

NOVICE PRINCIPALS: THEIR NEEDS, PERCEPTIONS, AND BELIEFS ABOUT
LEADERSHIP

by

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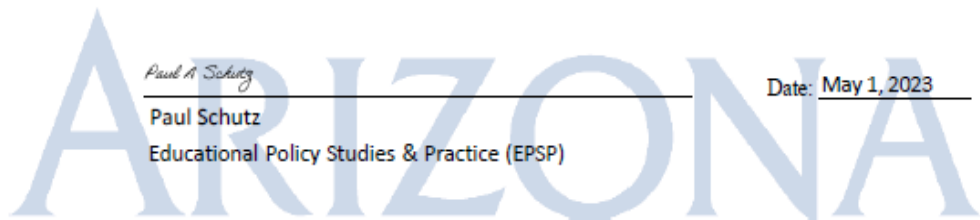
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Once a Wildcat, always a Wildcat!

BEAR DOWN!

Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

Dedication

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation research is to determine what leadership behaviors novice principals enact and what steps they talked about taking to build a school community of trust. Because establishing trust is important to a novice principal's ability to lead a school, it is vital that we understand how they go about this work.

This is a qualitative study where I interviewed six novice principals who had fewer than five months in their first principal position. I conducted interviews of no longer than 75 minutes to ask about their needs, perceptions and beliefs about leadership, and what they do to build trust, establish leadership styles, and find their formal and informal leaders who could assist them in the important work of instructional leadership.

Key findings included: listening to and learning from the teachers; finding the experts on campus, especially for curriculum and pedagogy with which they may not be familiar; understanding that they have a change in mindset in front of them; and finally, providing advice and ideas for pre-service and novice principals.

The implications of this study are that novice principals need time and support to create an atmosphere of trust at their sites; they need to get into the school to listen and learn, discover their formal and informal leaders and assign tasks based on their expertise; and lastly, novice principals need training in working with their people and mentorship from proven effective principals. It is hoped that with this study, school districts might be able to evaluate any existing induction or mentor programs for novice principals and assign appropriate mentors to help them through their first few years in this highly stressful and demanding job.

Chapter One: Introduction

“Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.” Simon Sinek, Twitter, March 17, 2021

Background for the study

A principalship is a challenging experience. The site leader carries the responsibility for anything and everything that happens on their campus. Principals are the instructional leaders, the financial managers, the professional development providers, the counselors for students, parents, faculty, and staff, as well as many other often unanticipated roles. Frequently, novice principals, those who have three or fewer years of site leadership (Hvidston, Range, McKim, & Mette, 2015; Shoho & Barnett, 2010), have little experience with the scope of the building leader role (Spillane & Lee, 2014). There are several responsibilities that novice principals feel ill-prepared to face, including dealing with staff and faculty who are not performing as required (Karakose, Yirci, & Kocabas, 2014) and undertaking the necessary step of working toward improvement with these staff and faculty is both stressful and extremely taxing (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Novice principals are often unprepared for the practical aspects of leadership (Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Spillane, Harris, Jones, & Mertz, 2015).

A school principal should focus on instructional leadership, which the National Association of Elementary School Principals defines as “leading learning communities in which staff members meet on a regular basis to discuss their work, collaborate to solve problems, reflect on their jobs, and take responsibility for what students learn” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 34). This also includes managing curriculum and instruction, as well as professional development. While many novice principals feel that instructional leadership is the most important aspect of their role as leader, “novice principals do not receive an instructional leadership blueprint when they enter

the principalship” (Hvidston et al., 2015, p. 120). A further challenge is that novice principals often feel unprepared to “[deal] with poor performing staff [and teachers]” (Karakose et al., 2014, p. 1366). Often, relationships are discussed when preparing for a principal role and when talking with mentors based on a principal’s need to conduct teacher observations and reviews, as well as the recruitment and dismissal of teachers and staff.

New principals are tasked with switching from teaching in a single classroom to leading an entire school site which forces them to figure out this new role, a challenging endeavor often leading to a feeling of helplessness, confusion, and despair (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). Novice principals must begin their journeys by listening to their stakeholders, learning about the school culture, and observing behaviors and the things said in the teachers’ lounge, in hallways and classrooms, in order to know how to move forward (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018). Because principals rely on others to do their own jobs efficiently and effectively (Tschannen-Moran, 2014), it is important as the site leader that the principal takes the time to create a community of trust. To do so, principals need to build strong relationships with their faculty and staff.

“Building trust requires patience and planning, whereas novice principals tend to have a ‘do it now’ attitude” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 5). For so many novice principals, their experiences were that dealing with the adults in the school were their biggest concern (Oplatka, 2012).

Principal preparation programs focus on theory and management. As such, pre-service principals may not learn that fostering an environment of trust and high expectations can ultimately lead to a better environment within the school for all stakeholders. “Schools need trust to foster communication and facilitate efficiency” (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 16). Ultimately, a school community where the principal communicates, cares, and follows through is the type of school where teachers and students clamor to be. These types of schools allow teacher leaders to step

up, principals to be in the halls and classrooms, and generally demonstrate to all stakeholders that they matter and are important to the school community.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

As a researcher, I believe that people create meaning and learn through experience. As such, I conducted this research through a constructivist lens. Constructivist theory considers how people gain, construct, and use knowledge (Wadsworth, 1989). Each person learns differently, at different times and makes meaning based on their own lived experiences.

Novice principals bring their own lived experiences as classroom teachers, counselors, curriculum service providers, deans of students, and assistant principals into their new roles. Often novice principals have little training on various leadership styles, nor do they particularly know what type of leader they are. They cannot always articulate it. Novice principals have learned the educational leadership theory; however, they have little practical application of said theory. This is a crucial deficit in their learning.

It is hoped that for any principal, the goal is strong instructional leadership. To work toward becoming that strong instructional leader, novice principals need assistance. Essentially, school leaders must consider their formal¹ and informal² site leaders to affect change. Additionally, good school leaders surround themselves with other good site leaders—teacher leaders, as well as other formal and informal leaders. In a distributed perspective, everyone has something to bring to the table—skills, knowledge, expertise—in which perhaps the principal doesn't have a strength. Tapping into the skill sets, knowledge, and expertise of informal site leaders can help to move the school forward in its individual goals. Novice principals do not

¹ Formal leaders are those who hold power in a school: principal, assistant principal, counselors, office manager, department chairs; these leaders can affect the direction of the school directly

² Informal leaders are those who do not hold power, but instead hold influence among their peers for various reasons; they may influence attitudes and/or processes

generally go into their new positions with skillsets to allow others to lead in their areas of expertise. It takes time and energy to learn to be this type of leader.

J. Spillane, R. Halverson, and J. B. Diamond (2004) further argue in their groundbreaking work on a distributed leadership theory that “understanding the *what* of leadership is essential; but that without a rich understanding of *how* leaders go about their work, and *why* leaders do and think what they do, it is difficult to help school leaders think about and revise their practice” (p. 8). Because the ideas of collaboration, trust, norm-building, relationship-building, and the like are some core tenets of instructional leadership (J. Spillane et al., 2004), it is important that novice principals have an opportunity to work with the *how* ideas for which the authors argue. To do so, novice principals must have the opportunity to practice the *how* ideas throughout their preparation programs, their internship, and in the first few years in their positions. They also need to be able to ask for help, especially from people with more leadership experience. This should be a positive norm, not something that novice principals fear doing.

Through this study, I examined the ways in which novice principals realized their needs so that they could build a community of trust at their sites. Further, I explored some of the actions these novice principals took to create and maintain their relationships with faculty, staff, and other formal and informal leaders through learning to trust others to lead.

Statement of the Problem

Novice principals enter the profession with new theoretical knowledge and perspectives about their jobs through their experiences as learners in their preparation programs. As a new site leader, it is crucial that novice principals quickly become part of the school community. For that to happen, novice principals must earn the trust and respect of their school faculty, staff, parents, and students. In collaborative, trusting schools, the goal is to have a critical mass of people

working together toward shared beliefs and goals, as well as being committed to the school's stated mission and vision as a learning environment where everyone (principal, faculty, staff, students, and parents) authentically cares for each other (Travis, 2017). Creating good working relationships with faculty and staff is vital to the success and efficiency of a school (W. Hoy, 2012; W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Oplatka, 2012; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and it is crucial that novice principals stay away from an "us versus them" mentality, which breeds distrust (Travis, 2017). New principals should enter their sites with the mindset that they are the foundation that will build a strong school community. Their beliefs and actions matter; new principals should recognize that they do not know everything and there are others at the site that can and will help them lead the school. Establishing themselves as having integrity and being trustworthy is the starting point for new principals. Once they have done this, they can work toward the necessary relationships in order to become an effective instructional leader.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine what novice principals do to establish trust when they enter a school site, and further, how they determine their leadership styles and what support they need from their faculty and staff, as well as their supervisors. It is hoped that this study will provide guidance for site principals, district leadership, and perhaps college and university principal preparation programs with insight into the often-overlooked practical application of human interaction required of the principal.

Inquiry World View

As a researcher, I believe that there are multiple truths and realities based on both the participant's experiences and the context of the situation. Each person has their own lived

experiences which influence their own beliefs, truths, and realities. There is no one right answer for all. The world and societal views are influenced by our own experiences and contexts. I conduct research from a constructivist viewpoint. I want to know and understand how these principals position themselves with their teachers regarding trust and leadership styles and skills based on their own lived experiences, beliefs, truths, and realities.

Positionality Statement

To begin, I am a career teacher with more than 20 years of experience in the classroom at the middle and high school levels, as well as at the college and university levels. I was also a building principal at a Title I school for six years. These experiences in schools shape my view of the relationships between stakeholders, especially between the principal and the teachers and staff. In my lived experiences, I struggled as a new principal in how to build strong, trusting relationships with my teachers. It took me a few years of self-reflection and growth to understand the importance of trusting my teachers and having my teachers trust me. I had to learn the hard way that a principal needs to be transparent in many areas of the job and I tended to keep things to myself. I also had to learn that I could not do everything and that I had many formal and informal leaders who could take some of the tasks and do them better than I could. There were also teachers who could lead certain professional development meetings, content and curriculum writing meetings, and several other instructional tasks, and not only do it well but in some cases, could do it better than me. It took time for me to realize that it was 1) okay that I didn't know everything, and 2) asking for help is a terrific way to show your faculty and staff that you trust them.

It must also be noted here that I am a cisgender white woman who grew up in the middle of a moderately-sized city in the Southwestern United States. This definitely colors my

worldview. For most of my childhood, we lived in Section 8 housing (rental assistance program), my dad worked two jobs, and my mom was mostly a stay-at-home mom. However, when I was in high school, my parents qualified for a Veterans Administration home loan and bought their first house in the same neighborhood in which I grew up. It was run down, but it was ours. I am the oldest of four girls, the first to attend and graduate from college, as well as the first to complete a master's degree. In addition to that, I attended one of the federally mandated desegregated high schools in our local district. This high school is in the center of town and at the time, the district bussed students in from all corners of the city. Our school was racially diverse for the time (the late 80s) but was mostly attended by upper-middle-class students, both white and students of color.

Part of my lived experience as a student was that of a second language learner. I attended a bilingual magnet school during second and third grade. I began learning Spanish while learning academic content, too. The school I attended was one of the first bilingual programs in the district. This was in the late 70s, so that was quite a crowning achievement for the district. The school only went up through third grade, so I had to move to our neighborhood school for the remainder of my elementary years. They did not offer Spanish classes, so I lost some of my skills. However, I had many Latinx friends in our neighborhood who would practice Spanish with me. As a result, I took Spanish both years of junior high school, and continued for three years in high school. I did not take Spanish my senior year because they did not offer an advanced enough class. When I entered the university, I decided that in addition to majoring in English, I would minor in Spanish. I did this for two reasons: 1) It would force me to continue practicing and learning the language; and 2) I would be able to study the Latinx culture. I felt this was important due to our proximity to the United States/Mexico border. I really wanted to

understand those people around me and how they interacted with the world in which we were living based on their cultural beliefs. I believe that my being a second language learner provides me with a different perspective—allowing me to be more open and accepting of those who are experiencing second language and cultural differences. I know that in my time in the classroom, as well as that of a principal, I had many parents and students who were appreciative of the fact that I not only spoke their language and could communicate with them but that I tried to understand their cultural needs.

I know I come from a perspective of privilege due to my whiteness. While I had not considered that before, about four years ago, I was honored to study Critical Race Theory and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy with various professors of color. Throughout these courses, I was forced to confront that I do have white privilege. While I may come from a lower-middle-class family, and I both attended and taught in diverse schools, I still have a level of privilege that people of color do not have. I do not have to confront racism as they do. Having said that, I do have to confront misogyny and patriarchal ideas almost daily. I am a single mom, and my daughter is white Latina. I constantly remind her to speak up for what is right and not allow anyone to treat her badly because of her heritage or her gender. She is also pansexual, so we work hard to be understanding and inclusive of all genders and sexualities.

A final note on my positionality is about my own sensemaking processes. I am the type of learner and researcher who is constantly thinking about connections. I tend to make connections across multiple concepts and truths. This is both a blessing and a curse when it comes to focusing on my research and writing as I sometimes try to do everything with too much information. That is often reflected in my work, and I have to take the time to consider what I want to communicate and narrow my focus to make it more cohesive.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

While principal preparation programs around the United States focus on the theory and the knowledge future principals will need, like budgeting and leadership styles, there has been little research on the practical, relationship-based needs and social organization within a school (Hvidston et al., 2015; Ng & Szeto, 2016; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Pre-service principals are often required to complete an internship that provides them with some hands-on experience, and while this internship is vital, often they are still shocked at what they deem the role of “ultimate responsibility” (Hvidston et al., 2015; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Spillane & Lee, 2014). In other words, novice principals learn during their first year that everything at the site is on their shoulders. As such, novice principals should have the knowledge and skillset to create a community of trust that allows for teacher leaders and others to step forward and contribute, thus freeing the principal up to focus on the big-picture needs of the school.

A core tenet of leadership is the leader’s ability to create a community of trust and build relationships with followers and informal leaders. Novice principals must build and sustain trust with their faculty and staff. Due to the nature of a school, and the hierarchy of power therein, the person holding this power needs to begin by laying the foundation for trust with their followers, and once trust is established, they must work to maintain high levels of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). According to Hoy and Miskel (2001, 2007) organizations have two basic structures: bureaucratic and professional. As such, in bureaucratic organizations, there is a delineated power hierarchy, often based on seniority, whereby certain members have control over tasks and people; however, in professional organizations, the core tenet is trust. In these organizations, the people in power rely on their followers to use their knowledge and professionalism to determine the best way to meet the needs of their clients or stakeholders (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Schools

are both bureaucratic and professional organizations. This dichotomy creates a unique situation for school leaders. They do hold a level of power over others, but they also must rely on the expertise and professionalism of their faculty and staff to meet the students' and parents' needs. This speaks to principals, faculty, and staff building a community of trust and shared leadership as appropriate.

