures used will consist of face-to-face and occasionally, telephone interviews of subjects. Information gained will then be analyzed using the NUD*IST computer program. This program will allow comparison of information so that conclusions can be drawn concerning needed training and support of elementary principals.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: There will be no significant risk to individuals participating in this study. On occasion an individual may experience mild discomfort should a

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: <u>Donna J. Raines</u>

TITLE OF PROJECT: <u>Epiphanies of the Principalship:</u>
<u>A study of Passages in Educational Administration</u>

question evoke an unpleasant memory. However, participants will be told that they may decline to answer any question at any time for any reason they choose. They may also terminate the

interview at any point in the process if they choose and may withdraw from further participation in the study of their own choice.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS *and /or* COMPENSATION: There are no direct benefits to any individual participating in this study.   Some satisfaction may be taken from the interview in knowing that they have assisted in a) broadening the knowledge base related to the understanding of their chosen profession and b) promoting a positive environment for elementary administrators.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Donna J. Raines at (xxx) xxx – xxxx or (xxx) xxx-xxxx or Dr. Russell West at (xxx) xxx –xxxx. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Each participant's right to privacy will be maintained. The results of the study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. The research information will only be available for inspection by personnel from the East Tennessee State University Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis in collaboration with the researcher, East Tennessee State University Campus Institutional Review Board and one other individual familiar with the subject and research procedures as a peer reviewer. Records will be stored for a period of 10 years following the study at the home of the researcher. All information about the participant will be treated confidentially and will not be revealed, except as noted above, unless required by law.

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT: East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury that may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee

Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at 423/439-6134.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: The purpose, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Donna J. Raines

TITLE OF PROJECT: : Epiphanies of the Principalship:
    A study of Passages in Educational Administration

project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me. My study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

_____

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   DATE

_____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR   DATE

APPENDIX D

Letter to Director of Schools

May 15, 2003.

Director of Schools
Johnson City Schools
Johnson City, Tennessee

Dear Director of Schools:

I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. I am writing my dissertation of the effects of a career commitment in the elementary principalship on the individual practitioner. I am defining career practitioners as those who have been active in the position for a minimum of 7 years. I believe that it is crucial for school systems and leadership preparation programs to keep abreast of the changes in the competency requirements of this level of administration and to be aware of what it takes to motivate, inspire, retain and prepare quality professionals to effectively lead in the 21st century.
I will be calling to request a confidential interview with _____ focused on prepared research questions relating to personal and school related issues and the elementary principal's ideas for meeting the current needs of successful practitioners. When my project is complete you will receive a copy of my research conclusions in an effort to make a contribution to your educational organization.
Thank you in advance for your willingness to permit me to expand the knowledge base related to this level of leadership in educational administration.

Sincerely,

Donna J. Raines
Principal, Fairmount Elementary School
Bristol, Tennessee

APPENDIX E

Letter to Principal

May 15, 2003.

Principal
Johnson City Schools
Johnson City, Tennessee

Dear Fellow Principal:

I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. I am writing my dissertation of the effects of a career commitment in the elementary principalship on the individual practitioner. I am defining career practitioners as those who have been active in the position for a minimum of 7 years. I believe that it is crucial for school systems and leadership preparation programs to keep abreast of the changes in the competency requirements of this level of administration and to be aware of what it takes to motivate, inspire, retain and prepare quality professionals to effectively lead in the 21st century.
I will be calling to request a confidential interview with you focused on prepared research questions relating to personal and school related issues and the elementary principal's ideas for meeting the current needs of successful practitioners. You will receive a transcribed copy of the interview to verify accuracy of its content. A pseudonym will be given to each participant to ensure confidentiality of the information shared for this study. When my project is complete you will receive a copy of my research conclusions in an effort to make a contribution to your educational organization.
Thank you in advance for your willingness to contribute to the expansion of the knowledge base related to this level of leadership in educational administration.

Sincerely,

Donna J. Raines
Principal, Fairmount Elementary School
Bristol, Tennessee

APPENDIX F

Auditor's Letter

Susan C. Fulmer, Ed.D., Director
ETSU at Bristol
1227 Volunteer Parkway
Bristol, TN 37620

March 12, 2004

Donna Raines, Principal
Fairmount Elementary School
500 Cypress Street
Bristol, TN 37620

Dear Ms. Raines:

I am pleased to write this letter on your behalf, commending you on the excellent work you have completed in your research project, "Epiphanies of Elementary Principals: A Study of Passages in Administration." After examining your materials, and meeting with you for a guided tour of your research experience, I have concluded that your work is complete, valid, credible, verifiable, and reliable. I am convinced that the study was conducted in a thoroughly professional manner. Your topic intrigued me, connecting life passages and important stages to the development of elementary school principals.

As auditor, I investigated your adherence to the standards of quality qualitative research methods. I traced the interviews you conducted with the 23 participant elementary administrators, reviewing audio tapes, transcripts from the tapes, and the resulting biographical portraits of real people, rounded by the revelations of their thoughts and feelings, not flat characters, delineated only by factual, statistical data. The "Fat data" that emerged produced vivid sketches of these administrators, breathing life into the printed words, and creating a sense of identification and recognition for the reader.

Your review of literature was thorough and complete, and provided a solid base for your research to build upon. The research questions were clear and they delineated the focal points of the study: critical incidents, stages, barriers, and challenges for the participants. The findings were organized by these categories also, making the progression from interviews to conclusions easy to track.

