

THE CHALLENGES OF BEING A NOVICE PRINCIPAL IN A DECENTRALIZED SCHOOL
DISTRICT IN A REMOTE COMMUNITY IN NORTHERN CANADA

By

DAVID K. SCHROEDER

Brandon University
2015

Brandon University
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Senate for acceptance, a **MASTER'S THESIS** entitled:

The Challenges of Being a Novice Principal In a Decentralized School District in a Remote Community in Northern Canada

Submitted by: **David Schroeder**

In partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Date: July 23, 2015

Dr. Jacqueline Kirk, Advisor

Dr. Heather Duncan, Committee Member

Dr. Michael Nantais, Committee Member

Permission has been granted to the LIBRARY OF BRANDON UNIVERSITY to lend or sell copies of this **thesis** to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA, to microfilm this project, and to lend copies of the microfilm to UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS to publish an abstract.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the project nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

Abstract

This qualitative comparative case study answered the main research question of what challenges four novice principals experienced, within the context of a decentralized school district, in a remote, northern Canadian community. The district administrator provided a unique perspective of what challenges she believed the novice principals faced in the school district. Additionally, the study answered subsequent research questions about the strategies novice principals utilized to begin their year, and the policies and procedures the school district employed to support their novice principals. Data collection included: 1) interviews with the novice principals and with the district administrator, 2) participants' personal reflections, and 3) a focus group discussion.

The findings confirmed the complexity of the principalship due to the demands of the job, and the amount of resiliency required. Two challenges experienced by the participants were budget management, because of the context of a decentralized school district, and managing the building. One strategy the participants identified for beginning the year successfully was to spend time building relationships with staff members and seeking their input. Additionally, the participants felt that a significant part of their successful preparation included an apprenticeship as a vice principal. Furthermore, they described how their former principals mentored them through the challenges they encountered during their first year in the principalship.

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a tremendous challenge for me, and it could not have been accomplished without the sacrifices and inspiration of many people. Most importantly, I would like to thank God, for His strength and wisdom.

Dr. Jacqueline Kirk, my thesis advisor, assisted me faithfully throughout the entire research process, beginning while I was still teaching in Kuwait. With her compassionate and comprehensive approach, she taught me to research critically, write scholarly, and think analytically. Her availability and support was incredible, and I could not have completed this thesis without her. I am specifically thankful for the support she showed my wife Nicole and I, and our family during this process, in which my thesis was put on hold as my family needed to come first. In addition to her impressive scholarly background, Jackie is an incredible human being, and I have been blessed to work with her.

Dr. Mike Nantais, one of my committee members, helped mature my writing with his experience and detailed suggestions, and I am grateful for his thoughtful expertise.

Dr. Heather Duncan, one of my committee members, improved my thesis with her meticulous editing. She encouraged me to develop clarity and significance in my study.

My brother, Bryan Schroeder, is an influential figure in my life, continually supported me with his wisdom and encouragement. I continue to look to him for guidance and advice.

My parents, Ed and Lisa Schroeder, prioritized education from primary school through university, and I am grateful for the sacrifices they made for my education.

My wife's parents, Jeff and Laurie Chappell, made sacrifices that allowed me to focus on writing my thesis, and I am grateful for their support.

My professional mentor, Barbara Lepp, was instrumental in her support of my writing, specifically during times of frustration and angst. She has been an influential mentor, and friend, for me for many years, and I will continue to seek her advice, wisdom, and support.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Nicole Schroeder, whose sacrifices were countless, whose support was endless, and whose encouragement was needed at so many points in this process. Nicole's commitment to my research continually invigorated my belief in myself that I could complete this journey. Nicole's love is never ending, and I could not have completed my thesis without Nicole's love, support, and numerous sacrifices.

The journey of writing my thesis was interrupted with the premature birth of our twin boys, Atticus Raymond and Colton Edward. 98 days in the hospital elapsed before our family was home together. The strength that Nicole, Atticus, and Colton exhibited through that battle is something I think about every single day. Upon returning home, I continued to write my thesis, and it became more difficult to find time to write while raising a young family. I cannot quantify the amount of sacrifices Nicole made, as she continually took on additional parental duties to provide me with time to conduct my research.

"My love is selfish, I cannot exist without you" – John Keats

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication	vi
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures.....	xii
 Chapter One: Introduction	 1
Background to the Problem.....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Research Questions	3
Significance of Study.....	4
Contextual Background of the Study	7
Overview of Methodology.....	7
Delimitations of the Study	8
Definition of Key Terms	9
Summary.....	10
 Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature on Novice Principals.....	 11
Challenges	11
The Complex Role of the Principal.....	11
The Challenge of Instructional Leadership.....	12
Leading Staff Members	13
Strategies.....	14
Principal Preparation	14

Entry Planning.....	14
Mentorship.....	16
Other Important Considerations	17
Decentralized School Districts.....	17
The Role of Resiliency in the Success of Novice Principals.....	18
Summary.....	18
Chapter Three: Methodology	20
The Qualitative Research Design	21
Selecting Research Participants.....	22
Huffam School District.....	22
Data Collection	23
Process of Data Analysis	26
Ethics.....	31
Summary.....	33
Chapter Four: Findings.....	35
The Cases: Four Novice Principals.....	35
Diana.....	35
Michelle	36
Evan	36
Tamara.....	37
Alice	37
Summary of the Principals' Characteristics	37
Final Categories.....	38
Five Challenges Faced by the Participants.....	39

Challenge #1: Unique challenges that flummox novice principals.	39
Challenge #2: Staffing: Professional relationships and staff supervision.....	41
Challenge #3: Budgeting: Becoming an accountant.	44
Challenge #4: Maintaining the operation of the building and property.....	46
Challenge #5: The all encompassing, demanding aspects of the job.	48
Entry Plan: A Vision to Begin the Year Assisted by a Guidebook.....	50
Huffam School District: A Decentralized District.....	52
Remote, Northern Communities.....	55
Mentorship from Experienced Principals.....	56
Vice-Principalship: The Ideal Training.....	58
Summary.....	60
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations	61
Case Findings Related to the Research Questions:.....	62
Research Question 1: Which aspects (real-life experiences) of the principal’s role do novice principals perceive as challenging?	62
Research Question 2: What strategies do novice principals implement to begin their year with success?	63
Research Question 3: What challenges do novice principals face from the perception of the district administrator?	64
Research Question 4: How does Huffam School District support its novice principals?	65
Connecting the Findings to the Literature.....	66
Principalship Complexity.....	66
Principal Preparation	67
Entry Plan	68