Novice principals are an important group of leaders. According to Petzko (2008), there is concern over the number of potential vacancies due to retirements and other factors. In fact, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has reported that principal retirement continues to be an issue—it is a long-term concern. In 2016-2017, the National Center for Education Statistics surveyed approximately 89,000 principals about their job satisfaction and plans for 1) Remaining in their current school; 2) Transferring schools; 3) Leaving as soon as possible; and 4) having no idea what they wanted to do (Goldring & Taie, 2018). As a result of this survey, they discovered that just over 11% of the principals planned to leave within the year, regardless of reason. Of concern is that the NAESP feared that vacancies in high schools and middle schools could rise to 55% and up to 47% in elementary schools. Petzko further notes that while there are many graduates from university and other principal preparation programs, a great number of superintendents in schools and districts are determining that these candidates are not qualified to lead a school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), of principals who were surveyed in 2015-16, ten percent of those left the principalship (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Further, among the principals that remained at the same school in 2017-18, 43 percent of them planned to continue in a principal position for as long as they could, 20 percent were undecided what they would do in the future, nineteen percent would continue as a principal until they were eligible for full retirement benefits from their school/district, and another eleven

percent would only stay in the job until they found another job that was more appealing to them (Goldring & Taie, 2018). These data indicate that schools and districts need to be prepared for principal attrition. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the projected change in employment change for principal positions at all school levels from 2021-2031 is approximately 14,200 (2022). In the school year 2020-21, there were a documented 98,577 public schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), so while 14,200 may not seem like a large number, that equals approximately a 6% change in the number of principals over the next ten years. We must recognize the need for new principals over the next number of years.

Unfortunately, novice principals are often ill-prepared to deal with all of the different demands on their time and energy (Petzko, 2008; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Spillane & Lee, 2014). College and university principal preparation programs have traditionally provided foundational and theoretical training for pre-service principals while ignoring the practical aspects of the principalship, including how to create a community of trust and collaboration (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Also of note is that novice principals need support once they become site leaders; they need someone with whom they can ask questions, vent frustrations, and discuss ideas.

Furthermore, many novice principals often do not understand that the responsibility for everything that happens in their building is on their shoulders. Most novice principals believe that their main function is to be good, strong instructional leaders (Bektaş, Kılınç, & Gümüş, 2020; Harris, 2016; Hvidston et al., 2015; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Petzko, 2008) and while instructional leadership is important, it is only one of the myriad roles that a principal assumes at their site. In their leadership role, novice principals must think and act appropriately to the situation. They must make sense of the situational context and

the job itself and then work together (Harris, 2016; Koyama, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020; Polizzi & Frick, 2012; Spillane & Anderson, 2014; Spillane et al., 2015; Spillane & Lee, 2014) with their team to meet school goals.

The literature provides three main themes that inform this study: 1) novice principals' perceptions, knowledge, and needs; 2) trust, trust-building, and relationships; and 3) social interactions, organization and principals making sense of their positions, their realities, and the situations they find themselves in through the day, semester, and year.

Novice Principals

The decision to pursue a principalship is one of great importance. With the attrition rate of principals, there is a need for new principals. The induction and transition of principals into the profession is of great interest, especially if we are to better understand the events and circumstances that encourage and discourage capable educators from seeking the position (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 563). Unfortunately, there is a shortage of qualified candidates (BLS, 2022; Petzko, 2008). This is alarming because we need good principals to oversee our schools.

Novice principals' perceptions.

Novice principals must possess certain knowledge and skills to be successful. College and university principalship preparation programs vary widely across the country, often because each state has its own certification requirements. Unfortunately, it seems that educational leadership training is out of touch with the reality of the principalship (Petzko, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). There appears to be a disconnect between what college and university preparation programs are teaching and what novice principals need to know to do their jobs efficiently and effectively. The Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC now known as Professional Standards for Educational Leaders) produced a set of standards for school leaders

that were, and still are, intended to be a foundation for principals at all stages (NPBEA, 2015; Petzko, 2008). However, the Stanford Educational Leadership Initiative did a study on exemplary leadership preparation programs, and “The report called for research-based content, a coherent, logical array of courses and learning activities, and program structures that link theory to practice and are framed around adult learning theory” (Petzko, 2008, p. 227). In other words, educational leadership/principalship preparation programs need to redesign/realign their requirements and curricula based on what novice principals do in the field. This redesign/realignment should consider the skills and knowledge novice principals need for working with their teams as collaborators.

Principals are the instructional leaders at their school sites. As such, they are expected to know and understand curriculum and pedagogy. However, as Hvidston et al. (2015) note, while novice principals feel that instructional leadership is the most important aspect of their jobs, these “novice principals do not receive an instructional leadership blueprint when they enter the principalship” (p. 120). This is a challenging area for novice principals because instructional leadership encompasses so many factors. Further, we must consider that there are occasions when a principal takes over a school that is a different grade level than they taught in their time in the classroom. There is a further learning curve for principals in this situation.

In their study of both late-career and novice principals, Hvidston et al. (2015) determined that novice principals felt less prepared to be instructional leaders, but felt it was the most important aspect of their jobs. They sent out surveys to 251 principals at a return rate of 49%. The survey was on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Not Important to 4 = Very Important), and all fourteen of the statements focused on instructional leadership practices, which included items such as school vision, aligning curricula, data-driven decision-making, student performance, and

success, and teacher evaluation and feedback (Hvidston et al., 2015). The independent t-test demonstrated that there was a significant difference in novice principals' views of instructional leadership as compared to late career principals ($t = 2.37, p < 0.05$). Further, novice principals' perceptions of specific instructional leadership elements demonstrated that monitoring teachers' performance ($M = 3.60, SD = 0.56$), monitoring student achievement ($M = 3.58, SD = 0.63$), and using assessment data to improve instruction ($M = 3.50, SD = 0.68$) were the three most important things they as principals do. It seems that "novice principals could have benefited from university principal preparation programs with strong instructional leadership components supported by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council" as well as perhaps "differentiated supervision and evaluation...Novice principals could benefit from mentoring from a principal who is a practicing and successful instructional leader" (Hvidston et al., 2015, pp. 119, 121). The authors go on to state that college and university principal preparation programs need to be more rigorous in their admittance process and allow more time for pre-service principals to learn, interact, and practice becoming strong instructional leaders.

In O'Doherty and Ovando's (2013) study on novice principals, they were interested in discovering what perceptions first-year principals had regarding instructional leadership, what they learned, and how they would apply what they learned to their future years as principals. What the authors determined was that first-year principals should be able to assess their preparedness to be the instructional leader. This requires frequent self-reflection. Instructional leadership is about curriculum, standards, and accountability (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013). New principals are expected to be effective instructional leaders. However, much like Hvidston et al. (2015) and Petzko (2008), the authors acknowledge that novice principals are woefully underprepared to be good, effective instructional leaders. O'Doherty and Ovando (2013)

discovered in their exploratory qualitative study that novice principals recognized that they would have to be very intentional about developing their skills as instructional leaders and focus on the academic needs of the students in their schools. This raises the question of how these novice principals would do that; most of the principals in O'Doherty and Ovando's (2013) study discussed trust and building relationships.

Nelson, de La Colina, and Boone (2008) in their constant comparative case study also discovered that novice principals expressed a need for having positive relationships with everyone in their school and that instructional leadership should be based on shared values, norms, and purpose. In fact, what the authors determined through the interviews is a lack of knowledge regarding the technical aspect and the complications of building relationships with those in the school community. They interviewed seven principals in their first year, and then they followed up with four of those principals entering their second year on the job. Those four principals (all White, two males and two females) all confirmed that they needed additional training and mentoring on how to go about building relationships with their faculty and staff (Nelson et al., 2008). They also indicated that instructional leadership should be the principal's primary focus, but that personal relationship building was more important at the beginning of their tenure than compliance building in the school.

Another key area in which novice principals felt extremely unprepared was that in which they had to confront or coach ineffective or unwilling faculty and staff (Dotger, 2011; Karakose et al., 2014; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Oplatka, 2012; Spillane & Anderson, 2014). According to Oplatka's (2012) review of current literature on new principals, many new and novice principals feel they lack training in how to manage people and conflict. In some cases, new principals had to deal with a hostile faculty and staff due to the general idea that the new

principal had little experience in leading faculty and staff, as well as some cases where the previous principal was so loved and admired (whether he/she was an effective or “good” principal or not) that the new principal would have a challenging time filling that previous principal’s shoes (Oplatka, 2012). Therefore, new and novice principals often go into a new school at a disadvantage, to begin with, and must overcome the negative feelings that sometimes emerge from faculty and staff. Working through these challenging situations requires time and patience.

Karakose et al. (2014) also argues that “dealing with people” was of key concern in their qualitative study of novice principals (N=28). They found that novice principals “felt least well prepared for dealing with poorly performing staff” (Karakose et al., 2014, p. 1366). Further, they discovered that whether the previous principal was professional and competent or not made no difference to novice principals’ perceptions of their entry into the school and creating a strong, cohesive, cooperative school climate and culture. Additionally, novice principals understood that they needed to have effective communication with their faculty and staff and that they needed to work on motivating their teachers, all of which contribute to a positive climate and culture within the school (Karakose et al., 2014). This qualitative study reiterates that building trust with the people in the school is the foundation for moving the school forward.

Trust

Trust is the assurance that a person can count on the goodwill of another person to act in one’s best interest and it is this goodwill, together with good morals, that bind people together (Baier, 1994). What this means is that we must rely on others to accomplish tasks. We are allowing other people to care for the things and people that are the most important to us. Schools

and the children in them are one of our society's most precious things (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Therefore, trust is a key tenet in any school, but trust is so much more than a simple definition.

Within the literature, there are many types of trust: relational (Bryk & Schneider, 2003); collective (Adams, 2013); reciprocal (W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). In the end, all these types of trust depend upon people working together for the common good of all involved. According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), trust holds the organization together due to common beliefs and goals; trust also allows for followers to pursue various avenues to accomplish goals and tasks without fear of recrimination. In highly trusting organizations, leaders and followers both feel valued and are willing to take risks knowing they have the support of their colleagues.

Trust is difficult to define in concrete terms because it is multifaceted and constantly evolving and further, trust is often defined individually and has different meanings for each of us. For the this study, I use Tschannen-Moran's (2014) definition of trust, which she arrived at through the literature: "Trust is one's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent" (p. 17). These five faces of trust (W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2009, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015) are what create the definition.

Trust-building in schools

In their empirical work, W. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) used an existing conceptual framework by Hoy and Kopersmith (1985), which was designed to measure faculty trust in their colleagues and in their site principal. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran added new items geared toward measuring the importance of competency and openness of the principal. Their new instrument was designed to assess each of the five facets, or faces, of trust listed previously.

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) pilot study consisted of a 37-item Trust Survey, wherein teachers responded to items surrounding the five faces of trust. They collected data from 50 different schools, and approximately one-third of the teachers involved were identified as coming from either low or high trust schools. The other two-thirds received a hard copy of the survey via mail. Seventy percent of the teachers they contacted agreed to participate in their study and returned the surveys. Their findings revealed three factors: 1) Trust in the Principal; 2) Trust in Colleagues; and 3) Trust in Clients, where clients are both students and parents. It is important to note that they used a principal axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation and teachers "did not distinguish between trusting students and trusting parents. Thus, the two sets of items combined into a single factor... 'Trust in Clients'" (W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 192). They provided reliability evidence of the measures of the three types of trust previously mentioned at $\alpha = 0.92$, $\alpha = 0.94$, and $\alpha = 0.92$, respectively. Forty-five schools returned surveys, which made the sample size 898 teachers. The researchers ran a factor analysis of the trust measure, and three items were eliminated due to poor factor loadings. Each of the three dimensions of trust (i.e., Trust in Principal, Trust in Colleagues, Trust in Clients) moderately correlated with each other. Trust in the principal was related to trust in colleagues ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$) and trust in clients ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). Trust in colleagues was correlated with trust in clients ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$). In the end, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) discovered that the three dimensions of trust they identified demonstrated a relationship and most importantly, trust is widespread when it is reciprocal. When the teachers trust their principal, they (the teachers) are most apt to trust their colleagues, students, and parents. On the contrary, if the teachers lack trust in the principal, distrust is prevalent site-wide among all stakeholders (W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

This empirical work by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) has continued to influence research on trust in schools. Their trust scale surveys are currently used in many schools and districts as a gauge for school needs in building climate and culture. However, novice principals need to understand this idea of distrust creating more distrust to better understand the human condition and what they might need to do to avoid distrust within and among their faculty and staff. Novice principals need to understand that a good, trusting leader is on their teachers' side, even if they don't always agree with their teachers (Hoerr, 2014). Trust-building in schools takes time and talent. Schools are about the people—the students, parents, faculty, staff, and the principal.

Tschannen-Moran (2014) provides a framework for trust-building activities that principals enacted in her book *Trust Matters: Leadership for Successful Schools*. This book serves as a narrative guide for what principals should do to build trusting environments within their schools. This qualitative work centers on case studies of three principals, one who has been successful at cultivating trust with her faculty and staff, and two others who even with their well-meant actions have been unsuccessful in creating and growing trust in their schools, thereby impairing efficiency and effectiveness (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

All three of these principals led elementary schools with a low socio-economic status and predominantly minority demographic. Each chapter of the book provides a Putting It into Action section with practical application ideas and steps to help new and novice principals begin to build their communities of trust. As she says, "There is no simple recipe for fostering trust. Building trust is a complex process requiring reflection and attention to context" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. xvi). In schools with high trust, the principal is respected and admired, not because they are just a nice person, but because the principal sets high standards, and they hold

teachers and others accountable in fair and reasonable ways. Teachers do not feel threatened but empowered. Further, when the principal extends trust, often they are trusted in return.

Tschannen-Moran (2014) notes that principals must exhibit trustworthy behaviors, including honesty, integrity, and keeping promises made. Further, principals also must be accountable for their actions and words, and ultimately be dependable and conscientious (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). New and novice principals should understand that their honesty and integrity are of the utmost importance. Do not make promises that you cannot keep. Do not supply half-truths when asked questions. Be honest, especially if you don't know the answer to someone's inquiry, or you cannot disclose the information. Being upfront with faculty and staff goes a long way to building the type of trusting environment that is vital to schools.

Novice principals must also understand that while trust takes time to nurture and grow, trust does not look the same for every person in every situation. It can take up to eighteen months to build a stable, trusting relationship with someone (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). To earn trust, the individuals involved must be willing to extend trust themselves based solely upon what they know of the person and situation at the time. This is the foundation from which stronger trust can be built. The principal sets the tone for the school in all ways. Their words and actions directly influence the culture of the school site.

Novice principals' reflections on trust and relationships

Throughout the literature, novice principals indicated that building relationships and working with people for the common good of the school was a vital action that they not only needed to take but needed help in doing (Hvidston et al., 2015; Karakose et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2008; Ng & Szeto, 2016; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Oplatka, 2012; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Petzko, 2008; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Spillane & Lee, 2014). College

and university principal preparation programs did not prepare them well enough, or at all in some cases, for the “people” aspect of the job. However, in much of the literature, it is also noted that when novice principals have career principal mentors, they can more easily and frequently discuss the human side of the principal position and seek advice and guidance for working through some of those human issues that arise at a school site, specifically with faculty and staff.