I was impressed with your thoroughness, conducting multiple stages of coding and analysis using the NUD*ist software program to search for patterns and help draw conclusions.

The biographical questionnaire, the interview guide, and the interview questions were thoughtfully prepared and generated a wealth of information to be applied towards answering your research questions and producing grounded theory.

Your research design employed the constant comparative method of data analysis, requiring multiple ways of checking information as it emerged, and employing a flexible stance and willingness to alter your research direction when prompted, allowing the data to take you wherever it indicated. Your field notes helped to put the interviews in context and provide a backdrop for the material.

Your own perspective as a principal gave you insight into the topic of the study, but you wisely balanced it with peer debriefing and member checking to insure triangulation and lessen the chance of bias. The care you enlisted to help ensure trustworthiness was evident, with attention paid to truth-value, consistency, and neutrality.

The data, research tools, and findings were well presented and organized in such a manner that tracing the audit trail was easier to accomplish.

The results of your study may help educators to revise portions of their administrator training programs. School systems may also benefit from this study's findings, using insight gained through this project to design better, more effective in-service training for their principals and creating mentorships, pairing experienced administrators with those new to the professional role to help them weather the critical incidents, stages, barriers, and challenges identified in the study.

I appreciate the opportunity to be associated with such a professionally conducted and thoroughly organized study. I commend you for your extensive efforts, as well as your positive, practical results.

Sincerely,

Susan C. Fulmer, Ed.D.
Director, ETSU at Bristol

APPENDIX G

Peer Debriefer's Letter

Blountville Elementary

155 School Avenue
Blountville, TN 37617
423-354-1650

February 10, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

I served as peer reviewer for Donna Raines during her work on her dissertation Epiphanies of Elementary Principals: Passages in Administration. Throughout her research, we discussed the work she was doing, from prospectus through research and analysis.

During this process, she explained to me her work and I provided feedback and reactions to her methodology and conclusions. She shared the process of her data collection with me, and we discussed various methods of analysis. In additions we talked over reliability and validity issues, member checking, and classification of data. I looked over her record keeping and also gave her other advice out of my field of expertise in the principalship.

Now that she has completed most of the work for this dissertation, I am confident that her treatment of the data is satisfactory. Her conclusions and recommendations are based upon the data, and can be traced back to that data. Donna looked at the research questions from various perspectives that provided a balanced picture of a career in elementary–school principalship.

I believe that the recommendations that came out to the research will be extremely useful for institutions that prepare leaders in the field of elementary administration and Directors and Supervisors of public school districts. By outlining the frustrations and the fulfillment in this position, Donna's study will provide aspiring leaders with options for developing their own awareness, taking into account preparation and program opportunities that will meet their needs. Similarly, material in the study will be useful to administrators in higher education settings as they design programs to prepare leaders to meet the challenges for the 21st century.

I am glad to have been able to participate in Donna's research process. I hope that my support, encouragement, and perspectives were helpful in making this a worthwhile project.

Sincerely,

Evangeline Montgomery, Principal
Blountville Elementary

VITA

DONNA J. RAINES

Personal Data:	Date of Birth: July 9, 1950
	Place of Birth: Plainfield, New Jersey
	Marital Status: Married

Education:
    Public Schools, South Plainfield, New Jersey
        Stetsen Institute, Florence, Italy
        Summer Studies, TSC,
        1971
    Trenton State College, Trenton, New Jersey
        Art Education, B.A.
        1972
    East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
        Secondary Education, M.A.,
        1979
    East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee;
        Educational Supervision and Administration, Ed.S.
        1984
    East Tennessee State University, Johnson City
        Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Ed. D.
        2004

Professional
Experience:
    Art Teacher, Avoca, Anderson and Central Elementary
        Schools; Bristol, Tennessee, 1973 – 1979
    First Grade Teacher, Central Elementary School;
        Bristol, Tennessee, 1980 – 1983
    Fifth Grade Teacher, Central Elementary School;
        Bristol, Tennessee, 1983 – 1986
    Principal, Avoca Elementary School,
        Bristol, Tennessee, 1986 – 1994
    Principal, Fairmount Elementary School,
        Bristol, Tennessee, 1994 – Present

Publications:
    West, R. F., Raines, D., & Russell, D. (1992). Report from the
        information collection writing team. Invited chapter in
        Principals for our changing schools: The knowledge & skill
        base, S. Thomas (Ed.). Reston VA: National Policy Board
        for Educational Admin.

Publications:	Raines, D. (1998) Short Story and Illustration, *Uncut Daisy,* Bristol Herald Courier, Bristol Tennessee.
	Raines, D. (2000) Short Story and Illustration, *Impractical hearts,* Bristol Herald Courier, Bristol, Tennessee.

Honors and
Awards:

Teacher of The Year – (1983)
Bristol Tennessee City Schools

Phi Kappa Delta Honor Society – (1986)
East Tennessee State University.

Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society –(1986)

Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society – (1987)
East Tennessee State University

Project LEAD Grant - $3,500 – (1988)

Career Ladder III Certification – (1989)

Presenter National Convention – Southern Association of
Colleges and Schools – (1993)

State Incentive for meeting Accountability Standards
$2,500 – (2000)

State Literacy Grant $51,000 (2001)

Gamma Beta Phi Society – (2002)
East Tennessee State University.