Coping with Complexity through Resiliency.....	69
Instructional Leader.....	70
Leading Staff Members	71
Contributions to Literature	72
There are distinct responsibilities in a decentralized school district that add to the challenges experienced by novice principals.	72
The vice principalship can be a strong element of principal preparation.....	73
A guidebook may assist novice principals with solving technical challenges.	73
Confirmation and Added Descriptions of Ideas Already Included in the Literature.....	74
The principalship is complex and all encompassing	74
Mentorship is important.....	74
Resiliency is required for success in the principalship	74
Limitations of the Study	76
Implications.....	77
Recommendations for Policy and Practice	78
Recommendations for Further Study.....	80
Conclusions: Final Thoughts.....	82
References.....	84
Appendix A: Collecting Data From the District Administrator	93
Consent:.....	97
Appendix B: Collecting Data from the Novice Principals	98
Consent:.....	103
Appendix C: Collecting Data from a Focus Group Interview	104

List of Tables

Table 1.	Novice Principal Demographics	38
----------	-------------------------------------	----

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i>	Mindmeister (Axial Coding).....	29
<i>Figure 2.</i>	NVivo Challenge Word Tree	30

Chapter One: Introduction

Effective principals lead successful schools. Schools rely on their principals to make informed decisions that will enhance school culture, school functionality, and school academia. Principals' decisions are therefore of the utmost importance, as each decision greatly affects how efficiently and successfully the school operates. The complexity of the principalship, and the demands associated with the principalship, make it incredibly challenging for novice principals to succeed. This qualitative comparative case study explored the challenges experienced by four novice principals, within a remote northern Canadian community. A series of two interviews during the latter half of their first year as principal allowed participants to reflect on the challenges they faced. Much research has already been conducted on this topic in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, U.S.A., and U.K. (Beeson & Matthews, 1991; Bush, 2011; Crow, 2007; Daresh & Male, 2000). Only a small volume of research has been conducted in Canada in regards to novice principals (Northfield, 2013; Sackney & Walker, 2006), and in particular, in remote northern communities or in school districts that use a decentralized budgeting process.

Chapter one introduces the study by presenting the varying aspects involved with the structure of this research. The chapter begins with an explanation of the research problem, the research questions, and a statement about why this study is important within the current literature. Although the literature already includes several studies about the challenges faced by novice principals, this research is set within the context of a decentralized school district in a remote northern Canadian community. Those elements make this study unique and important. Chapter one also includes a section about my personal background. Within the framework of this study, it is important for the reader to understand my personal background. This allows the reader to consider how my biases, which have evolved from my own connections to the topic

and to the context of this study, have influenced my interpretation of the data. Following the description of my personal background, I have provided a description of the context within which the study takes place. In the next section, I have briefly outlined the methodology. I chose a qualitative comparative case study for this research because through the examination of different cases (participants), it contributes to the existing literature by adding new findings, as well as confirming past findings. Following a description of the methodology, I have outlined the delimitations that I have imposed and, finally, the chapter ends with a list of terms that I will use throughout the thesis, a chapter summary, and an outline of the remaining chapters.

Background to the Problem

To comprehend the challenges faced by novice principals, it is important to understand the role of the principal. The role of the principal includes being responsible for every aspect of the school. Therefore, when you become “the sole person responsible for everything that happens at your school, the world rotates a little differently” (Tooms, 2003, p. 531). Two substantial challenges that all principals face are the demands placed on principals and the complexity of their role (Walker, Anderson, Sackney, & Woolf, 2003). The sheer volume and variety of demands the principalship entails is exceptional (Kelly & Saunders, 2010), and success is expected immediately (Hobson et al., 2003). Research findings indicated that novice principals benefit from mentorship (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Walker & Qian, 2006). These challenges faced by novice principals are recorded in the literature and provide an indication of the problem this study addressed.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is the multitude of challenges faced by novice principals, because of the complexity of their role and the demands made upon them. The

principalship is complex, especially for novice principals. Furthermore, the context of the remote Canadian north and the experience of working within a decentralized school district added elements, not previously described by the literature, to the experiences of these novice principals. Novice principals face a variety of challenges and need to be socialized into the position. Therefore, it is important to know what these challenges are, what strategies novice principals use to be successful, and how their school districts support them in their role.

Research Questions

It has been established that in their first year, the majority of novice principals face numerous challenges associated with the complexity and responsibility of being a principal (Walker et al., 2003). The primary research question this study explored was “How do novice principals working in a decentralized school district in remote, northern Canada experience the challenges associated with the first year in the principalship?” The subsequent research questions based on this question were as follows:

1. Which aspects (real-life experiences) of the principal’s role do novice principals perceive as challenging?
2. What strategies do novice principals implement to begin their year with success?
3. What challenges do novice principals face from the perception of the district administrator?
4. How does Huffam School District support its novice principals?

The research questions are answered in chapter five, along with the contributions this study brings to the existing literature, and the implications it creates for the future.

Significance of Study

This study was important as it confirmed and built upon the knowledge of challenges novice principals faced by providing a description of the experiences of four novice principals working within the context of a decentralized school division in remote, northern Canada. Details regarding the challenges of novice principals within were elucidated. The study also revealed how novice principals established themselves in their schools, what strategies they utilized to overcome challenges, and how their positions are increasing in complexity. By uncovering the challenges these novice principals are presently facing, this research shed light on how they need to be continually supported to succeed.

A full literature review will be detailed in chapter two. Novice principals deal with numerous challenges regarding their newly acquired positions of responsibility, including financial management, issues with staff members, instructional leadership, school policies, legal frameworks, and constant demands (Woods, Woods, & Cowie, 2009). Increasing complexity amplifies the challenges a novice principal faces (Crow, 2006; Northfield, 2013; Paese & Mitchell, 2007). Therefore, it is imperative that novice principals are supported as they are socialized professionally into a role that is often stressful and demanding. Effective leadership is imperative to successful schools, as research indicates a “substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement” (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003, p. 5). Numerous novice principals are overwhelmed with the amount of responsibility the job encompasses (Spillane & Lee, 2013). Due to each unique culture, school and community, there is no singular way to improve the preparation for principals. The majority of learning is done experientially, through making mistakes (Tooms, 2003; Walker & Qian, 2006) under the pressure of the job title (Paese & Mitchell, 2007). This study can assist future novice principals in understanding the

challenges and responsibilities they may face in their first year and provide examples of strategies they can use for success.

While much research has been conducted on novice principals in a global context, missing from the literature is decentralized school districts in remote, northern Canada. Northern Canada is considered an area of Canada that is more remote than the rest of the country. Thus, this research builds upon current literature on novice principals by describing the experiences of four novice principals, who are engaged in their first year of the principalship, in a decentralized remote northern community in Canada.

Researcher's Background

This research focus originated from my interest in leadership and my goal of becoming a principal in the future. In this section, I have shared my personal background to expose how I have become interested in the study of novice principals and why it is important for me to understand the experiences of novice principals working within a decentralized school district in remote, northern Canada. It is necessary to acknowledge myself as a human instrument, and consider the context of Huffam School District for this study. Merriam (2009) stated that rather than trying to eliminate the bias that influences the study, "it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (p. 15). Stating my investment in this topic and my identity, as a researcher, is imperative because it allows the reader a lens to view my interpretation of the data, which stems from my personal experience, my cultural connections, and my educational background (Creswell, 2003).