Participants in Nelson et al.’s (2008) study suggested that “developing strong relationships with students, families, and staff is a common challenge among novice principals and requires ‘setting boundaries’ and ‘building trust’” (p. 692). Further, one of the participants, Ann, critiqued her preparation program stating that there should be more focus on practice, rather than theory and research. While she did indicate that theory and research are important, her thoughts were that practical application, as well as real-life scenarios and situations, are more important (Nelson et al., 2008). Another participant in this study, Samantha, indicated that focusing on relationships with teachers and staff was the area she found the most challenging and would have appreciated better training and preparation (Nelson et al., 2008). Both participants raise a key concern in their reflections on relationships and how to go about creating a positive and trusting learning environment in their schools. This research draws on Sergiovanni’s 2004 work on systems world and lifeworld. The authors posit that in education the “lifeworld...refers to the aspects of the school that are reflected in culture, values, and relationships. The lifeworld is about developing human capital within the school community and is what gives purpose to the organization” (Nelson et al., 2008, p. 697). Further, the idea of the lifeworld is not about compliance. It is about committing to one another for the common good of the organization.

This idea coincides with Petzko (2008) who argues that according to novice principals, “establishing good relationships” and “motivating staff” were top priorities (p. 229). As

discussed previously, human relations and personnel were key issues in her quantitative study. Novice principals need more time to work on their skills directly related to human relations and personnel, which include their “ability to communicate, resolve conflicts, motivate employees, manage teams, and select, evaluate, and further develop faculty and staff” (Petzko, 2008, p. 238). As a result, Petzko recommends that principal preparation programs must make a conscious effort to comprehensively address human relations and personnel issues.

Novice principals must recognize that they need to develop trust in their leadership by finding and engaging with their teacher leaders. These actions will lead to a trusting and trustworthy faculty. It is through their building their relationships with their teacher leaders that trust can be built campus-wide. Developing these relationships “required getting to know who the people are on the campus, determining collective strengths and areas of need, asking thought-provoking questions, and more important, displaying active and empathetic listening” (O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013, p. 546). These novice principals must take the time to get to know their people. They must be authentic, consistent, and communicative.

Principal preparation and professional needs

According to Shoho and Barnett (2010), novice principals aspire to develop professionally, be open and communicative with their stakeholders, inspire their faculty and staff, build relationships with stakeholders, and provide support for professional development for their teachers and other staff. The authors argue that the best way to assist novice principals in building up these skills is through mentoring and coaching. Most of the novice principals in their study understood that the first year on the job was to learn about and understand the school's existing culture and the teachers and staff on-site before they implemented any type of dramatic change (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). However, the novice principals did feel that having someone

with more experience with which to bounce ideas around, discuss issues and provide feedback would have helped them adjust and deal with “adult-oriented issues”. In other words, novice principals need mentors to whom they can talk about the happenings and people at their school sites.

Shoho and Barnett (2010) reiterate that having strong communication skills with all stakeholders is crucial. In fact, novice principals indicated that “their interpersonal communication skills were constantly being put to the test in working through conflicts with teachers, staff, and parents” (p. 583). Novice principals are under a microscope and their every word and deed is dissected and analyzed by teachers, staff, parents, and students. As such, they need to be prepared to be very deliberate, concise, and professional in their communications, both verbal and non-verbal, with all stakeholders. Shoho and Barnett (2010) argue that principal preparation programs need to allow time and opportunity for pre-service principals to work on their people skills, including how to resolve conflicts, self-reflection, effective and efficient communication, and managing their time; further, they need to learn about and develop skills in problem-solving and mediation to address the various issues that may erupt at their sites. In addition to this, novice principals must have a support system in place whereby they have mentors and coaches to facilitate and guide their on-the-job learning. Creating partnerships between districts and schools that extend beyond pre-service preparation and include leadership development throughout the novice period (years one through three) would provide a great opportunity for novice principals to continue honing their skill set.

Karakose et al. (2014) also contend that the novice principals they studied experienced challenges in communication and inspiring their teachers to give their best. Because the novice principals in their study indicated many challenges regarding the human relations aspect of the

job, the authors suggest that novice principals need additional professional support, which could include professional development and mentoring by seasoned, successful principals. This support is especially important, not just to address the relationship building that should be taking place, but also to support the novice principal in the cases of addressing poorly performing faculty and staff.

The recurring theme of human relations is also discussed by Ng and Szeto (2016) in their work on discovering the professional development needs of novice principals. In their qualitative work, they determined that novice principals felt they needed knowledge and skills in human resource management (human relations) and wanted the time to seek out and share with experienced principals any challenges or other situations they needed to address, especially regarding teachers. Many of the respondents understood that they did not work alone. They had to rely on the expertise and professionalism of teacher leaders. To do that, they needed to work on creating a stable relationship based on trust (Ng & Szeto, 2016). Unfortunately, these novice principals did not feel prepared to initiate actions that would create the types of relationships they understood were necessary.

Social aspects of leadership and making sense of it. Schools are humanistic and “humanistic schools had principals who led by positive example, were considerate, personal, avoided close supervision, were engaging, friendly, and had faculties with high morale” (W. Hoy, 2012, p. 77).

As previously noted by Petzko (2008), college and university preparation programs are not meeting the needs of novice principals. Because teacher morale can be problematic when a novice principal enters a school site, these principals need to be prepared to address that low morale. Novice principals understand that working on and creating good, strong relationships

with faculty, demonstrating respect to all stakeholders, and providing authentic motivation to staff are vital to establishing a successful school (Petzko, 2008). It is also important that novice principals know, understand, and learn how to address confrontational situations, whether with parents, students, faculty, or staff. When novice principals react badly to confrontational situations, it can damage the relationship and chip away at any established trust (Petzko, 2008), which can take a long time to rebuild.

In her study of novice principals, Petzko (2008) administered a survey that contained 18 knowledge and skills domains that principals should know and be able to do. The survey was based on a 4-point Likert scale across two criteria: 1) the importance of knowledge and skills in specific content areas in their initial success and 2) how prepared they felt in that area. The Likert scale ranged from 1—little to no importance—to 4—critically important. The sample consisted of new middle and high school principals and assistant principals attending a national leadership conference. There were 250 surveys distributed and 77 complete surveys were returned. Of the 77 complete surveys, four were removed from analysis due to the vague answer about which position the respondent held (middle/high principal or middle/high assistant principal—the respondents failed to choose a grade level), which allowed for 73 completed surveys for data analysis. Petzko's methodology was to calculate the mean score for each of the two criteria. She compared using an independent sample t-test or one-way ANOVAs.

The results indicated that two-thirds of the domains were very or critically important to their success. Two domains scored higher than 3.5: human relations and personnel. In fact, “human relations and personnel scored higher than 3.5 with every [disaggregated] group of principals” (Petzko, 2008, p. 235). This indicated that novice principals were most concerned about how to communicate, resolve problems and conflicts, motivate site employees, manage

teams, and select, evaluate, and further develop faculty and staff (Petzko, 2008). In the end, human relationships, working together, instructional leadership, and evaluation were the most important across all groups. According to Petzko's (2008) results, more respondents indicated that while human relations and personnel issues were critical to their success, they felt very unprepared to manage these areas ($M = 2.52$ and $M = 2.44$, respectively). These data indicate that principal preparation programs must consider putting more emphasis on the knowledge and skills necessary to meet this need.

According to Spillane and Lee (2014), novice principals experience "the ultimate responsibility shock" (p. 442). A consistent theme in their longitudinal mixed-methods study was how novice principals are unprepared for the weight of their responsibility. Suddenly, these novice principals are responsible for every person on campus, student academic progress, teacher and staff employment, everything. Several interview respondents claimed that even with their assistant principal experience, they did not realize the extent to which the principal is held accountable for every single thing that happens on that campus (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Many of the novice principals the researchers interviewed express a sense of loneliness and increased stress. They had to make sense of their new responsibilities and work to understand how they could employ strategies to create a more collaborative environment where they could trust others to get the job done and always work toward the common school goals. In one case, Janice, a novice principal who was the assistant principal at the school before, was able to share that because there were relationships already there, she had an easier time integrating herself as the instructional leader. As Janice states, "I knew the climate and the culture of the school...I knew the people...So I think that went a long way because I was already part of that, so I didn't have to learn it and take the time to figure out the culture of the school" (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p.

454). Alternatively, those respondents who were placed in an unfamiliar school did not have the advantages that Janice had, and therefore some of them had serious issues to overcome with faculty and staff. As Spillane and Lee (2014) explain, “when novices enter the principal occupation in schools that they know relatively little about, the problems of practice tend to be exacerbated” (p. 456). Novice principals in this type of situation should have and take the time to learn about the school climate and culture, learn about and gain the trust of the people on campus, and reflect on their own words and deeds to make sense of the situations. This is important because as the role of the principal “brings about shifts in existing social relationships” (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 434). This shift cannot be helped but could instead become a strength if the novice principal accepts it for what it is. Novice principals need to remember that the trust between two individuals can change based on the social context of the relationship (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 46).

Spillane et al. (2015) further argue that for novice principals who are new to their sites, they have the added challenge of not knowing the people they can trust, or whom they can recruit to help lead the school. Again, it is important to consider “how school organizational conditions such as staff norms (e.g. trust, collective efficacy) influence novice principals’ efforts to navigate leadership in the plural and leadership in the singular as they are socialized into their new occupation” (Spillane et al., 2015, p. 1081). In this work, the authors use a sensemaking framework to analyze the interview data from a longitudinal mixed-methods study of novice principals. They were concerned with how novice principals use sensemaking framework—making meaning, noticing, and bracketing cues in their environment and interpreting those cues (p. 1069)—to process their experiences as novice principals at their school sites.

Coping with the school site's identity, which includes forming strong, sustainable learning communities, creating and implementing a shared vision, and making sense of the school's existing culture is imperative for novice principals (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Novice principals must endeavor to make sense of who their school is—because the school is made up of people, novice principals must know the people. Some novice principals go into their new sites as authoritarians who demand compliance; however, over time, they may adjust their leadership approach to be more inclusive of their formal and informal leaders on campus.

Because a principal's actions play a key role in the development and sustenance of trust, they need to be very deliberate about showing respect and regard to each of the member of their school community (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Novice principals would do well to practice active listening to their teachers' and staff's concerns and react accordingly. Demonstrating integrity by doing what they say they will do is vital to building that trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 44). Through these types of actions, novice principals create a community of trust in their organization. And while principals are often at the mercy of federal, state and district policies, laws, rules, and guidelines, in the end, they are the instructional leaders and are ultimately responsible for their school sites.

The principalship is a position of power. However, that power is based on relationships built around trust and believing that all actors in the school are not only "pulling their weight" but are also performing their assigned tasks to meet common school vision and goals. Schools "are social systems and, as such, the interpersonal relationships in them are embedded in a social context" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 167). Within this social system, principals are the instructional leaders, as has been discussed throughout the literature, and they are often called upon to make sense of people and situations and act accordingly. In her work on how principals

create a local policy that is appropriate and necessary for their individual schools' needs, Koyama (2014) suggests that principals act as *bricoleurs*. The instructional leader enacts policy—federal, state, district, and local school-level. In this study, Koyama was interested in how principals enact policy regarding the accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This work was part of a larger qualitative study of principals, assistant principals, and various district-level administrators where the focus was how principals were able to comply, minimize, alter, or subvert the requirements with which they were faced for the required public reporting of overall student achievement results. These initial data were collected over approximately three years, where she began interviewing 45 principals in New York City. Koyama then followed up interviewing 12 of the 45 principals each year for approximately four years (Koyama, 2014). The focus for coding the data was on accountability. Koyama “utilized the notion of *assemblage*, a term often associated with actor-network theory (ANT), to frame how NCLB’s testing, and data-monitoring accountabilities bring together, and are deeply imprinted by, a plethora of actors with varying aims, resources, and histories” (2014, p. 3). Principals and other actors within the school by necessity rework and adjust policies to meet their own needs. Novice principals often do not know how to be *bricoleurs*, or they are unwilling to do so due to their inexperience.

Novice principals can learn how to practice “strategic leniency” which can build trust when the principal balances commitment to fair procedures (rules, policies, laws, and the like) and a commitment to the people (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). As Hoerr (2014) argues, test scores are important, but the students are more than percentiles and teachers are more than drones who teach to the test. Both groups of actors are people with feelings, opinions, ideas, and values. Considering Koyama’s (2014) work in conjunction with the existing literature on sensemaking,

communication, and social interactions on school campuses (Dotger, 2011; Spillane & Anderson, 2014; Spillane et al., 2015), novice principals should learn how to rally their faculty and staff and do what works for them and their school sites.

Of further note in the literature is that the system of schooling and the role of the principal has evolved such that local control has ceased to exist (Foster, 2004). Schools are often referred to as communities; however, when one considers the systemic nature of schools and the role the principals play, leadership has become “a language used subtly in power to persuade” (Foster, 2004, p. 178). In other words, leadership and the language used in leadership can be a way to exclude groups of people from it. Foster (2004) contends that because schools are required to teach to state and/or national standards, and are often measured for achievement through standardized testing, the principal (and by extension, the superintendent) is a tool of the nation-state who has little to no say in the *what* of schooling. While these ideas are in contrast to what Koyama (2014) argues in her work on the *bricolage* that principals may employ at their school sites, the fact remains that principals are accountable to the bureaucracy for meeting the standards that those in power have determined are the only acceptable measurement for success. Foster further argues that the control over schools and schooling, “affect the exercise of leadership in a local setting: setting standards of performance, culpability, and responsibility that limit any exercise of leadership over a schooling culture” (Foster, 2004, p. 183). Foster’s arguments raise the question as to the purpose of schooling. Are schools’ purposes to provide an effective workforce that contributes to the economy? Or is there another purpose to education? These are compelling questions for principals to consider, especially considering the accountability mandates, both local and national.

Summary

The literature on novice principals, their preparation, their ongoing professional development needs, and their role in the humanistic approach to leadership is varied in availability. There is much research on novice principals and their experiences. However, the bulk of that body of work indicates that there is so much more work to do to prepare novice principals for the extremely demanding and high-stress job. Spillane and Lee's (2014) work on the sense of ultimate responsibility that novice principals encounter further discusses the other ideas presented in other literature, such as building trust (W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; W. K. Hoy, 2012; Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and instructional leadership preparation (Koyama, 2014; Oplatka, 2012; Petzko, 2008; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Throughout the literature, the recurring themes are novice principal perceptions and preparation, trust, needs, and making sense of their roles. These themes provide a foundation for where we need to go next. Relationships, trust-building, and the human aspect of leadership must be addressed in all stages of principal preparation and the first several years of a new principalship.

Gaps

There is one predominant gap in the literature that must be noted here. Much of the literature discusses the need for college and university preparation programs to redesign their coursework and curricula to better meet the needs of pre-service and novice principals in working with the people that make up their school site. Most of the literature employs qualitative methods to determine novice principals' perceptions of their pre-service training, what they felt prepared to do and what they felt they lacked in preparation. A couple of studies employed quantitative surveys, providing data on training and trust.

However, of note is that very little was discussed throughout the literature about *what* and *how* novice principals can create good, trusting relationships with their faculty and staff. Many participants could not articulate the actions that they took to begin building trust and creating a strong climate and culture within their schools. Further, a secondary gap in the literature exists as most of the studies did not ask novice principals about what *didn't* work in their first year as instructional leader. It would be interesting and provide some idea about what additional training and learning novice principals may need, not to mention how districts could better prepare and mentor novice principals. Lastly, the literature did suggest that college and university preparation programs are failing their pre-service principal students in the practical application of the theory (Dotger, 2011; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Petzko, 2008; Polizzi & Frick, 2012; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Türker, 2016), and there was little discussion as to what these programs could do to better prepare our future principals beyond the college/university classroom and theory. This study aimed to address these gaps.

Research Questions

In this inquiry, I investigated two research questions:

RQ1 In what ways do novice principals talk about their approach to developing relationships and trust at their schools?

RQ1a In what ways do novice principals work to build a foundation of trust with faculty and staff?

RQ2 In what ways do novice principals talk about how their leadership programs and previous administrative experience prepared them to develop relationships and trust at their schools?

RQ2a In what ways do novice principals identify their formal and informal leaders?

RQ2b In what ways do novice principals employ leadership knowledge in their new positions?

As a researcher, I saw my role as eliciting real lived experiences through my interview questions.

Novice principals bring a fresh perspective to leadership and my research questions were designed to encourage my participants to think deeply about their actions when entering the school site as the newly appointed principal considering their novice status.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

This study aimed to determine what and how novice principals go about their work in creating communities of trust, identifying their formal and informal leaders, and how they adopt and adapt their leadership styles as needed. The methodology I used is informed by the phenomenological approach that people make meaning in situations and contexts based on their own lived experiences, and that behaviors and meaning-making are in a constant state of evolution due to personal interpretation and the situations in which people find themselves (Punch, 2014). Being informed by Punch's work allowed me to dig at the interpretations of my subjects (Bhattacharya, 2017), as well as to confront my own interpretations due to my lived experiences in a principalship. I attempted to determine connections between principal preparation and the reality of the position at the commencement of their principalship, as well as discover how novice principals go about creating trust at their school sites. I focused on their preparation, trust, trust-building, leadership style and sensemaking. I explored understanding how novice principals approach the realities of their positions in relation to their beliefs about trust, trust-building, and leadership styles.

Sample/Participants

For this study, I recruited six novice principals, intending to focus on their experiences as a new principal in a school during the first five months. This is a group of individuals that can become overwhelmed due to the increased workload they are expected to take on (Covarrubia, 2020; Karakose et al., 2014; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Quinn, 2021; Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Context

I aimed to discover the experiences of novice principals, those with less than one year of experience in the role, have had in their new roles and how they can build trust and employ

various leadership styles. To do so I interviewed these novice principals about their experiences to gain insight into *how* (emphasis added) these principals applied their learning and experiences to the reality of the day-to-day leading of a school. My participants were the newest of the new—they had each only been placed at the beginning of the school year, hence they had been in their positions for approximately five months at the time of recruitment and interviews.

Participants were selected from a large urban school district in the Southwestern United States – Shining Desert School District. I worked with the district research manager who provided me with a list of possible participants. As noted previously, I used purposive sampling based on the number of years the participant has been a building principal, specifically selecting those who have only one to three years of experience. However, due to the requirements of the school district and the Institutional Review Board at the university, I was not permitted to contact potential participants. Instead, the research manager had to make initial contact and provide a brief introduction of me and my study. Unfortunately, novice principals did not respond to the research manager’s emails. As a result, the research manager directed me to meet with the director who oversees all new principals.

I met with the director to discuss my research goals and needs. At that time, he requested I send him my participant letter and he would reach out to novice principals. This process was challenging for several reasons: 1) I was at the mercy of others and had to rely on them to get me in the door with the novice principals; 2) the director only had contact with first-year principals; and 3) it was incredibly time-consuming. I met with the research manager via Zoom in August. I did not meet with the director until after fall break in October. Having said that, once I met with the director, he emailed approximately 20 new principals. Of those 20 to whom he sent emails on my behalf, I received emails from six of them. These six principals all agreed to be interviewed

for my study. Because six principals responded to the director's inquiry, I adjusted my study to include these six participants, and I also had to adjust my focus to these principals who have less than a year of experience. I began to consider this as an interesting opportunity for learning from the newest of the new principals.

The participants were emailed the Informed Consent form (see Appendix A), where I asked that they sign and return a scanned copy or a photo to me via email. At that time, I also asked each of them to complete the Google Form for demographic data collection (see Appendix B). We then set up an interview day and time. All demographic data was collected on the participant principals that included: age, gender, race and ethnicity, highest degree obtained, and number of years of administrative experience. I also asked that they report what type of administrative experience they had prior to their principalship. The grade level of the school the principal oversaw was not a factor I considered vital; however, it must be noted here that several of the novice principals became site leaders at a grade-level school they had never worked in before.

Data Collection

Data collection began in November 2022 and concluded in December 2022. Over the course of a month and a half, I interviewed all six novice principals about trust, trust building, leadership styles, and preparation for their new roles. Procedures are described in detail below.

Instrumentation

Considering the literature on trust (Adams, 2013; Blanchard, Zigarmi, & Nelson, 1993; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; O'Connor, Anthony-Stevens, & Gonzalez, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2009, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015), principals were interviewed once to determine their initial thoughts, observations, and suggestions on

leadership in relation to the reality of the job, as well as how trust is established as a foundation and then built for capacity. The interview questions were semi-structured in nature, thus allowing the interviewees to expand upon answers as they saw fit. The goal was to elicit rich conversation and storytelling from their experiences as a novice principal. Interview questions are listed in Appendix C. Follow-up interviews were not scheduled. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Procedures

Interviews began with my confirming their agreement to the interview and reminding them that the interview would be recorded. I began recording and I received verbal confirmation from each that they consented to the interview and the recording. Next, I provided them with my Statement of the Problem and reviewed my Research Questions. I asked each participant at this point if they had any questions; if they did, I answered them and if they did not, we proceeded with the interview questions beginning with question one. If I needed clarification on an answer, I asked follow-up questions. If a participant answered a question not yet asked, that was taken into consideration, and I rephrased the unasked question to gain clarification. Additionally, if a participant answered a question while addressing a different question, I circled back to that previous answer as a refresher and asked any further probing or clarification questions.

To honor participants' time in their packed schedules, I strove to keep interviews to 60 minutes. I did recognize that participants may have needed extra time to address the interview questions and tell their stories. I was very flexible on the time allotment, but again, I was determined to honor their time. The longest interview was 73 minutes, and the shortest interview was 48 minutes long.

Interviews were scheduled via Zoom per participants' choices. Every principal chose Zoom and they remained in their offices for the duration of our time together. Zoom interviews were ideal for using the basic transcription from the recorded session, to which each participant agreed in both writing and verbally on the interview recording.

Interviews were video recorded via Zoom, and transcribed. The transcriptions were shared with participants through a summary of what they said. This was for member checking, accuracy, and clarification. All audio and video recordings were deleted after transcription was complete; transcriptions are kept on a password protected computer. Furthermore, each principal was given a pseudonym, as was their school site, and the district to assist in confidentiality. Only I have the codes that match the principal and their site with the pseudonyms. Again, this information is on a password protected computer.

Data Analysis

I began data analysis by looking through the pre-determined themes and codes I had compiled ahead of time. My pre-determined themes and codes are directly related to the literature on trust, trust-building, leadership styles, and preparation for the role.

Procedures

I read and re-read the transcribed interviews several times. As I did so, I made notes and wrote memos on specific terms and phrases that each principal said related to my pre-determined codes. The purpose was to identify themes related to the research questions regarding trust, trust-building, leadership, and preparation for the job. I was able to compare participants' terms and ideas, as well as asking myself questions about those terms and ideas to arrive at common definitions, ideas, and thoughts (Punch, 2014). I used both deductive and inductive approaches for themes and codes. My goal was to make meaning of the data in ways that made sense for my

theoretical framework and my research questions (Punch, 2014). As I read through the transcripts several times, I was looking for relationships and commonalities amongst the participants' experiences, ideas, perceptions, and beliefs. I allowed for the emergence of other codes and themes. I compared terms and phrases across participants. I asked myself how the responses and emergent themes are interconnected. At this time, I also compared interviewees' responses to the literature to determine similarities and differences. Through these coding processes, I gained some insight into the specific beliefs and approaches my participants have and behaviors they exhibit in trust-building, leadership and sensemaking, and their preparation for the demands of the job.

At the conclusion of my coding, I analyzed the lived experiences of my participants as novice principals to determine connections to novice principal needs in relation to their preparation and the realities of their jobs. Additionally, by listening to their stories and analyzing their beliefs, I worked to explain the phenomena that I observed regarding leadership, trust and trust-building, and their experiences and preparation for their new responsibility-laden positions.

Role of Theoretical Framework

This study is framed for trust and trust-building (Tschannen-Moran, 2014) through a constructivist lens. The school principal position is one of leadership and power; however, principals cannot get things done alone. They must rely on others to successfully lead a school (Spillane & Lee, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and in fact, they often work through other people. A novice principal has abundant theoretical knowledge when they enter the building, but they must learn the job by doing it. They need to discover who their formal and informal leaders are and work diligently to build trust with that team of people, and indeed with the whole faculty and staff. It is only through working through those trusted individuals that principals can become

the instructional leaders they need to be in their buildings (Hvidston et al., 2015; Klar, 2012; Ng & Szeto, 2016; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Spillane et al., 2015; J. P. Spillane, R. Halverson, & J. B. Diamond, 2004). Creating relationships built on mutual trust allows principals to build capacity for leadership with their teachers, thus also allowing the principal to focus on instructional leadership as a whole, and the needs of their faculty and students, as well as manage both the fiscal and physical plant of the school.

Rigor

To address rigor in this study, I mirrored what other qualitative researchers have done through my interview questions and procedures. I worked to establish trust with my participants by getting to know them a bit, asking them questions about how they were doing, explained confidentiality as related to my study, and answered questions about my study, in particular what I would share with the district, and that I would destroy video and audio recordings after transcription was complete. I established the accuracy of the population I was studying through my questions on previous experiences in administration and ensured that each of them had never led a school before as this was the main requirement for participants in my study.

Credibility

In addressing credibility, I sent the interview summaries with key terms and phrases to the interviewees for member checking. I asked them to review the summaries for accuracy and clarity. Further, I shared the emergent themes with them. If they raised questions about what was said, I was able share the audio/video recording with them for further clarification. However, none of the participants questioned the summaries and all agreed that what I summarized was what they said, lived, and believed.

I recruited two colleagues, one of whom has experience as a building principal, and the other who is a current professor of practice at a university. Both are former graduate students in my program, and I asked them to read through the data analysis and provide feedback. Having two other sets of experienced eyes review my analysis helped me to further analyze any areas that were vague, as well as providing me a critical assessment of my methods and analysis. Based on their suggestions, I was able to clarify and add detail to several points in my findings.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, I worked to tell stories through each participant's interview. My work was informed by thick description. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2019), describe thick description as the researcher providing a detailed account of what they see and hear in the field; the use of direct quotations from participants assists in the narrative storytelling of thick description. Approaching my interviews through this concept was vital to understanding the phenomena of trust-building and leadership, and further, how novice principals were able to accomplish these vital goals.

Moreover, in doing semi-structured interviews, I was mirroring what other researchers have done in the past in studying principal preparation, trust, and leadership (Karakose et al., 2014; Nelson et al., 2008; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). While some of the research I have cited also uses surveys as a method (W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Hvidston et al., 2015; Petzko, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015), many more have done qualitative research in talking with principals and teachers about their lived experiences. My interviews followed the same research protocols that others have done previously (Blanchard et al., 1993; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Dotger, 2011; Hayes & Irby,

2020; Hvidston et al., 2015; Leithwood et al., 2020; Petzko, 2008; Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2009, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Chapter Four: Results of the Study

The following section provides background information on the school district, as well as the demographic data on each participant. I then provide some information on each participant, including their education, leadership experiences, and their experiences as educators prior to becoming involved in school administration. This information assists in telling their stories, lived experiences, perceptions, and beliefs.

Shining Desert School District

This school district is a large urban district in the Southwestern United States. The district offers Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade at 90 schools. The demographics in the district are noted in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1

Race/Ethnicity*	2021-2022 SY Enrollment	2022-2023 SY Enrollment
White – not of Hispanic origin	7873	8188
African American	2677	2924
White of Hispanic Origin	27172	28892
Native American	1603	1690
Asian	625	960
Multi-racial	1717	1852
TOTAL	41885	44506

*Racial categories are based on the U.S. Census labels

Table 1 shows that the district has a large Hispanic population of more than 65% of the enrolled students. Further, this district covers a large area of the city in which it is located and has schools that are located in upper-middle-class to poor neighborhoods. There are several schools in

outlying sections of the city that could be classified as either suburban or bordering on rural. However, with the expansion of the city, those schools are more likely to be classified as suburban due to the growth of residential neighborhoods.

The socio-economic distribution of students is quite varied. Having said that, 80 of the schools (approximately 89%) within the district qualify for Title I federal monies to provide supplementary services for students; this is the Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) count, which is a federal measure of poverty levels that determines which students qualify for supplementary services. Shining Desert School District overall has a large Title I population. This can often present a challenge in schools as traditionally Title I classified students have been labeled as “at-risk” for dropping out. There is a stigma attached to a Title I classification, as well as the term “at-risk”. In actuality, U.S. Department of Education states that the federal Title I program “provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (“Improving Basic Programs Offered by Local Education Agencies (Title I, Part A),”). It must be noted here that federal Title I monies are awarded not simply on the enrollment of students who qualify for those services based on the FRL, but also based on the state allocation per student.

For context, in our particular state, the Auditor General Office reports fiscal year per pupil allocation for fiscal year 2022 is \$10,729, which is near the bottom among the 50 states plus Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico for per pupil spending (2022). That means for every student enrolled in a school, the school is allocated \$10,729 to educate that student for a year. Federal Title I monies are designed to provide additional funds to Title I designated schools, which is allocated by the total Title I enrollment in the school, not the individual student, so that

these schools can provide services like reading intervention, math intervention, after school tutoring, and other academic services to Title I designated students. The information on Title I and per pupil allocations is important to understanding the systems in place within Shining Desert School District and some of the situations that novice principals face in their schools. Of the six novice principals, five of them are in designated Title I schools.

Participants

The six novice principals I interviewed consisted of two males and four females; the age range varied from 30s to 50s. All were either White of Non-Hispanic origin or White of Hispanic origin. They all hold a Master's degree in educational leadership, but one also holds a Master's degree in Biology. That principal has a unique story in that education is her second career. Table 2 provides demographic information on the participants.