My interest in becoming an educator began with having my father as my Mathematics and Science teacher for three years in high school. Having my father as my teacher was a positive experience for me as my father was, and still is, an important figure in my life. My

brother, Bryan, is another influential educator in my life; he is a principal of a private elementary school. Bryan's decision to teach internationally in Thailand for one year in 2007 significantly influenced me to follow suit and teach internationally. Three years later, I taught mathematics in Kuwait for a total of three years. The school at which I taught allowed me to become an informal leader in only my second year. I presented at professional development conferences, assisted new staff members with the technology software of our school, and led an international skiing trip to Switzerland. During my second year of teaching I began taking my Master's of Education in Educational Administration with a goal of becoming a principal in the future.

While studying educational administration for my Master's degree, my interest in leadership promptly grew. I analyzed everything my principal did, while gaining an interest in everything regarding the way the school operated, and the reasoning behind it. During my time in Kuwait I worked under four different principals (of three different nationalities), which allowed me to observe different leadership styles and values.

Upon returning to Canada, I began to work as a substitute teacher; this experience offered me an interesting perspective on the leadership of the schools I was called into, as I analyzed their leadership. Upon accepting a contract position, I again analyzed the leadership styles of my administrators. These experiences influenced my interest in leadership, specifically in novice principals, and the challenges they face in their first year.

My observations are supported by the literature; the role of the principal is critical to school enhancement and improved student outcomes (Bush, 2011; Cortez, Sorenson, & Coronado, 2012). This study aided my professional journey, as I desired a greater understanding of the complexities of being a principal, specifically, a novice principal. Furthermore, leadership is a passion of mine, in relation to sports, business, and especially education. I continually study

examples of illustrious leaders in my quest of lifelong learning, centered on the topic of leadership. Since I have worked for many different types of leaders, I understand the influential role they have over the entire school community. I think communication ability and trustworthiness are two important characteristics for school principals. If leaders communicate transparently with their staff members, trust will ensue.

Contextual Background of the Study

Although the participants in this study suggested that they felt somewhat unaware of the influence that the context had on their experiences, it is important for the reader to understand the environment in which the study took place, and the influence the context had on the study findings. Huffam School District is located in a remote community in northern Canada. The school district has a student population of over 12,000, and the majority is located in the inner city of Hawalli (“District achievement”, 2014). Huffam School District is a decentralized school district, which creates more responsibilities for its principals; they are responsible for their complete school budget, including teacher salaries. Budget autonomy created more challenges for the novice principals, which became a further incentive to research the challenges these particular novice principals faced. The findings and conclusions of this study must be interpreted within this context.

Overview of Methodology

The research methodology will be explained in full detail in chapter three; however, I will provide a brief overview at this point. A qualitative comparative case study research design was utilized in this study, specifically the heuristic design, as new meaning was discovered, along with the existing knowledge (Merriam, 2009) of the challenges faced by novice principals. The participants of this study were four novice principals, and the district administrator of

Huffam School District. The qualitative interviews were open-ended and semi-structured, and the data were coded into categories. The goal in qualitative inquiry is not to generalize to a population, but rather to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon, (Merriam, 2009), which in this study is the challenges faced by novice principals working in a decentralized school district in remote northern Canada. To support the data collected from interviews, the participants completed personal reflections that revealed current challenges they were facing. Triangulation of data was achieved through collecting data in multiple ways, which also included a focus group interview; this built reliability and trustworthiness in the data, and study (Merriam, 2009). Open coding was used in data analysis to allow the data to drive the study, and I was open to emerging categories. “Assigning codes to pieces of data is the way you begin to construct categories” (Merriam, 2009, p. 179), as I grouped the data into similar categories. The final categories were constructed over lengthy periods of construction, thought, and reflection. The findings of the data are presented in chapter four.

Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited by the following factors: First, this research focuses only on novice principals within the Huffam School District, within and surrounding the remote northern community of Hawalli, Canada. Second, participants of this study were exclusively novice principals, and did not include principals who have been in the role of principal in the past in a different school or different school district. Finally, this study took place over the latter half of the 2014-2015 academic school year.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are used as follows:

- *Centralized school district*: A centralized school district is one in which both the organizational processes and the finances are managed through one central office rather than by individuals, who work at the school level. For example, in a centralized school district a great deal of the hiring process and the budgeting process might be handled by district office staff.
- *Challenge*: The tasks or situations the principal must work through or accomplish.
- *Decentralized school district*: A decentralized school district is one that enables principals to be chief executive officers with broad control (Lujan, 2011). For example, principals in a decentralized school district might be asked to manage a budget that includes salaries for the teachers at their schools or might be asked to be responsible for hiring.
- *Elementary schools*: Schools that include kindergarten to Grade 7.
- *Entry plan*: A vision utilized by novice principals to navigate through their entry into the principalship.
- *High schools*: Schools that include Grade 8 to 12.
- *Mentee*: The novice principal whom is being supported by a mentor.
- *Mentor*: Mentors may be trained or untrained in assisting novice principals; they assist principals new to the profession with demands and responsibilities.
- *Novice principal*: A principal entering their first year as the principal for the school.

Summary

This chapter introduced the study. The problem this research addressed, the challenges faced by novice principals, has been clearly stated. What makes this research significant is the context of a decentralized school district in remote, northern Canada, which contributes uniqueness to this study. I included my background as the researcher to allow the reader insight into my perspective as the researcher; it also clarified and minimized any biases based on my perceptions. The methodology was outlined to provide insight into the details of this study and to gain a greater understanding of why a qualitative comparative case study was utilized. I have described the delimitations that I have used to bound this research.

Chapter two reviews the literature regarding the complex challenges that novice principals face to provide an overview and understanding of the topic, and the strategies utilized for success. Chapter three describes the research methods used in this study, including the participants, the context of Huffam School District, instrument, data collection techniques, data analysis methods, and ethics. Chapter four describes the participants, and summarizes the findings, which are supported by the data. Chapter five answers the research questions, connects the findings of this study to the literature, states how this study contributed to the literature, and adds implications and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature on Novice Principals

In this literature review, I examine how the challenges that novice principals face are explained through the literature and I explore strategies, including entry planning, which assist novice principals' success. Overall, the literature review includes three sections about the challenges faced by novice principals: 1) the complex role of the principal, 2) the challenge of instructional leadership, and 3) leading staff members. It also includes three sections regarding different strategies to support the success of novice principals: 1) principal preparation, 2) entry planning, and 3) mentorship. Finally, the chapter ends with two sections that I believe are essential to this study of novice principals working within a decentralized school district in a remote northern Canadian community: 1) decentralization in education and 2) the role of resiliency in the success of novice principals.