TABLE 2

Participant*	School & Grade*	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity**
Brandi Crawford	Sonora Elementary School K-5	F	41	White
Savannah Anderson	Inglewood Elementary School K-5	F	34	White
Justin Paul	Kaplan Elementary School K-5	M	47	White
Erica SantaMaria	Franklin Elementary School K-5	F	51	Hispanic
Alejandra Lopez	Prickly Pear Middle School 6-8	F	43	Hispanic
Holt Williams	Sunset Primary School K-3	M	42	White

*All participant and school names are pseudonyms

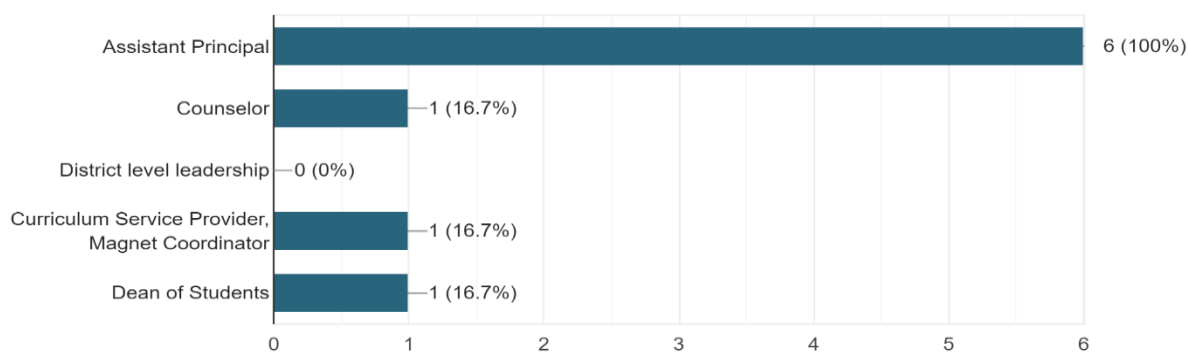
**Racial categories are based on the U.S. Census labels

Each participant also had prior experience in administrative roles, most of them within schools; none had prior experience in administration at the district level. However, there was one participant, Alejandra Lopez, who also had leadership experience in the private sector. All six novice principals had prior experience as assistant principals. In the assistant principal role, most of them acted as disciplinarians in their former school sites. One of the participants was also a Dean of Students previously, which is traditionally a disciplinarian role, and is heavily involved in the district initiatives to address discipline issues in a more constructive manner than simply suspending or expelling students. However, the Dean of Students is also sometimes tasked with assisting teachers in issues with classroom management, as is the assistant principal. If a school site has both a Dean of Students, and at least one assistant principal, often the role of disciplinarian falls first to the Dean of Students and the assistant principal becomes the secondary disciplinarian. This becomes an important point in telling my participants' stories. Three participants also had other administrative experience within schools. Table 3 below presents the types of experience my participants have in educational administration:

TABLE 3

Previous experience in school leadership BEFORE assuming a principalship

6 responses

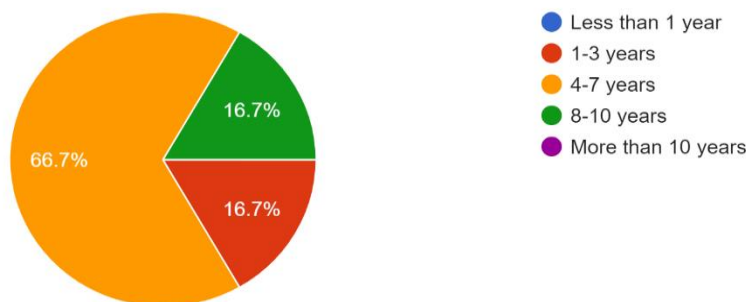


As for the previous experience, most of them had at least four years in some sort of administrative role, which could include school counselor, special services coordinator, or a service provider position to work with teachers. Only one participant had less than three years of administrative experience. Table 4 below provides the breakdown of years of administrative experience:

TABLE 4

If previous experience in leadership, how many years?

6 responses



Each of the novice principals that had assistant principal experience expressed a degree of gratitude for that experience as they were able to transfer some of that skillset to their new roles. There were learning opportunities for each of them, which are presented later in this dissertation.

Brandi Crawford. Ms. Crawford is in her early 40s, identifies as a White female, and has four to seven years of experience in administration. She began her career as a middle school teacher, then became an assistant principal at a middle school. All of her experience in leadership has been at failing schools. She decided to apply for a principal position due to the number of openings, and she really wanted to have a broader impact on students. Because of her background in failing schools, she found that she had to shift her mindset when she began her

principalship at Sonora Elementary School. Further, Ms. Crawford is married to a fellow teacher, and she attributes her willingness to apply for a principal job to the fact that her spouse understands the demands on her time and supports it. She has four children, three in public school and a one-year-old at daycare. She said that she's "never been so overwhelmed in [her] life, but [she] wouldn't change it for the world" (Interview, November 3, 2022).

Savannah Anderson. Ms. Anderson is in her mid-30s and is the youngest of all the participants. She also identifies as a White female and has one year of administrative experience. She spent three years as a site-level coordinator for special services for students (exceptional education, behavioral intervention, child-find, etc.) and then spent one year as assistant principal. Ms. Anderson does not equate her coordinator position to an administrative position. All of her years of experience were at Inglewood Elementary School, where she is now the principal. She began her career as an elementary school teacher and moved up from there, beginning with running professional development sessions on-site. Ms. Anderson talked at length about how Inglewood is a "multi-generational site, both for the families and the faculty and staff" (Interview, November 7, 2022). She felt that this was an important point, especially as she moved into the principal position while everyone on site already knew her. Ms. Anderson did say that she often feels like she's "in fight or flight mode...but that it's not really flight or fight mode and [she needs to] just breathe" (Interview, November 7, 2022).

Justin Paul. Mr. Paul is in his mid-40s and identifies as a White male. He has four years of experience as an assistant principal in a K-8 school. Before that, he was a high school math teacher. His educational experience includes coaching various sports teams. It was during his time coaching that he began to think about leadership. At Kaplan Elementary, he stepped into a position that was previously held by a much-beloved principal. Kaplan is a neighborhood school

where the parents are very involved. Mr. Paul knew that he was going to have to quickly earn the trust of the parents, faculty and staff. One of the greatest lessons he learned is that he “doesn’t know what [he] doesn’t know” (Interview, November 9, 2022) and he had to remember that his previous leadership experience may have helped him step into this role, but that he still has quite a lot to learn about the job.

Erica SantaMaria. Ms. SantaMaria is in her early 50s and identifies as a Hispanic female. She has the most administrative experience among the participants with over eight years in leadership roles. She began her career as an elementary teacher and then moved into a counselor role. She worked toward her administrative certification and became an assistant principal in a K-8. She is now in the principal role at Franklin Elementary School, which serves grades K-5. Further, this site is a specialized program school, which is a small neighborhood school where the parents are very involved, much like Mr. Paul’s experience. Ms. SantaMaria replaced a beloved principal in a very close-knit community. Due to the close-knit community, Ms. SantaMaria felt very strongly that when she went into the school, she needed to just “be [herself] and just build relationships with the families...[and] with the teachers...just genuinely show that I care about students and teachers” (Interview, November 22, 2022). Ms. SantaMaria believes strongly in coaching people to be their best and realize their potential. In fact, she is also pursuing a certificate in life coaching.

Alejandra Lopez. Ms. Lopez is in her mid-40s and identifies as a Hispanic female. Education was a career change for her. Due to personal circumstances, she left her career as an environmental biologist with a large private company and became a high school biology teacher. She missed her role in management, and as such, she decided to pursue her administrative certification. Ms. Lopez spent two years as a Dean of Students and then moved into an assistant

principal role in high school. In July 2022, she was offered an interim principal position at Prickly Pear Middle School. Something of note about Ms. Lopez and Prickly Pear Middle School is that she “purposefully was looking to work in an at-risk school” (Interview, December 2, 2022), and Prickly Pear fit that profile. This school has been plagued by high absenteeism for both students and faculty, as well as failing grades awarded by the state board of education. Ms. Lopez knew that it would be challenging in such a school, but for her, she knew that she could “make personal connections with both students and faculty” and Prickly Pear allowed her to have the “best of both worlds—connections and management” (Interview, December 6, 2022). Furthermore, Ms. Lopez is the only participant who came from outside Shining Desert district. She was a teacher, Dean, and AP in a different district, so she has the added challenge of learning about the district and how it operates.

Holt Williams. Mr. Williams is in his early 40s and identifies as a White male. He began his educational career as a high school social studies teacher. He found himself often being asked to take on teacher-leader positions, like department chair, mentoring and other tasks. He saw the impact that administration has on a school’s climate and culture and wanted to make that type of positive impact. He became an assistant principal at a high school in Shining Desert district and then moved into an assistant principal role at a K-8 school. Mr. Williams is now the principal at Sunset Elementary School, which is a primary school. This is another small neighborhood school, with high parental involvement and a close-knit community of parents, faculty, and staff. When he began at Sunset, he knew that “there are already so many great systems in place, and we already have such a strong community. I have to learn the community...and continue my learning [because] moving from high school to elementary school...I wanted to experience that and I’m glad I have because I’m able now to see how much of an impact I can make on students”

(Interview, December 9, 2022). At Sunset, the faculty and staff really do believe in the whole child and Mr. Williams is excited to be a part of that.

Each of my participants shared their stories with what I perceived to be passion and candor, filled with examples of amazing things at their sites, as well as the challenges they faced. None of them are perfect, but their stories are authentic. Being authentic means that sometimes the stories are not fun, like Ms. Lopez, who despite dealing with the whole school due to a teacher's passing the night before, still gave me her time for the interview. These are realities that principals face.

Data analysis

The following sections describe in detail my processes for analyzing the data gathered during the participant interviews. I focus on what my participants said as well as what was implied in their stories.

Themes and Codes

As noted previously, I went into each interview with a set of pre-determined themes and codes for which I predicted each participant to address. Based on the literature on trust, trust-building and leadership, as well as that of novice principals (Aravena, 2018; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Covarrubia, 2020; W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Karakose et al., 2014; Kılınç & Gümüş, 2020; O'Connor et al., 2013; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Quinn, 2021; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, 2014), I was certain that keywords would appear throughout the interview time. I used a combination of pre-determined codes but also allowed for the option of open coding. I determined that I could process what was said versus what was implied during our conversations. I then moved to axial coding, where I was able to take the implied ideas that appeared in the interviews, categorize them based on what the participants described (actions,

beliefs, behaviors), and cross-reference them by each participant. Table 5 lists both the themes I pulled from the interview transcripts after going through each transcript several times and making notes and memos on what I saw within those transcripts, as well as the pre-determined themes and codes that I had in mind when I originally set out to do this research.

TABLE 5

Themes	Codes
<p>1) Trust, Trust-Building and Relationships (RQ1a)</p> <p><i>Correlates with theme 2 in literature review</i></p>	<p>Honesty*, integrity*, care*, celebrations, follow-through, vulnerability*, relationships*, consistency</p>
<p>2) Leadership Style* & Skillset, Knowledge & Needs (RQ2a, RQ2b)</p> <p><i>Correlates with theme 1 in literature review</i></p>	<p>Ultimate responsibility*, impact, formal and informal leaders*, transparency, input*, communication*, visibility, servant, democratic, changemaker, capacity-building</p>
<p>3) Mindset (RQ1, 1a, RQ2, 2a)</p> <p><i>Correlates with theme 3 in literature review</i></p>	<p>Replacing the “perfect”, owning the site as your own*, getting people to believe you’re there for the long-haul, preparation*, prior experience*</p>
<p>4) Novice Principal Preparation</p>	<p>Experience, ask for help, find your leaders</p>

**Indicates a pre-determined theme and/or code*

When I look at the pre-determined themes and codes as compared to the themes and codes that I pulled from the transcripts, I could see that they were related. They may have

different names, but ultimately, they mean the same or very similar things. Each of these themes is discussed next.

Trust, Trust-Building and Relationships. As noted in the literature, the theme of trust and trust-building (Theme 2 in the Literature Review) is important because to create a school culture of trust, the principal must enter the site willing to take the time to build trust and relationships with stakeholders (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2009, 2014). The word *trust* (emphasis added) appears in the transcripts a total of 83 times. My participants had much to say about trust and how they define it, their beliefs about building it, and how they go about achieving trust (RQ1). In several interviews, these principals spoke about “walking the talk” to demonstrate to faculty and staff that they are trustworthy individuals. Ms. Lopez talked at length about how she has “to stick to my word, and if I say I’m going to do something, I do it” (Interview, December 6, 2022) and Mr. Williams said “I don’t make promises I can’t keep. When they come to me, they are asking for my support [and] I will do it...I show my actions...walk the talk” (Interview, December 9, 2022). These are examples of follow-through, as well as honesty and integrity, which were pre-determined codes in my theme of trust.

Also, within the theme of trust, several of the principals talked about caring for their people and celebrating the positives. Ms. Crawford talked about how it is imperative that she “stop what I’m doing and listen to them” (Interview, November 3, 2022) when teachers come to her with an issue. “I validate their emotions every single time. It’s all of those little tiny things that equal trust...those little things you do over time. Simon Sinek has a saying that I keep next to my desk that it’s not about being in charge; rather it’s about taking care of those in your charge. Take care of your charge because they’re people” (Interview, November 3, 2022). Ms. Crawford also begins each staff meeting with celebrations. As she says, principals and teachers

“have a hard job. We have to come together. We have to celebrate each other, and they want acknowledgement” (Interview, November 3, 2022). In fact, she ensures that she celebrates one or two staff members at every meeting. Celebrations are important to building trust amongst staff.

Ms. SantaMaria also felt strongly that celebrating the “little things and just saying ‘thank you’ to the staff goes a long way to building trust” (Interview, November 22, 2022). She also indicated that honoring the support staff and folks like the janitors and cafeteria workers is just as vital as honoring the office staff and teachers. Celebrating everything from birthdays to positives that happen in the classrooms, cafeteria, and playground, all of it is important. Mr. Williams also believes that one of his responsibilities is to get into the classrooms and “make positive comments and recognizing ‘Wow! That was amazing how you redirected that child!’ And recognizing when a classroom is a warm and caring environment” (Interview, December 9, 2022). Ensuring he expresses gratitude and support to the teachers and staff goes a long way to building the trust necessary for him to become a strong leader. It is important to him that the faculty and staff know that he is there, and he supports them and their efforts.

When talking about trust, my participants had various ideas about what trust looked like for them in their individual situations and schools. Many of them spoke effusively about how trust includes having grace, providing validation, and being honest with stakeholders. In fact, my participants believe that they need to be consistent, be forthcoming when allowable (confidentiality must be upheld in certain situations) and be transparent with faculty and staff. These actions are necessary for trust-building.

Mr. Williams talked about how he needs to “build a relationship” (Interview, December 9, 2022) with his stakeholders and that he needs “to just listen and learn” (Interview, December 9, 2022), which will go a long way toward the trust-building he wants to accomplish. Ms. Lopez

said something similar but expanded by saying that “just like respect, you have to build it from yourself, before you ask it of people...you have to stick to your word, and if I say I’m going to do something, I do it” (Interview, December 6, 2022). Both examples speak to follow-through, which is foundational for trust.