Challenges

Three challenges that were prevalent in the literature were the complexity of the principal's role, their influence on instructional leadership, and how they lead their staff members. The complexity of the role includes their many responsibilities and challenges. The challenges of instructional leadership and leading staff members are specific aspects of the job, which are both important and difficult.

The Complex Role of the Principal

The principalship is a complex role because of the amount of responsibility it entails. Research indicates the lack of appeal to become a principal because of the increasing complexity of the role (Bengston, Zepeda, & Parylo, 2013). DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) stated, "People are reluctant to aspire to a position that sounds impossible to perform" (p. 46), while Hare (2014) referred to the principalship as simultaneously rewarding and impossible. The

complexity of the position is due to the multitude of responsibilities the principal fulfills (Walker et al., 2003), and the vast diversity of those responsibilities. Slater, Garcia, and Gorosave (2008) included the following in a list of responsibilities for principals:

- Professional isolation
- Dealing with the legacy of the previous principal
- The amount of tasks, managing time and priorities
- Budgeting
- Supervising ineffective staff
- Implementing new curricula or other government plans
- Dealing with school buildings

The role of principal is complex because it is fragmented, arduous and diverse, requiring long hours with demands from multiple people (Spillane & Lee, 2013; Walker & Qian, 2006). Daresh and Male (2000) questioned whether anyone would desire the position if it continues to increase in complexity. Novice principals often feel confused and frustrated due to the lack of simple answers to their problems (Jentz, 2009). The position of principal will most likely continue to increase in complexity in the future; therefore, changes should be made to ensure that novice principals are given opportunities and support to succeed. An important aspect of ensuring that principals will be successful is their role as the instructional leader in a school.

The Challenge of Instructional Leadership

An abundance of literature stated the considerable influence a principal has on student achievement and school improvement (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006; Webber, Scott, Aitken, Lupart, & Scott, 2013). Expectations are increasing on principals in their roles as instructional leaders, as they enhance teacher

aptitude, and facilitate growth in student learning (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Purington, 2013; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010; Webber et al., 2013). Duncan and Stock (2010) stated instructional leaders were those who utilized the community to support school success, and set high expectations for students and teachers by prioritizing, and created a culture of learning. They must be conscious of the latest research on innovative teaching strategies, and be able to provide the necessary resources for teachers to raise student achievement (Dipaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Principals need to show leadership to their teachers regarding instructional practices by staying current, and seeking innovative teaching strategies. The following section details how principals communicate with their staff members.

Leading Staff Members

An extensive body of research exists that describes how novice principals are faced with the enormous challenge of effectively communicating with staff members who are unproductive and defiant (Beeson & Matthews, 1991; Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Campbell-Rush, 2013; Crow, 2007; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Spillane & Lee, 2013). It is essential to build positive relationships with staff members, as principals build alliances and gain influence (Burkhauser et al., 2012; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Meyer, Macmillan, & Northfield, 2011). Staff supervision is an essential component of administration, one which is often uncomfortable for novice principals (Walker et al., 2003). The ability to communicate with people is vital to the role of the principal, to build relationships in a rapidly shifting environment (Devos, Hulpia, Tuytens, & Sinnaeve, 2013; Fullan, 2002, 2003; Goleman, 1998; Jentz, 2009). Strong communication builds trust, which is vital in developing relationships with stakeholders, and building the morale of staff members within the school.

Strategies

The challenges outlined above make the principalship a demanding job. Therefore, it is important for novices in the role to plan strategies that will help them to succeed. The literature outlines three strategies that lead to success for novice principals: utilize the theory they learned in their graduate degree, enter the principalship with a plan, and trust their personal and professional mentors.

Principal Preparation

Principal preparation programs are frequently perceived as insufficient preparation for future administrators (Crow, 2006; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Walker & Qian, 2006). However, counter arguments state that despite their imperfection, university preparation is still the best route (Crow, 2006). It is impossible to prepare someone or replicate the challenges of administration (Duncan, Range, & Scherz, 2011; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Sackney & Walker, 2006), due to the unique contexts of every school and community. In most states and provinces in the United States and Canada, principals require a Master's degree in Educational Administration (Duncan, 2011), and it is one route to headship in the United Kingdom (Draper & McMichael, 2000). The onus is not solely on preparation programs, as principals must learn to utilize the theory they have learned and apply it to the practice of the principalship. The next section describes entry plans and their importance in the success of a novice principal.

Entry Planning

Although the transition from teaching to administration appears innate, it is actually a big step (Loder & Spillane, 2005; Spillane & Lee, 2013). This transition is of great importance to success (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003), however, it is impossible to be fully prepared for it (Daresh &

Male, 2000). Novice principals need clarity surrounding their expectations to succeed in their new position (Paese & Mitchell, 2007). Novice principals are immediately held accountable for their work, a grace period does not exist (Crow, 2006). It is vital to possess an entry plan as a vision to assist in this transition. Ashton and Duncan (2012) defined an entry plan as a “guide beginning principals can use to navigate the unavoidable confusion that comes with leadership” (p. 19). Meeting with staff members to begin the school year is a positive step in building relationships and gaining confidence, and allows novice principals to learn and respect aspects of the culture which are important to stakeholders (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Burkhauser et al., 2012; Jentz, 2009; Rooney, 2013). Novice principals wish they held an answer key to sort through their issues (Tooms, 2003); however, success is not achieved through a single route (Burkhauser et al., 2012). The socialization to the role has a major influence on understanding the cultural norms of the school and community, and is essential in transition to the new role.

Certain skill sets are needed in the preparation for the role of principal, which utilize knowledge and disposition. This is referred to as professional socialization (Crow, 2007). Socialization is defined by Duncan and Stock (2010) as “the process of learning the culture of an organization, including cultural norms and conceptions of appropriate and expected behavior” (p. 298), which is a skill all novice principals must develop (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Daresh, 2001; Duncan & Stock, 2010). Novice principals should have a complete understanding of the current culture of their school and community before they begin to align it according to their vision. Crow (2006) found novice principals in the United States to be insufficiently socialized to their positions, while burdened with the same expectations of a veteran principal. This situation can lead to burnout, anxiety, and failure. Novice principals need to prepare themselves for their initiation into their new position, by utilizing their skill set and applying it to their challenges.

Novice principals benefit from mentorship and support groups (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Briggs, Bush, & Middlewood, 2006; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Walker et al., 2003). The novice principals benefit from the guidance they receive, but also in the professional and personal relationships they develop. This helps confront the common theme of isolation among novice principals (Briggs et al., 2006; Spillane & Lee, 2013). If there is a comfort level established in the relationships of a mentorship, it often eases the transition that a novice principal makes into their new position.

It is critical for novice principals to present their leadership philosophy and their vision for the school to the stakeholders at their school (Tooms, 2003). This is done to demonstrate their personal vision convincingly and sincerely (Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Webber et al., 2013), and to reflect on those values through the complexity of the job (Daresh & Male, 2000). Challenges are associated with the school vision (Ashton & Duncan, 2012), which is why novice principals need a foundation from which to express their credence. Webber, Scott, Aitken, Lupart, and Scott (2013) stated that “leaders who draw upon the interplay among values, theoretical and procedural knowledge, professional skills and personal qualities to shape their leadership vision are more likely to achieve positive organizational change and enhanced professional cultures” (p. 252). The literature emphasizes the importance of basing crucial decisions on the vision of the school, which reflects the vision of the principal. The following section describes the influence of mentorship for novice principals.

Mentorship

The value of mentors for novice principals is strongly stated in the literature (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Bush, 2011; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Kelly & Saunders, 2010). Specifically, Walker et al. (2003) noted how novice principals are better prepared to begin the year if they are

mentored. Mentors support novice principals as their schools transition to new leadership; this expedites the learning curve as novice principals transition to their new positions. Through the mentorship process, novice principals develop strong relationships with their new social networks (Duncan & Stock, 2010). These relationships enhance the mentoring process. The following section describes how the literature reflects on the elements of a decentralized school district.

Other Important Considerations

The preceding sections have covered issues that are identified in the literature as the challenges faced by novice principals and the strategies that aid their success. However, there are two additional areas that are described in the literature that I feel are important to this study. First, the school district, that provided the context for my study, had adopted a decentralized management plan where principals were responsible for school-based budgets that included both teachers' salaries and building maintenance. Therefore, it is important to understand the literature surrounding the topic of decentralized school districts. Second, resiliency is identified in the literature as a personal characteristic of successful principals. Resiliency is important due to the critical role that principals play within the classroom, school, and community. Both decentralization and resiliency are important to consider within the context of this study.

Decentralized School Districts

Decentralized school districts entail different responsibilities for principals. Decentralized districts are defined as a district that enables principals to be chief executive officers with broad control (Lujan, 2011). Not all decentralized school districts are equal (Ouchi, 2006); at Huffam School District there are added responsibilities such as budgeting and hiring. Centralized districts are a district that is managed by accountants and business managers.

Decentralized budgets are the minority in this province and official provincial or federal numbers that depict the percentage of decentralized school districts across the province or county did not exist (D. Smyth, personal communication, June 5, 2015).

The Role of Resiliency in the Success of Novice Principals

The role of the principal is multi-faceted, increasing in complexity, constantly changing and demanding (Blendinger & Snipes, 1996; Crow, 2007; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Jentz & Murphy, 2005; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Walker et al., 2003). Pollock (2013) described the challenges as arising from the constantly changing landscape in which schools operate, high-stakes accountability and competition, curriculum, power, increasing diversity, and transforming labor relations. Novice principals will face many challenges in which they use their fortitude and self-resiliency to thwart criticism. Developing self-reliance and resiliency is a skill, which needs to be learned as novice principals handle the criticism and anxiety associated with their position of leadership (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Crow, 2007; Jentz & Murphy, 2005; Kelly & Saunders, 2010). Novice principals must develop fortitude to withstand the difficulty of their first year, and present an air of confidence and strength. Stress is present in the adjustment of fresh demands (Paese & Mitchell, 2007), therefore, increasing resiliency is necessary to execute a good job with high expectations.

Summary

This literature review examined the existing knowledge related to the challenges faced by novice principals. It included how novice principals should enter the profession, as well as the need for novice principals to receive mentorship. Ashton and Duncan (2012) identified a “sink or swim” (p. 21) mentality to novice principals, which is an unfortunate reality for such an influential position. Tooms (2003) proclaimed, “We are seen as therapists, confidants, and

people who have all the answers. What we wear, how we interact with others, and the kind of car we drive are all open to scrutiny” (p. 532). That statement signifies the necessary preparation novice principals need to succeed, and the all-encompassing nature of the position. The literature lacked details regarding the real-life experiences novice principals go through, specifically in how novice principals experienced success, within a decentralized school district in a remote, northern, Canadian community.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology in this qualitative comparative case study. It includes a brief introduction to the participants (novice principals and the district administrator from Huffam School District), and the context of the decentralized school district that employs the participants. A full explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures are included, and the chapter concludes with a description of the ethical considerations that were important in this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This qualitative research study explored the challenges faced by novice principals, detailing how they encountered those challenges, and the strategies they employed to succeed. The research question that guided this research was “how do novice principals working in a decentralized school district in remote, northern Canada experience the challenges associated with the first year in the principalship?” Additionally, four research sub-questions assisted in the guidance of the study: Which aspects (real-life experiences) of the principal’s role do novice principals perceive as challenging? What strategies do novice principals implement to begin their year with success? What challenges do novice principals face from the perception of the district administrator? How does Huffam School District support its novice principals?

This research used a qualitative comparative case study research design, utilizing “the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 39). I sought insight into the particulars of this phenomena and interpretation through the eyes of select individuals (Merriam, 2009) about the challenges that novice principals faced. Previous research has been conducted regarding the challenges of novice principals; this study has the potential to extend the reader’s knowledge of these challenges, while focusing on how the challenges are mitigated by a decentralized school district in a northern Canadian community.

Adding knowledge to the understanding of the central phenomenon will aid future administrators who face similar challenges in their first year of the profession. The chapter is divided into five sections: (a) the qualitative research design, (b) the research participants, (c) the context of Huffam School District, (d) data collection, and (e) data analysis.

The Qualitative Research Design

There are three foundational methodologists in the area of case study research: Yin, Stake, and Merriam. Their methodological recommendations have influenced educational researchers (Yazan, 2015) and the research they conduct. Yin prefers both quantitative and qualitative evidence to gather data in mixed methods research designs (Yin, 2002). While there are similarities between Stake and Merriam, Merriam “presents a much more comprehensive approach to qualitative understanding of data validation” (Yazan, 2015, p. 147). Merriam utilizes the literature review as essential in its contribution to theory development, which helps frame the research questions (Yazan, 2015). Furthermore, I chose Merriam’s heuristic design as I sought to discover new meaning in addition to the existing knowledge of my understanding of the central phenomenon (Merriam, 2009), the challenges faced by novice principals.

Qualitative case study research focuses on a single element (Merriam, 2009). In this study, that single element or the central phenomenon was to understand the challenges faced by novice principals through their lived experiences. A case study is selected “for its uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge to which we would not otherwise have access” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46). The distinctiveness of a case study is not the scheme used, but rather “the questions asked and their relationship to the end product” (Merriam, 2009, p. 44). The interview questions were chosen to extract details from the participants to answer the research questions. Some examples of the questions asked are: what challenges were faced, what strategies were employed, what mentorship was available, and how the participant’s experiences were unique due to the context of their location.