Ms. Anderson indicated that trust “must be mutually earned...and it takes time. [You] have to be available, being around, being open [are] definitely some of the ways you can earn...trust” (Interview, November 7, 2022). It is key for these novice principals to remember that trust is a mutual endeavor. One way to earn the trust of your stakeholders is by being consistent (W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). This goes back to demonstrating integrity and doing what you say you will do. Ms. Crawford expressed that “there isn’t any one thing you can do to earn people’s trust. You must be consistent over time, like it’s your behavior, consistency over a long period of time...day to day actions” (Interview, November 3, 2022). She welcomes her faculty and staff every day, asking them how they are doing, and acknowledging and validating their concerns and needs. Mr. Paul also discussed how trust means that he doesn’t “need to be a micromanager” (Interview, December 9, 2022) because he knows that the teachers are doing their jobs and doing them well. He also indicated that it goes both ways and that the teachers and staff need to trust that he is doing his part.

Theme summary. Participants as a group spoke most often about trust as it relates to vulnerability with each other, knowing that each is doing their part to meet shared vision and goals and that they are a team working together. As trust is the basis for creating a strong school culture, this made sense to me and is also supported by the literature on trust (Adams, 2013; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Curt M. Adams, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Many of them commented about how trust is shared (Lopez, Crawford, Paul, Williams), they all indicated that

trust is earned, and they also all stated in some way that trust is about demonstrating that you as the principal have everyone's best interests in mind with every decision you make at any given time.

Leadership Style and Skillset; Knowledge and Needs. In this study, I also aimed to understand how novice principals made sense of their leadership style and skillset, as well as learn about their knowledge and needs in their new positions (RQ2 and Theme 1 in the Literature Review). The answers were as varied as the participants' personalities. Ms. Lopez sees herself as a differentiated leader because "[I] have to differentiate the leadership depending on the need. I'm a big believer in teams decision-making. I don't like to make the final decision [without input] from others. I like to get input" (Interview, December 6, 2022). However, she is also capable of and willing to make hard decisions on her own. Having said that, Ms. Lopez did indicate that her immediate supervisor has given her some powerful feedback by reminding her that she is not the assistant principal, who is generally responsible for discipline, so she has "to be careful that I don't act that way to the staff, that instead, I should give that bad cop [role] to my assistant principal and the dean so that I can be the motivator that staff needs" (Interview, December 6, 2022). Taking on the principal role means adjusting to the needs of all stakeholders.

Alternatively, Mr. Williams describes himself as a transformative leader and is collaborative. He does not believe in unilateral decision-making. He claims that he is "not a micromanager" (Interview, December 9, 2022) and trusts that his teachers and staff are doing their best for the students. However, he also stated that he needs to adjust his leadership based on the situation. As he said, you "want to be that kind of leader where you can adjust your style based on the situation and the person...it's very hard to categorize ourselves as just one thing"

(Interview, December 9, 2022). Mr. Williams is consistently attempting to make sense of his own leadership style.

There were two principals who saw themselves as servant leaders. Ms. Crawford, while transitioning from middle school to elementary, and transitioning from failing schools to a former A-rated but now C-rated school, expressed that she is a servant leader because she constantly asks “What can I do for you right now? How can I service you? These are my people and I need to take care of them” (Interview, November 3, 2022). However, she also feels that she is a capacity-building (her phrase) leader. She looks for her change-makers. She wants to find the leaders on the campus and then build their capacity as leaders. “So, who can I turn to for classroom management? Who’s the leader for data? Who’s the leader for guided reading? I believe the answer is in the room. I’m not an expert in elementary curriculum, so I had to rely on the voices on campus” (Interview, November 3, 2022). In this way, she has also identified her formal and informal leaders on site who can step in and lead the change that is needed in the school to increase academic achievement.

The other principal who saw herself as a servant leader is Ms. Anderson. She uses language like “our building, our students, our school” (Interview, November 7, 2022). She stated that she cannot do this job alone and she said she feels strongly that nothing is beneath her. She said she can often be found cleaning tables in the cafeteria, sweeping the halls, and doing other janitorial tasks, as well as myriad office tasks, including answering the phone, directing students and parents, and finally, she puts herself in the rotation for substitute teaching when needed. In her previous site where she was an assistant principal, the principal asked her one day why she was cleaning tables in the cafeteria. He told her it wasn’t her job, to which she responded that yes, it was, as she is part of the team. One of her favorite things to do is give restroom breaks for

teachers because it allows her to go into the classrooms and interact with the students in a different capacity. Further, she assists teachers by working with groups of students on tasks when the teachers are engaged with other students. Ms. Anderson feels that she needs to “model that teamwork and productive and positive attitude, especially because that’s what [she] wants from her staff” (Interview, November 7, 2022). She defines herself as being a collaborative leader who looks to her faculty for ideas, input, and sometimes guidance.

Mr. Paul describes himself as a democratic leader. He looks to get “input that is collaborative, however, the buck stops with [him]. The teachers are in the trenches in the classroom every day, so [he] needs their input” (Interview, November 9, 2022) for the betterment of the school. Having said this, he admits that he has faced challenges due to his leadership style because, at his school, there are many teachers and staff that just want to be told what to do. And while he says he can do that, it’s not his style, especially considering the traditions in place at his school. Mr. Paul prefers to be right in the trenches with the teachers, especially as their population is changing and they have a higher free and reduced lunch (Federal Title I program) population. This changes classroom dynamics sometimes. He believes that he needs to step up and support the teachers while asking for and implementing their input.

On the other hand, Ms. SantaMaria firmly practices grow-your-own leadership (as she termed it). She thinks “all of us have strong leadership skills within us, and there are teachers that will run circles around me in particular areas of education. So, my style is to find other leaders on campus that are willing or would like to share their knowledge in a particular area” (Interview, November 22, 2022), which speaks to her discovering whom her formal and informal leaders are and tapping into their skillsets. Ms. SantaMaria went on to claim that she is a servant leader. She loves “serving others personally and professionally, and just being there to support in

any way I can. My goal is also to work toward transformational leadership as well. I want the staff to view the principalship not as us versus them, but rather all of us united as one team” (Interview, November 22, 2022). It appears that Ms. SantaMaria has a difficult time categorizing herself as a particular type of leader. Some would argue that she is trying to be too many things at once, but in the end, everything she is describing is essentially capacity-building.

Another thing that each of them had in common was their insistence that visibility went a long way in their leadership styles toward building trust with their faculty and staff. All of them claimed that they never wanted to be the type of principal who sits in his or her office. Being around the hallways, playground, and in the classrooms is one type of visibility they each said they felt strongly about. For example, Ms. Anderson at Inglewood Elementary School stated that “being available, being around, being open [are] definitely some of the way that you can earn staff trust, you know, showing them that you are there...being in the classrooms, being out on the playground, so that they (the teachers) can then show you they trust your judgment because you don’t sit in your office all day [with] some vague perspective of what’s going on” (Interview, November 7, 2022). Prickly Pear Middle School’s Ms. Lopez said “I don’t want to be the principal that’s in my office. This is a rare occasion where I’m in my office. Really, I try to be as much out of the office as much as possible...that I’m visible whether it’s at lunch, whether it’s in the hallways, and the classrooms...I sub as much as anyone else” (Interview, December 6, 2022). A final example is Mr. Paul telling me that “it’s all about visibility, being out there, being on the campus, building relationships with the students, letting the students know that I’m here for them. Also getting in the classrooms, making positive comments” (Interview, November 9, 2022). These are three principals who spoke about visibility as a trust-building action, not only

with faculty and staff but with students, too. Being visible is highly important for principals and is part of what makes a strong leader.

Theme summary. Again, as a group, the participants spoke about being willing to listen and learn from the school faculty and staff, as well as discovering and using their formal and informal leaders skillsets. Finding the site leaders can help the novice principal gain the trust of the people on site as it demonstrates their willingness to allow other experts to lead. Lastly, each participant was firm in saying that they had to be visible on campus and not closed off in their offices. Each of them spoke about being a part of the team and making their presence known by demonstrating that they are available and eager to be involved with their faculty and staff. The key takeaway in this theme is that novice principals do what it takes to find how they fit into the existing school culture, and that their leadership knowledge, style, and skillsets are in a constant state of evolution. This statement may not seem to relate to trust, but it does suggest that novice principals have transferable knowledge that can get them where they need to be in trust-building.

Mindset. All participants faced challenges when they assumed their new roles at their school sites. Some of these challenges came in the form of: 1) the novice principal who is replacing the beloved and respected principal who retired; 2) the novice principal who is the fourth principal in four years at a failing school; and 3) the novice principal who needs to take a formerly A-rated school that has fallen to a C-rated school and implement change with a faculty that does not want nor see the need for change. There was also a fourth challenge that emerged from my participants' stories: the novice principals who are moving into a grade level they have never experienced before now. These challenges are an opportunity for a change in mindset. Essentially, I define a change in mindset as 1) Change within the principal, and 2) Change within

the school itself, be it policies, procedures, staffing or other items that need attention and how all stakeholders embrace or do not embrace that change.

For Erica SantaMaria, the biggest challenge she faced was related to school safety. As previously noted, Franklin Elementary School is a small neighborhood school, with high parental involvement. At dismissal time, there were so many adults in the hallways, Ms. SantaMaria was very concerned because she did not know who all the adults were. As she said during her interview, there was:

One change I had to make...was for safety...at dismissal there were hundreds of people in the hallways lined up to pick up students. It's not that I don't want families here. I was just very uneasy with the amount of adults that were coming into the building...So, I'd rather apologize for something that I believe is for the best...for the safety of the students, than have to apologize for the loss of a student (Interview, November 22, 2022).

Further, Ms. SantaMaria has told her faculty and staff that she does not have all the answers, she is okay with making mistakes, and that she is not afraid to fail. She believes that when she makes mistakes, "with communication, we can get through them" (Interview, November 22, 2022). She feels that she is at the center, and she is there to reach out and support faculty and staff. This is what makes her a strong and trustworthy leader. She implemented a foundational change that was quite different from the previous principal who allowed hundreds of people in the hallways.

Alejandra Lopez talked about her biggest challenge being staff. Because Prickly Pear Middle School has a large at-risk student population, there traditionally has been quite a bit of faculty and staff turnover. Ms. Lopez claimed that "getting people to believe you care" (Interview, December 6, 2022) was especially challenging. Prickly Pear saw three principals in

three years, which makes her the fourth principal in four years. This made much of the faculty and staff wary of her when she began. Added to that, it has been challenging to acquire and retain faculty and staff, and further, attendance has been an issue. In fact, on the day of our interview, which had been rescheduled twice, Ms. Lopez shared with me that she and everyone at Prickly Pear were dealing with the loss of a teacher who passed suddenly the night before. She was addressing this during the day before our interview time with the help of district personnel.

Ms. Lopez also talked about leadership in terms of differentiating leadership by faculty and staff, much like we do as classroom teachers with our students. She believes that teams should be part of the decision-making process and have input. For example, “some people need much more, and I don’t mean this condescendingly, but the very touchy, feely, emotionally driven type of leadership; others run, follow, or go with the ‘what exactly do I need to do’, step-by-step leadership style” (Interview, December 6, 2022). Ms. Lopez talked at length about her leadership team of the assistant principal, the dean of students, and the support coordinator and how each uses their strengths and they divide tasks, which includes working with faculty and staff.

In fact, Ms. Lopez and the assistant principal have divided the observations and evaluations based on their content area strengths, too. She observes and meets with all math and science teachers while the assistant principal takes care of the teachers who teach the humanities-based courses, as that is his area of expertise. Lastly, Ms. Lopez made a point of telling me that “leadership styles do have to change, sometimes on a daily basis” (Interview, December 6, 2022) and that one challenge she has faced in this regard is that as a former dean of students and assistant principal, she was the disciplinarian, while now as the principal, she is the chief motivator and cheerleader for everyone including faculty, staff, and students. That has been a

challenge to her mindset that she is working to adjust by reminding herself that “every person has a different level of motivation, and so you have to appeal to everyone’s personality type” (Interview, December 6, 2022). This speaks to the differentiation Ms. Lopez discussed previously. Facing Prickly Pear’s challenges has forced Ms. Lopez to make foundational changes within herself. Yes, she is creating opportunities for change with her faculty and staff, but the change in her mindset is also crucial to her success as a leader.

For Justin Paul, his biggest challenge was different leadership styles. According to him, Mr. Paul tries to be very democratic in his leadership style. He wants his school site to be a collaborative place. He regularly asks for teacher input, especially because he has no experience teaching in an elementary school, and he made the point to tell me that “I don’t know what I don’t know” (Interview, November 9, 2022). He was also quite candid with the Kaplan faculty and staff about the fact that he has no experience in elementary school and needs their guidance. Because of his lack of experience in elementary school, Mr. Paul is also facing his own foundational change. His role as the principal is already challenging but add in his need to learn a whole new way of doing things regarding curriculum and pedagogy relating to children under the age of twelve and this adds to his job stressors.

Holt Williams has had a similar experience at Sunset Elementary School. Mr. Williams is another elementary school transplant. All his experience in teaching and administration was at the middle and high school levels. For him, aside from the change in grade levels, the biggest challenge in leadership:

is [the] well-established culture of tradition and recognizing that, valuing that, showing the staff and faculty that I’m not here to change everything right away. I’m gonna support, I’m here to learn, so that’s been a challenge because there are definitely things I

think we should be doing, but as a first year principal, I'm not ready to do that yet
(Interview, December 9, 2022).

Mr. Williams discussed his experience insofar as judgment from some of the teachers about his lack of elementary experience and he had to reiterate that he really is there to listen and learn. Again, this is a foundational change for him. In the end, it was about him "walking the talk" and showing through his actions that he is listening and learning. In fact, he said he has worked with some of the teachers to learn about DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessments, their purpose and use, and going beyond that, he is now going to do some team teaching with one of his first-grade teacher leaders. He seemed very excited about this opportunity. In the end, he called himself a distributed leader because he does actively encourage the teacher leaders to step in and take charge, especially with what is happening in the classrooms. He is still in the process of identifying his informal leaders, but he has several formal leaders to whom he defers in curriculum concerns and ideas.

At Inglewood Elementary School, Savannah Anderson was faced with the challenge noted before of taking over a school where she worked previously in a different role. Additionally, Ms. Anderson noted that as a multigenerational school, there are faculty and staff that have spent their entire careers at Inglewood. This can be especially challenging when you want to make a change. To address this, she sought faculty and staff input about what was working well and what wasn't. She learned that:

surprisingly a lot of people felt the dress code [for faculty and staff] was very lax. Some people were not super professional, but things that were being worn weren't so great...so I had to address that. Yes, we can be comfortable, but we can also still be professional
(Interview, November 7, 2022).

The dress code may not seem important in the grand scheme of things, but because she asked for input, Ms. Anderson felt compelled to address the situation.

She also asked that teachers post objectives and make lesson plans available, which was a change from previous years. To combat the pushback from that request, she framed it as a “it helps me help you...because if I walk into your room, and I’m not sure what you’re supposed to be teaching, or what the end goal is, how can I help you in determining if you’re able to do that? If you’re meeting that end?” (Interview, November 7, 2022). She couched it in terms of ultimately helping the students be successful. This was a foundational change for the school faculty and staff. While she was not replacing a principal they did not want to lose, because of her prior positions within the school, she had the added challenge of getting the team on her side.

Alternatively, for Brandi Crawford at Sonora Elementary School, one of her greatest challenges was reframing her own mindset having come from a state-designated “failing” school. Sonora had been an A-rated school for many years, so Ms. Crawford had to adjust her mindset from “a sense of urgency and expectation as far as what instruction looks like, and what classrooms look like” (Interview, November 3, 2022) for a state designated “successful” school. She had to force herself to slow down and look at things from a different perspective. However, she did not account for what the faculty and staff perceived as change. Sonora was given three additional administrative positions this school year, that did not exist in previous years and the faculty and staff thought it was too much change. It did not occur to her that they would see it that way because the positions given to Sonora existed at the other schools from which Ms. Crawford came. While the faculty and staff complained to her that she had changed too much, she had to focus on shifting their mindset to that of seeing the positives in these newly created positions. The other challenge she addressed was that Sonora went from an A-rated school to a

C-rated school (based on the state board of education school rankings), and now her task is getting the faculty and staff to see what they need to do to get back up to an A-rated school. To alleviate some of their fear and hesitation about the changes Ms. Crawford deems necessary to increase their letter grade, she is using the terms “shift” and “pivot” because, as she says, “it’s not about working harder; it’s about working differently because our path has changed and we have to change with it” (Interview, November 3, 2022). The foundational needs of the school have shifted, and as such, the faculty and staff need to adapt. Her experience in failing and turnaround schools may help her in getting the faculty on board with what needs to happen now.

At Prickly Pear, Ms. Lopez had a unique perspective for a couple of reasons, the first being that education is a second career for her, and the second being that she purposefully sought to lead an underperforming or failing school (as labeled by the state board of education). Ms. Lopez indicated that “there was dissatisfaction with the previous principal. [Principals are] coming in and out, and they’ve had turnover every couple of years as well. So, I think it’s a very cautious atmosphere of who’s starting with you. It’s been a challenge getting people to believe you care” (Interview, December 6, 2022). She further discussed how due to the turnover in principals and faculty, there are challenges in creating relationships. Her story is very interesting in and of itself due not only to her educational and career background, but also because she purposefully chose the more difficult school assignment. In the end, she stated that “the most positive thing about middle school is that I think you can make more of an impact than at the high school. You can actually change the most at-risk students at middle school. It’s easier to capture and help than it is at the high school level...” (Interview, December 6, 2022). While some may argue that her belief that middle school students are easier to affect academically, we

must admire the fact that she willingly placed herself in a leadership role in one of the most challenging schools in the district.

For Ms. Crawford, the previous principal put the teacher leadership team in place and Ms. Crawford had no intention in changing that. This leadership team is a recognized group of formal leaders. She said that she meets with them often and works to “incorporate their voices as much as I can” (Interview, November 3, 2022). She is on board with anything they suggest that is for the students. While the teacher leadership team focuses on academics, they also bring joy and fun to the campus for the students (Interview, November 3, 2022). The previous principal created a school where everyone wants to be, students and teachers alike, and Ms. Crawford is working with that team to expand that and make it even better for those students, especially after having been off campus for distance learning during COVID.

In Mr. Paul’s case, the previous principal at Kaplan Elementary School was amazing, by all accounts. She was a Type A personality, which is in direct contrast to his personality. Mr. Paul claims he is very laid-back. He knows that the teachers are doing amazing things in their classrooms, and he does not feel the need to micromanage. As he stated, he’s “much more collaborative. It’s different for the faculty and staff...not wrong, just different” (Interview, November 9, 2022). Kaplan is a small neighborhood school, as noted previously. The level of parental involvement is quite high, and the parents, faculty, and staff are rather vocal. This was a challenge for Mr. Paul as he had to establish that he was not going to be watching every little thing every person did. He made it a point to be visible and spend his time “going into classrooms...and telling [his] wife ‘I’m gonna have a lot of work at home’ because after school I can’t get stuff done because I’m going into classrooms and checking in as much as I can with teachers” (Interview, November 9, 2022). Replacing a much-loved, admired, and respected

principal can be especially challenging for the new principal. However, this foundational change is necessary as principals retire or move on. The new principal entering the site will need to quickly learn how they fit in before making the site their own.

The final principal who had to work through replacing a beloved, respected principal who retired is Ms. SantaMaria. In her case, she was welcomed by all stakeholders at Franklin; she was upfront by telling everyone that she is there to support and that ultimately, she is “trying to inspire adults to see their true potential. That is a true passion of mine. I want them to aim high. Working with adults is just showing a lot of compassion and empathy toward teachers and what we love, and really helping them to know that I’m here” (Interview, November 22, 2022). Her goal is to coach her teachers to help them be their very best for the students, because ultimately it is about the students. She actively seeks out both her formal and informal leaders (faculty and classified staff, like teaching assistants) and offers coaching and care to them so that they can reach their potential.

Theme summary. Each participant had challenges they had to face. Some of the challenges involved them reflecting on themselves and their lived experiences and beliefs. In this case, they recognized that they had to change their own mindset (Crawford, Lopez, Paul, Williams). Some change manifested itself in recognizing that they had to take the time to listen and learn, especially if they were placed in a site where they had no experience in the grade levels within the school. This required those participants to admit that they needed the help of their formal and informal leaders and embrace that. I determined that the grade level of the school (elementary, middle, high) contributed to the phenomena of trust-building and leadership style. Each of the participants who were grade level transplants indicated they felt prepared to do

the work to some degree, but the fact that they lacked pedagogical or curricular knowledge for the grade level was concerning to them.

Additionally, change in mindset was necessary for two of the participants when they realized that they were no longer the perceived disciplinarian. They had to adjust their mindsets that their faculty and staff had different expectations of them. These principals needed to be the person who motivated them, celebrated the positives, and reminded everyone that they are a team.

This theme falls outside of the framework of trust. However, in embracing the need for change in mindset, novice principals are modeling necessary leadership behaviors for their faculty and staff. This is as equally important as trust and trust-building, for it demonstrates that the leader is willing to work differently and face their own challenges to do the best for the school community.

Novice Principal Preparation. The final theme was something that emerged during interviews with no prompting from me. With the need for changes in mindset presented above, it is important to note that each of the novice principals had some thoughtful advice for prospective principals. They all felt strongly that their educational backgrounds assisted them in fiscal plant management, but they all also indicated that learning about their people and adapting to that and the ultimate responsibility piece is overwhelming. While they each believed that their Master's programs were vital in preparing them with theory and demonstrating what makes a good instructional leader, they also felt strongly that prospective principals need more training in managing people, learning about actions and behaviors to build good, strong, trusting relationships, and managing the stress, which is also reflected in the literature on mentorship (Covarrubia, 2020; Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengtson, 2012; Quinn, 2021) as well as in the literature

on preparation (Dotger, 2011; Kılınc & Gümüş, 2020; O'Doherty & Ovando, 2013; Petzko, 2008; Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

Ms. Crawford was quite candid about how she feels the pressure to perform and show growth at her site, not only in student test scores but also her professional growth as well. She feels immense responsibility for her faculty, staff, students, and site. She expressed how she feels very overwhelmed and exhausted. The pressure of the ultimate responsibility is grueling sometimes because “Everything is yours. I think you can prepare as much as you can...but until you're in this seat, where it stops with you, you don't quite get it” (Interview, November 3, 2022). She was firm in her statements about preparation, but that novice principals do not know the job until they are doing it. She recommends that pre-service principals shadow experienced principals often to gain a better understanding of the demands of the role. That would also allow pre-service principals to see how those with experience handle situations, people, change and all that is involved in the running of a school site.

Ms. Anderson's unique experience of having been at her site in a different role still did not prepare her for the ultimate responsibility of the school site. She said that she feels “like I'm in flight or fight mode so I think that's been something to...learn and navigate. It can [also] be very isolating. It's definitely a hard transition and it can be very lonely sometimes. There's always work to be done” (Interview, November 7, 2022). In Ms. Anderson's situation, she has the added task of finding ways to fit into the team as the leader who makes the final decisions and must accept and deal with the consequences of said decisions. This has been especially challenging as there have been a few instances of people not taking her seriously. Finding a way to work through this has been mentally taxing.

Mr. Paul may be a very laid-back leader insofar as he does not micromanage, but he also knows and understands that he is responsible for all decisions and happenings at his site. He said he works diligently to seek input from faculty and staff; they are the people working directly with students every day, so he wants to hear what they have to say. However, as he said “there are some teachers who just want to be told what to do. I need to get into the trenches with them. That is one of my strategies...communicating with the teachers and being transparent” (Interview, November 9, 2022). What he said about transparency was something he was rather passionate about, while still maintaining that sometimes the principal is not at liberty to discuss certain issues or share certain things due to confidentiality. However, he said he recognizes that being as communicative as possible can only help him to create the type of familial environment for which he strives at Kaplan.

In interviewing Mr. Williams, I felt that his points about taking the time to listen to the teachers are vital. He has not worked at the elementary level before and recognizes that he has quite a lot to learn from his teachers, who know and understand elementary pedagogy and curriculum. It is only after listening and learning that change can be effective. As he said, “I think the most important thing of being a new principal and taking over a building, is all about looking, learning, observing, hearing out, and supporting” (Interview, December 9, 2022). He understands that he is not going to be able to implement any sort of change until the people within the school are on his side and they all work as a team. Mr. Williams articulated that finding any way you can to get in there and create that foundation of trust is important to getting everyone on your side as a leader. According to him, he needed to become part of the school by immersing yourself “in the culture, learn the culture, and be the culture. The job is hard enough so don’t make it harder on yourself... you need to respect the culture of that school” (Interview,

December 9, 2022). His points about school culture are also crucial. The school culture is its very identity and becoming part of that are necessary before trying to make the school your own through any type of change.

On another note, Ms. Lopez made the point that recognizing and understanding that the principalship may not be for everyone is also something which principals need to consider. The job is quite demanding and, in the end, everything falls on the principal's shoulders (ultimate responsibility). As Ms. Lopez said, "I think a lot of people go into principalships and they decide 'I thought this was what I wanted' [but] I actually don't. I'd much rather be in the assistant principal role. You don't think when you're an assistant principal how different that role is to the principal role. But it is quite significant" (Interview, December 6, 2022). She also talked about understanding that she is the one responsible for the school and as an assistant principal, she did not feel that level of responsibility. Ms. Lopez further said that the principalship is "definitely a hard job, it's not for the weak...but it can also be very fulfilling when it works out well. It's just finding that happy medium...and keeping your sanity while you're at it" (Interview, December 6, 2022). It is essential that pre-service principals are encouraged to do their best but that the role is quite different to that of other school level administrators. Finding ways to communicate the demands of the job while also encouraging pre-service and novice principals in their positions is a tricky task.

Finally, Ms. SantaMaria's advice for pre-service principals is to accept that principals do not work alone. In fact, she said that she "can't do this job alone, and so if others are willing to help, I'm willing to ask for help. I do that a lot and it really saves me a whole lot of time and stress" (Interview, November 22, 2022). She talked about how the job is a demanding one and the possibility of burnout is real. When principals burn out or do not manage stress well, this can

affect the school. It is not good for teachers or students when the principal is not fully there mentally.

Asking for help does not make one weak. In fact, it can strengthen your leadership skills because you talk to and seek advice from others who have already faced similar, if not identical, situations. Those experienced leaders have knowledge that they are more than willing to share to help novice principals grow and learn. In turn, these novice principals can refine their skills and help to build capacity with their teachers in the same vein.

Theme Summary. Each principal had similar ideas about what new principals needed to do. It is crucial that novice principals ask for help, be transparent, be open and honest, work hard at becoming part of the community and build trust with their faculty and staff. Further, novice principals should have prior experience in school administration as an assistant principal or a dean of students. These experiences will help to ease the transition. It is through these actions that a principal can become a strong instructional leader and provide the support that teachers need in their classrooms, which in the end will only help the students in their academics. This final theme is disconnected from my framework of trust. However, what these novice principals said is important for their population. We do not want them to burnout, be overwhelmed and overworked. Finding ways to implement their suggestions could go a long way in assisting novice principals in their transition to instructional leadership.

Summary

Each of the participants were able to share many stories about their experiences. Through using analysis tools informed by phenomenology and ethnography, I was able to build more understanding of the phenomena of trust, trust-building, leadership and the change in mindset that novice principals find themselves confronted with when entering a school site for the first

time. Novice principal preparation was a theme I did not anticipate but was pleased to hear about from them. Their experiences within the first five months of the school year provided some powerful insight into what pre-service principals might expect overall in their new positions. In addition, being informed by the concept of thick description to relay the lived experiences of the novice principals allows me to show their experiences more fully in beginning their careers as school site leaders.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This study aimed to discover in what ways novice principals talk about creating trust and relationships with their faculty and staff, as well as how they talk about leadership, leadership styles and finding their leaders, those who can assist them in making positive impact and change at their sites. In addition, this study concerned itself with the actions that novice principals take to begin building trusting relationships with their faculty and staff, and by extension with students and parents, to become a strong instructional leader. I was interested in how these novice principals went about the work and what they need in terms of support from mentors and district personnel to do their best in their leadership roles. Additionally, I was keen to understand how they talked about their preparation for this new role having had other administrative experience.

Through participant storytelling, I was able to analyze and think deeply and critically about what my novice principal participants believe and the experiences they have lived at the beginning of their new positions. Through semi-structured interviews, I listened to these novice principal participants and worked to tease out their ideas and beliefs about leadership and trust, as well as how the two related to each other in creating the type of school environment where teachers and students are valued. Further, through the participants' own words from their interviews, I determined that these novice principals at least know and understand how vital it is to build trust, ask for help, adjust leadership styles as needed, and build capacity among teachers by identifying their formal and informal leaders and assigning tasks to those leaders based on their strengths. Sharing leadership tasks is also a way to build trust because the principal demonstrates their trust in what the teachers know and can do.

Lastly, I learned from these principals that they had some definite ideas about preparation for pre-service and novice principals based on their own experience. Their advice seemed practical and doable for those administrators and teachers who are thinking about moving up to become the site instructional leader.

Interpreting the Findings

This research study was designed around the framework of trust as presented in the literature (Adams, 2013; Baier, 1994; Bektaş et al., 2020; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Curt M. Adams, 2013; W. Hoy, Gage, & Tarter, 2006; W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; W. K. Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; O'Connor et al., 2013; Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2009, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The idea that trust is the foundation for creating an atmosphere of collegiality, cooperation, shared vision and goals, and working with both formal and informal leaders to accomplish tasks is at the core of this literature. As the school leader, the principal has a responsibility to create opportunities for trust-building and leadership amongst the faculty and staff. Bearing these ideas in mind, as a researcher I was able to hear about the lived experiences of my novice principal participants about my research questions. There were four predominant themes that emerged from this qualitative study: *trust, trust-building, and relationships, leadership knowledge, change in mindset and needs and preparation.*

Trust is about being vulnerable with others and believing that they will take care of us and the things and people most important to us (Baier, 1994). As such, when novice principals enter a school site, the need to become a part of the school community by working to build trust with the faculty and staff is of the utmost importance. In their work on the five faces of trust, W. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) discovered that teachers are looking for principals that they can trust, but beyond that, when principals take the time to lay a foundation of trust, that is

reflected in the classrooms as well and can have a positive impact on student achievement (W. Hoy, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). In my study, each of the principals confirmed that their first step as novice principals was to go into the site, assess the culture and work to become part of that culture by taking action to build trust with their stakeholders.