Merriam described three types of case study research: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Heuristic case studies can “bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the

reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (Merriam, 2009, p. 44). This research study followed the heuristic special features, because the case study sought to enlighten the reader's understanding of the phenomenon, the challenges experienced by novice principals

Selecting Research Participants

I sought to understand the central phenomenon of the challenges of being a novice principal through "purposeful sampling – based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The target population in this study was novice principals within Huffam School District, located in and surrounding Hawalli, Canada. This selection criterion of novice principals was essential to begin purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). The number of novice principals who participated in this study was based on the number of willing volunteers, but also on the number of novice principals in Huffam School District, which varies on a year-to-year basis. Rather than looking for large numbers of participants, I looked for just a few. During this year, there were five novice principals working within Huffam School District. I sent formal invitations to each of them via their school email addresses. Of the five, four volunteered to participate in my study. One of the participants in this study was the district administrator, Diana, who helps lead all of the principals in Huffam School District. The other four participants were the novice principals, Michelle, Evan, Tamara, and Alice, who were all in their first year as the principal of their school. A detailed description of each participant is included in chapter four as their characteristics are part of the findings of this study.

Huffam School District

Huffam School District has over 30 elementary schools, over 10 secondary schools, and one center for learning alternatives, which includes continuing education, distance education, and

community alternate programs. The majority of the schools are located in the city of Hawalli, which has a population of approximately 70,000 people. “The district administers an operating budget of over \$100,000,000 and employs approximately 700 teachers and over 400 support staff” (“District achievement”, 2014, p. 4). The district offers choice schools in the nature of Aboriginal, Montessori, French immersion and Traditional. The district educates 3,000-4,000 aboriginal students in the district; approximately 25 percent of the entire student population (“District achievement”, 2014). Huffam School District offers many different programs for the numerous types of students it educates.

The teachers and staff members (excluding principals and vice-principals) of Huffam School District ended the 2013-2014 school year on strike (two weeks). They also began the 2014-2015 school year on strike (three weeks). This may have had an influence on the beginning of the year for the principals.

Data Collection

Triangulation of data was achieved by collecting data in multiple ways (individual interviews, personal reflections, focus group interviews), which built reliability and trustworthiness in the data (Merriam, 2009). A pilot study was conducted with a principal outside of the study to improve the quality of questions asked in the interviews. The data collection methods used in this study were:

- ***An interview with the district administrator.*** The interview was held in Diana’s office. The length of the interview was approximately thirty minutes. The interview consisted of 12 questions
- ***Two interviews with the novice principals.*** These interviews were held in the participants’ office, respectively. The interviews took approximately twenty to

thirty minutes each. The first interview had 11 questions, the second interview had 10 questions

- *A focus group discussion with the novice principals.* The focus group discussion was held in the boardroom at the central office for Huffam School District. The length of the discussion was approximately forty minutes. There were six questions answered and discussed.
- *Two reflections from the novice principals.* These were emailed to me. They were approximately one page in length. The topic was entirely up to the participant.

Semi-structured interviews were used, where some of the questions were more flexibly worded than others (see Appendix A: Collecting Data from the District Administrator, and Appendix B: Collecting Data from the Novice Principals). The information gleaned from the literature review was used to probe respondent answers to the interview questions during the first interview. In the second interview, my questions evolved from a combination of the data obtained from the first interview, as well as from the literature review.

The participants were interviewed as part of the data collection process, because “interviewing is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals” (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). However, “the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). The great advantage of collecting data throughout the interview process is that I gained crucial information through the interview. I also had greater control in collecting data by interviewing, in comparison with observations, because I asked specific questions pertaining to the research. Data collection also

took place via a focus group interview (see Appendix C: Data Collected From a Focus Group Interview). All interviews and the focus group interview were recorded, and I transcribed them myself into a digital form for analysis. I spent time following each interview reviewing the notes I wrote during the interview.

An individual interview with the district administrator was the sole data collected from her. She was interviewed to gain perspective from the lens of Huffam School District, which added context and depth to the study. The questions for this interview were derived from the literature review, and many questions shared similarities with the interview questions I asked the novice principals in their first interview. Each participant was asked for permission to tape-record the interview, and at the end of each interview, I asked the respondent if they would like to check the transcript for accuracy of recording and whether they wished to make any additions or deletions.

I interviewed the novice principals in the second half of the school year, and again near its conclusion. I wrote reflections of my own after each interview to add comments and observations from the interviews. In addition to these interviews, the participants described the challenges they were facing by writing personal reflections. The data collected from the initial interviews determined what data and categories were sought after and developed during the subsequent interviews near the end of the year. These categories were slightly transformed in the second interview, as the data drove the inquiry, as new challenges and categories emerged through the progression of the school year. Between the individual interviews, a focus group was held, as I strove for a deeper understanding of the data constructed within a social framework.

My tasks as the interviewer were to follow the same interview protocol for each respondent, to respect each participant, and protect their privacy. The interview protocol contained a series of open-ended questions, however, I adjusted the interview questions, as necessary, to facilitate a conversational flow within the interview context. The interview location and time was negotiated with each respondent ahead of time.

Merriam recommended that the data collected via interviewing were supplemented by my own ongoing impressions, reflections, and interpretations; this was considered the first form of data analysis (Merriam, 2009). This was important in the interview process, as I reported my general impressions of the interview process and commented on the content of the interview conversations.

Categories emerged as data analysis took place following data collection, and I refined the categories based on the challenges that novice principals faced. Upon analyzing the first set of data collected, I based the next data collection on the categories that emerged from the first set of data, rather than waiting to begin the analysis after I had completed the entire data collection process. The data collected from individual interviews influenced the topic of discussion in the focus group.

Process of Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to gain an understanding of the data (Merriam, 2009). The data were organized into computer files early in the process of qualitative analysis, which was critical due to the quantity of data collected. I transcribed the interviews and personal reflections for analysis, and the data were coded into different categories. This is “nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designations to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 173). The data were divided

into segments and codes; these codes were inspected for similarities, before being brought together within general categories. “The construction of categories is highly inductive. You begin with detailed bits or segments of data, cluster data units together that seem to go together, then ‘name’ the cluster” (Merriam, 2009, p. 183); this is how I created the final categories.

The methods of analysis used in this qualitative comparative case study followed the work of Merriam. In the first step of data analysis (discovery), after the interviews, I wrote reflections regarding the interviews with the participants. I wrote down my reflections of the participants and reflected on certain aspects of the interview, specifically answering the following questions regarding the interview: what has been covered, what remains to be covered, what non-verbal messages have been transmitted, and what new ideas have emerged. Following the self-reflection, I transcribed the interviews myself, which allowed for another means of generating understanding and seeking significance, which is considered to be rudimentary analysis (Merriam, 2009). Transcribing the interviews included giving participants pseudonyms, specifically Tamara, Diana, Evan, Alice, and Michelle. The school district, community names, and schools were given pseudonyms as well. The interview transcripts were then sent to the participants, and they had one week to respond whether they wished for any alterations to be made. The next step in data analysis was to read the transcripts and make notes in the margin, along with highlighting sections of the data. Upon completing these initial steps of analysis, the data were uploaded into Nvivo, a computer program utilized for qualitative data analysis, which was used to analyze and code the data into categories.