There is quite an expansive amount of literature on leadership styles in a school context. A basic Google Scholar search for the term school leadership styles yields over 3.5 million results. Even refining that search to peer-reviewed articles published after 2019 yields over 17,000 results. This is quite overwhelming. In my study, each participant gave examples of their various leadership styles. Some classified themselves as servant leaders, while others said they were democratic and collaborative. Each novice principal talked at length about how their leadership style is always evolving. Often their leadership style would be considered situational, which Blanchard et al. (1993) defined as adapting leadership to the specific situation and person to meet the immediate needs of those involved. The other leadership style mentioned by two participants is that of servant leadership where the desire is to serve those they lead (Greenleaf, 1998). However, two of them also claimed that in addition to being either a servant leader or a situational leader, they were also a distributed practices leader as defined by J. Spillane et al. (2004). At their cores, these leadership styles are about:

- Applying leadership skills (theory into practice)
- People (leadership teams, teachers, staff, students, parents)
- Situations (day-to-day issues and happenings within the school; issues within the community that affect the school and the people within it)

- Formal and informal leaders' expertise (the experts—classroom management, , curriculum, pedagogy, working with challenging students working with challenging teachers)

The third theme is change in mindset, where I am talking about how these novice principals adapt to the school, the culture, the neighborhood, the faculty and staff, and then how they have to learn the job by doing it. However, change in mindset also encompasses changes that they need to make at their school sites. The principal is the foundation of the school as well as the one responsible for creating the foundation of trust.

The final theme is the type of preparation that my participants recommend for novice principals. Each spoke of the need for administrative experience, as well as the importance of asking for help when needed. I did not anticipate this theme emerging, but it was a natural progression in conversations with all six participants. Additionally, each participant was firm in their beliefs that the position is quite demanding and that asking for help is a necessary behavior. This action demonstrates to their faculty and staff that they are not going to “fake it ‘til they make it”, but rather that the novice principal has trust in their people and can admit not knowing everything. Also discussed were ideas such as finding ways to fit into the existing team, learning, adapting to and adopting the existing school culture, and shadowing career principals as often as possible. Mentorship was discussed explicitly by two of the six principals.

Ms. SantaMaria participates in a local formal group of new principals that meets monthly to vent, problem solve and strategize over various situations that they may have experienced over the last month. She also is part of a group chat via text that consists of all female principals. They do book studies together regarding issues in education and administration. Ms. SantaMaria also spoke to having a principal mentor and stated that “I really take advantage of that. I don't

hesitate to reach out when I have a question. I don't want to pretend to know it all. People want to help you and it's just a matter of being okay with that" (Interview, November 22, 2022). She also reaches out herself to other principals she knows to ask about shadowing them for a day and asking how they go about the business of instructional leadership. Ms. SantaMaria was very firm in her conviction that asking for help demonstrates a willingness to learn and be part of a team.

Ms. Anderson also felt fortunate to have several mentors to whom she can reach out. According to her, "this has made a significant difference. Knowing there are people out there who have 'been there and done that' is very helpful" (Interview, November 7, 2022). She did go on to say that the principalship can be isolating and lonely, so having colleagues who have had the same or similar experiences with whom you can talk, and bounce ideas around is vital to maintaining your mental health. The job is never done, as Ms. Anderson reminded me. But knowing that you are not alone is key.

Implications

The implications for this research are varied. First, because novice principals are new to the ultimate responsibility role, they need mentorship (Covarrubia, 2020; Ng & Szeto, 2016; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2018; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Parylo et al., 2012; Quinn, 2021; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). They should have a trusted colleague with multiple years of experience in not only the management of the fiscal and physical plant, but also mentors who have strong interpersonal skillsets who are able to work with their mentees on relationship and trust building. Schools are not just buildings made from brick, mortar and wood. They are also made up of the people inside those walls. Very often, novice principals need help navigating the people aspect of the position. Having someone with whom they can talk and discuss ideas and solutions, not to

mention ask for guidance and advice, can only help them become more authentic, trustworthy leaders.

Second, we should ensure that novice principals know that it is okay to make mistakes and ask for help. Each participant reflected on how they had no problem admitting lack of knowledge about certain things, and willingly asking others for assistance based on those persons' strengths. Being willing to distribute responsibilities and leadership was an important point each participant made. With the number of tasks that principals must deal daily, it is vital that they feel they can go to others for assistance, especially if it is a task someone else is more knowledgeable about and could complete in a more efficient and expert manner.

Third, each participant expressed that they felt very well-prepared for the position insofar as theory and their previous experiences in leadership roles. However, they also each indicated that the job can be very overwhelming and is quite the shift in mindset from their previous experiences in leadership, which were often related to discipline at a school site. Many of them felt unprepared for the ultimate responsibility role (Spillane & Lee, 2014) as previously stated, as well as addressing the human needs of their faculty and staff. What I mean by that is they often had little to no experience in meeting the emotional needs of faculty and staff (the adults) but were quite adept at meeting those needs in students. They had to do further work and research in working with adults and learning about trust and trust building. They all felt strongly that they needed to be more well-versed in human needs and having a mentor that has strong interpersonal skills would be beneficial, which is supported by literature on mentoring (Pariante & Tubin, 2021; Quinn, 2021).

Limitations

The main limitation in conducting this study is that all interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom. This is a limitation as I was unable to truly gauge body language and facial expressions as I would have been able to do had the interviews been in person. I asked each participant to choose the mode for the interview: in-person or via Zoom. Each participant chose Zoom simply because it is convenient. Doing the interviews via Zoom was convenient for us because we did not have to relocate. This also provided me with the opportunity to use the Zoom auto-transcription feature. However, during four of the six interviews, we were interrupted by office managers, kids, counselors, assistant principals or teachers. Only two of the participants kept their office doors completely closed and did not perform any other tasks. Having said that, I was patient and understanding through the interruptions because of my own lived experience as a former principal.

Need for Future Research

Two of my participants, Holt Williams and Brandi Crawford, told me that if I asked them the same interview questions at the conclusion of their first full year in their new roles, they would probably have more information to share. I am certain that yes, they would have a wealth of new information, experiences, and ideas. In fact, given the chance, I would welcome the opportunity to take this study to the next level and do follow-up interviews about their first-year experiences with a focus on preparation.

Finding and retaining principals who are strong instructional leaders is of the utmost importance for our schools. It is also imperative that these principals have excellent interpersonal skills and are willing to take the time to create and sustain good, healthy trusting relationships with faculty and staff (Aravena, 2018; Pariente & Tubin, 2021; Parylo et al., 2012), and by

extension with parents and students. District personnel who hire principals must recognize the need for relationship-building as a key first step for any principal new to a site. However, for novice principals, district personnel must also make a concerted effort to provide the support and resources to assist novice principals in refining their interpersonal skills and becoming a part of their school site team, all before trying to initiate change or focus completely on instructional leadership.

Providing mentorship programs as a norm can assist novice principals during their induction time in the position. Novice principal mentorship can assist in developing the mentee's professional skills but it is dependent upon the mentoring program goals and how mentors are trained (Pariente & Tubin, 2021). Aravena (2018) pointed out that mentoring is a "professional activity based on interpersonal relationships" (p. 225) and further, that this is a leadership behavior that builds trust within this mentor/mentee relationship. This is a reciprocal relationship that where both mentor and mentee have the opportunity to learn professionally (Aravena, 2018).

In her dissertation work in Tennessee, Quinn (2021) heard from principals who were just beyond novice status that what they needed in a mentor was someone who had a similar experience in school context (i.e. same grade level, Title I, other special programs, race/ethnic population). She further learned from those participants that they needed time to build trusting relationships with their mentors (Quinn, 2021), which is what novice principals also need to do with their own faculty and staff. One other key finding in Quinn (2021) is that mentorship should not be a short-lived endeavor, but rather should continue as needed. In fact, she saw that mentorship should perhaps begin before a novice principal even begins at a site.

Another point that must be made is that four of the six participants in this study found themselves in a school site at a grade level with which they had never worked previously. While

all four of the principals who moved from high school or middle school to elementary or from high school to middle school embraced the change and challenge, it must be noted here that because these principals lacked pedagogical and curricular knowledge for the grade levels at their current sites, their work essentially doubled. They now find themselves in the position of having to learn the principal job while doing it, plus learning pedagogy and curriculum for the appropriate age and grade levels at their schools. Each of these four principals spoke about their need to find their formal teacher leaders who are the aces for each area where the principal lacked knowledge and then taking the time to learn from these teachers. This is an admirable endeavor, but would it not make more sense to place principals in schools where they have experience at the grade level? Perhaps this is something the school districts could consider. Then the novice principals can focus on the immediate need of building relationships and trust, finding their formal and informal leaders, and adjusting to the various leadership styles they need to use at a given moment while not having to overly concern themselves with learning pedagogy and curriculum.

Suggestions from participants. Principal preparation across the country, and indeed the world, tends to focus on theory and knowledge, with little practical application of said theory and knowledge (Petzko, 2008). The colleges and universities that are recruiting classroom teachers and preparing them for the principal role have failed these novice principals in this way (Ng & Szeto, 2016). District in-house programs could also learn from the literature criticizing preparation programs so that they can create stronger training programs for their recruited pre-service and novice principals.

There is a disconnect between what colleges and universities are doing and teaching to prepare new principals and what new principals actually need to know and be able to do in order

to do their job effectively (Petzko, 2008). Leadership preparation programs could consider other avenues to redesign and realign the curriculum and experiences for prospective principals to what the new principals need to learn, know, and be able to do. One area in which principal preparation programs have failed new principals is in emphasizing relationships and trust (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). There seems to be a need for this in preparation programs.

As such, things like trust-building with teachers and staff are rarely, if ever, discussed in principal preparation programs. This demonstrates a disconnect between what novice principals need to be able to do with teachers and staff regarding relationships and what is taught in preparation programs for these novice principals. These are strong criticisms of various preparation programs. However, perhaps college and university preparation programs, as well as district in-house programs, could consider how to better meet the needs of pre-service principals, especially considering what many novice principals declare they were not prepared for when taking on the leadership role. Each of my participants reiterated the point that their preparation programs were terrific for learning theory and leadership styles, fiscal plant management, observations, and the importance of instructional leadership; however, each of them also indicated that more preparation on what to expect regarding the demands of the job, the stressors, how to go about building relationships, and authentic mentoring would help immensely in getting to the point where they could be the instructional leader that the school, faculty, staff, students, and parents deserve. Fostering behaviors to help pre-service and novice principals in the interpersonal tasks might be something to consider.

The ability to effectively lead a school site requires trusting relationships. All stakeholders must feel valued, trusted, and respected. School site leaders must encourage those

very behaviors that can build feelings of value, trust, and respect. Leadership, as such, is not only what leaders know and do, but *how* and *why* (emphasis added) they do what they do.

Conclusion

We understand the rigor and importance of the principal role in a school. The principal is the site leader, which is comprised of various roles and responsibilities. At the core is the role of instructional leader. However, as noted throughout the literature (Hayes & Irby, 2020; W. Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, 2014), as well as in the participant responses to the interview questions for this research, instructional leadership often falls second to working with faculty and staff to establish good, strong, trusting relationships. Both the literature and my participants indicated that without the first steps of relationship-building, instructional leadership becomes even more difficult to oversee.

Novice principals need time and resources to make sense of their new roles. Providing mentoring opportunities with career principals who have demonstrated strong interpersonal and leadership skills should be an expectation. In addition to this, perhaps creating grade level (elementary, middle, high) cadres where novice principals can come together and discuss challenges, celebrations, strategies, and decompress with each other is another avenue to creating a strong group of leaders who support each other.

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form



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University of Arizona Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Novice principals: Their needs, perceptions, and beliefs about leadership.

Principal Investigator: Shannon K. Dineley

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether to participate.

The purpose of this study is to examine how novice principals create communities of trust in their school sites, as well as in what ways these novice principals employ various leadership strategies in leading their school sites. I hope to talk with eight to ten novice principals about leadership.

This study requires a minimum of one hour of your time. There is a demographic questionnaire that will be completed before the interview. The study is designed as a qualitative study consisting of semi-structured interviews with participants. The interviews are designed to last no more than an hour, but can take up to 90 minutes. Follow-up interviews may be requested to elicit further information or request clarification. Should follow-up interviews be requested by the principal investigator, they will take no more than one hour. Further, interviews will be conducted over Zoom, Skype, or Google Meet. The interview questions are designed to elicit your lived experiences in a leadership role. There are seven interview questions in total, and I encourage you to respond to all of them; however, you may decline to answer any of the questions. Emergent themes will be shared with you for member checking, accuracy and clarification.

There are no expected risks to you because of participating in this study. However, there is a small risk of loss of confidentiality, as well as a small risk of discomfort due to the nature of the questions based on your lived experiences. I will endeavor to minimize any risk related to loss of confidentiality by using pseudonyms and protecting those files. For the risk related to discomfort, should you experience discomfort based on the interview questions and answer, we will discuss it together and work through why this discomfort is present and how we can overcome it together or you can skip answering the question. You will not benefit directly from participating in this study.

Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted, and password protected.



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Your responses will be recorded with a pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this pseudonym will be kept in an encrypted and password protected file. Only the principal investigator will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed.

With your permission, I would like to audio and video tape this interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Your name will not be in the transcript or my notes.

Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so, and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

Information collected about you will not be used or shared for future research studies.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. The University of Arizona Institutional Review Board may review the research records for monitoring purposes.

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without penalty. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will not be used in the final report.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you contact:

Shannon Dineley, Principal Investigator
shannondineley@email.arizona.edu or 520-400-0989

Paul Schutz, PhD, Co-Principal Investigator and Advisor
pschutz@arizona.edu

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Program Director at 520-626-8630 or online at <https://research.arizona.edu/compliance/human-subjects-protection-program>.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form, and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

 Printed name of subject

 Signature of subject

 Date

HSPP Use Only: Consent Script
 Non-Funded or Internally-Funded
 v2021-09-02

Appendix B

Google Form fill-ins for pre-interview demographic data collection

1. Name (changed to pseudonym)
2. Age & gender
3. Race and ethnicity
4. Highest degree attained
5. Type of previous administrative experience before principalship
6. Number of years in previous administrative experience

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been a building principal? And where? (RQ1)
2. Tell me about your reasons for becoming a principal. (RQ1)
3. Can you give me some examples of challenges you faced when you first became principal and how you overcame those challenges? (RQ1, RQ2)
4. Tell me what trust looks like for you as a principal. (RQ1)
5. In what ways do you create trusting relationships with your faculty and staff? What steps do you take? (RQ1a)
6. Tell me about your approach to leadership in your school. How do you employ leadership strategies in your school? Were there challenges? Please describe. (RQ1a, RQ2a)
7. What else would you like me to know?

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