In the program Nvivo, I highlighted sections of the data and placed them into 27 broad categories called codes. This coding scheme was applied to all data (individual interviews, personal reflections, and the focus group interview). I listened to the interviews repeatedly, and

read the interview transcripts and personal reflections repeatedly. I sought greater insight into the data, participants, and categories. Conducting the final set of individual interviews, and collecting a second personal reflection from each novice principal participant finalized the data collection.

Upon the completion of all data collection, the open codes were grouped into five categories, which is the process of axial coding (Merriam, 2009). As advocated by Merriam, data were analyzed simultaneously with data collection, as these data were then deemed to be “parsimonious and illuminating” (Merriam, 2009, p. 171). The names of these categories were harmonious with the orientation of the study, given that the categories were responsive to the research questions, which stemmed from the body of literature. Merriam (2009) recommends a low number of final categories, because of the inverse relationship of the number of categories and an increased level of abstraction. By selecting a low number of final categories, the information learned from the data was clearer, and it led to a greater understanding of the data through the process of axial coding.

Seeking a greater understanding of the relationships related to the categories studied regarding the central phenomenon, I utilized special resources to gain insight about the data. I used the computer program Mindmeister to create webs concerning the categories (See Figure 2), and it allowed me to gain a greater understanding of how the categories were directly related to each other. I reflected on how the categories were interconnected, if at all, and how they influenced each other. This aided the process of axial coding as I continued to strive to finalize the final categories. The web below does not reflect the final categories, but rather, part of the process in constructing the final categories.

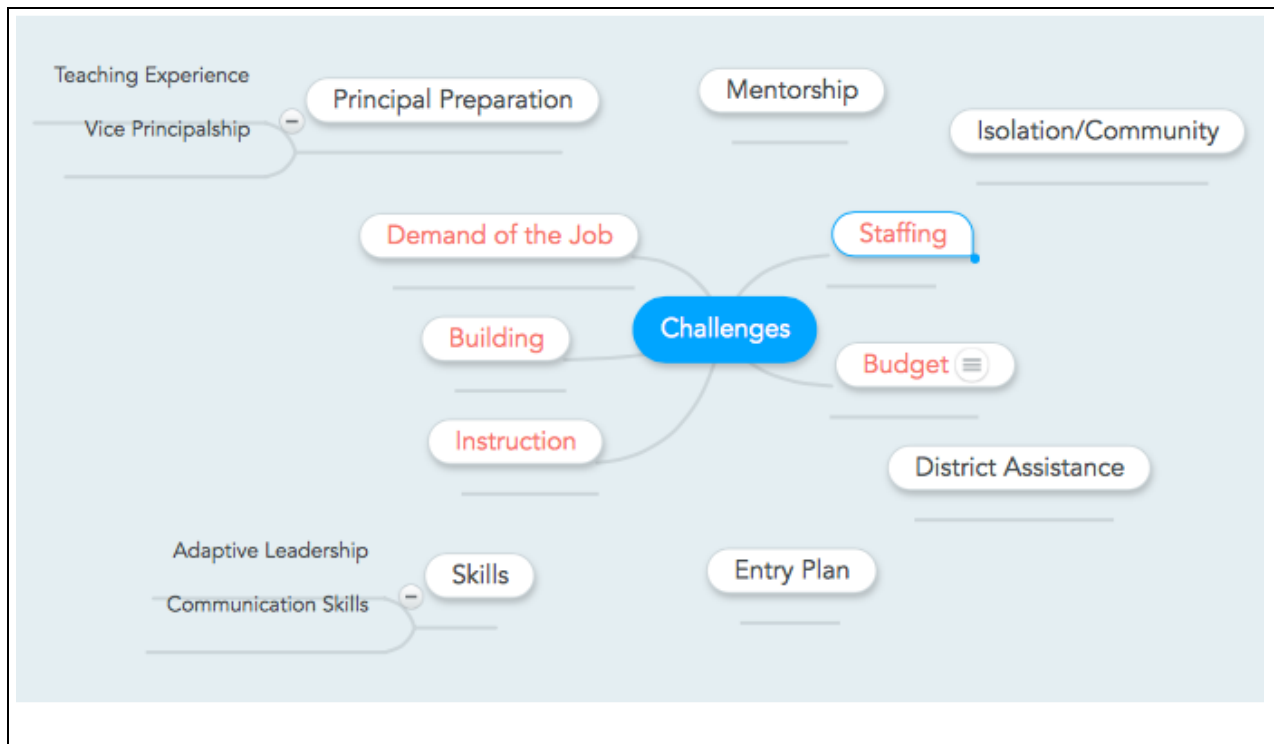


Figure 1. Mindmeister (Axial Coding)

Nvivo allowed me to run queries on certain words or phrases, and place them in a word tree (See Figure 2), showing which words came before and after the searched-for word from the entire data collection, as I sought connections and consistencies amongst these patterns. Certain words and phrases such as buildings, Huffam School District, and staffing stood out in this word tree, before and after the word challenge, which aided the process of axial coding as I gained a greater understanding of each category.

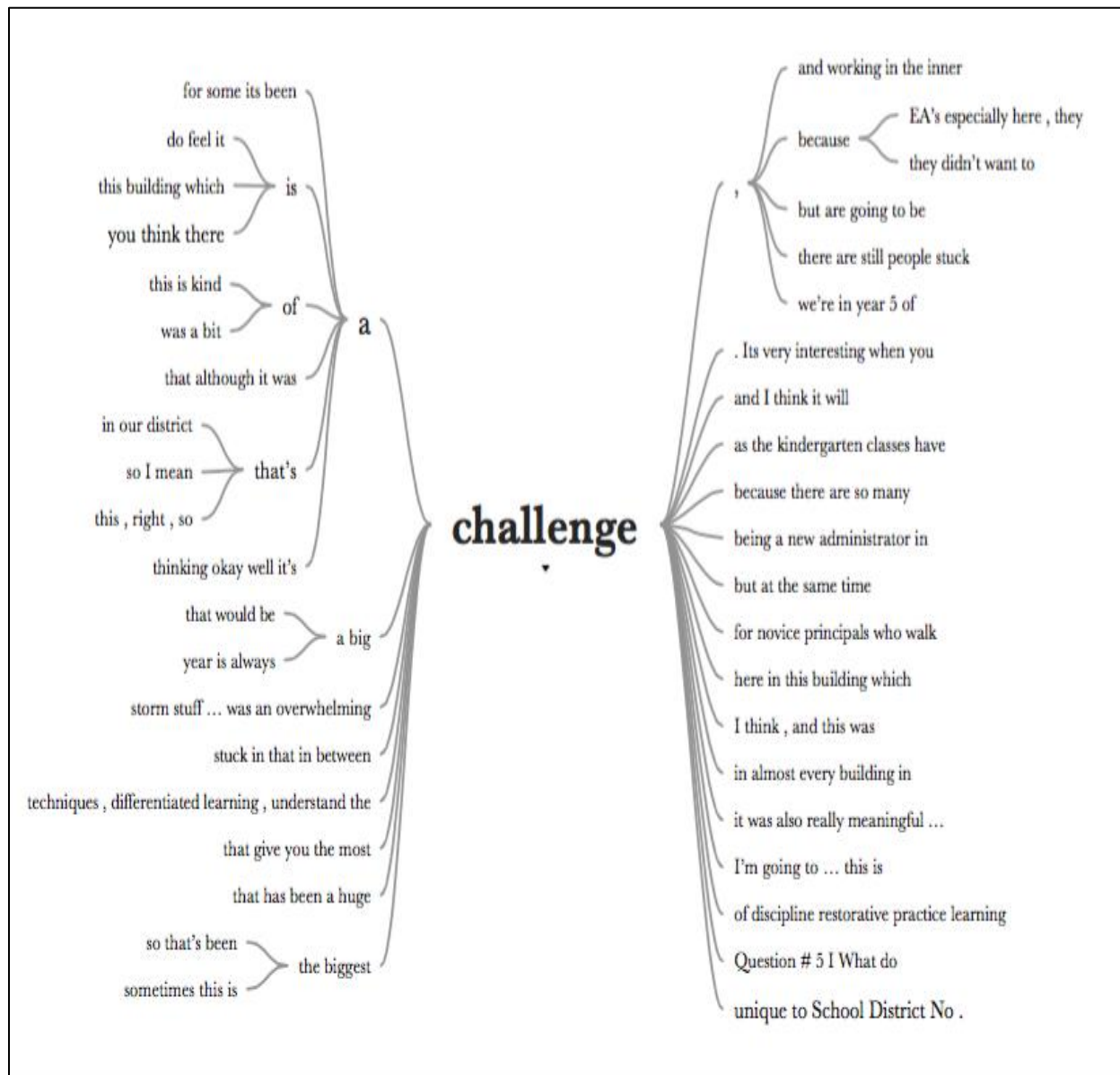


Figure 2. NVivo Challenge Word Tree

The categories are exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent, meaning all germane data are placed within a category (Merriam, 2009). Each precise entity of data fits in one category, under a title that gives insight into the data, categorized in a way that allowed each category to be as descriptive as the others. The process of analyzing data in a comparative case study begins with analyzing individual cases, before moving on to build generalization across the four different cases (Merriam, 2009). The final step in data analysis consisted of testing and confirming. Based on the data from the individual interviews, personal reflections, focus group interview, and considering my own reflections through the data collection process, this chapter reports the main challenges faced by novice principals, and the categories related to those challenges.

Ethics

This study tracked the following three ethical considerations: to maximize the benefits to the participant while minimizing any risk, to respect the participant in their voluntary involvement, and to ensure justice (Creswell, 2012, p. 22). With respect to the entirety of the research process, an emphasis on ethics was maintained throughout the data collection process, the reports and distribution of reports. It was essential to respect the research sites, and to minimize any educational disruptions that may have taken place throughout the research process. Permission was granted from Huffam School District before any research took place within the school (research site). The participants were made aware of any risks in participating in the study. No pressure was placed on participants to become involved in the research study, and they were free to withdraw up to the point of data analysis.

To ensure full disclosure of the research study was provided to those involved in ethics approval, many steps were necessary before the study was accepted. The study was conducted as

per the research protocol and consent forms approved by Brandon University's Research Ethics Committee (BUREC). Subsequently, Huffam School District's ethics committee approved my study, upon being made aware of any potential risks involved with the research site and research participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants, the school district, and the names of any towns or schools mentioned. I balanced investigating the experiences of the participants in depth, while respecting the participants and the research site. I detailed how much time I planned to spend at the research site with the participants, and included "the anticipated number of days, the length of each visit, and the times when each visit [would] take place" (Creswell, 2012, p. 211). Although there were differences in the time spent with each participant, the differences were minimal, and my anticipated time was accurate.

I explained the stipulations for informed consent to the volunteer participants, before I asked them to sign two copies of the consent form, one to keep, and the other for myself. A condition for informed consent was that any participant could choose to withdraw their participation, and have their data destroyed, up to the time of data analysis. The interviews took place in a private location of each interviewee's choice. I encouraged respondents to check the transcripts of their interviews upon finalization to ensure the accuracy of recording, and also to make any desired additions or deletions. All data (transcripts from interviews and personal reflections) obtained from participants were kept in a private location that was locked.

The ethical focus for collecting the data was ensuring that the participants felt comfortable with the research purpose and procedure, and no deception was involved. The ethical focus for analyzing the data and writing the final report was on accurately interpreting and reporting the participants' viewpoints. I did not interact with any stakeholders who did not volunteer to participate in the research, and did not touch any personal or program property.

All participants were asked the same, open-ended questions, and each participant was given the right to refuse to answer any questions. For the final interview question, I asked, “is there any other information you would like to share which could aid this study?” This allowed participants to either add new information, which had not been discussed, or to add any new thoughts, which had emerged from previous questions. To protect the interests of the individual participants, information that did not pertain to the research question was not included in the final report. All data obtained from interviews and reflections were kept in a locked, secure location. For the purpose of grouping results, all participants, their schools, and any other names mentioned were given a pseudonym, which protected the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.

Summary

This chapter explained why I utilized a qualitative comparative case study to describe the challenges faced by novice principals, who were the participants in this study. The participants were novice principals in Huffam School District, located within and near the city of Hawalli, Canada. The research design was imperative to this research, as it influenced numerous factors involved in this study, such as the interview questions, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and personal reflections, which was imperative as I coded and analyzed the data to gain a greater understanding of the central phenomenon, the challenges faced by novice principals.

Chapter four describes the participants in detail, including their years of experience, the sizes of their current school, and my descriptions of their characteristics. The findings are presented and supported by the data. They are organized in five categories, including: Five challenges faced by the participants, Entry plan: A vision to begin the year assisted by a

guidebook, Huffam School District: A decentralized district, Mentorship from experienced principals, and Vice principalship: The ideal training.

Chapter Four: Findings

The findings from this qualitative comparative case study are outlined in chapter four. The four cases in this study were four novice principals. Therefore, the chapter opens with a detailed description of each of the participants, including their years of experience in education, as well as personal characteristics, which assist the reader in understanding their persona. The data were collected by an interview with the district administrator, as well as individual interviews, a focus group interview, and personal reflections from the novice principals. I will report on the different challenges that emerged from the data collected, as well as the main categories that emerged, through data collection and analysis.

The Cases: Four Novice Principals

This research study had two types of participants: Diana, the district administrator, provided insight into Huffam School District, and the challenges she believed were faced by novice principals. She detailed the numerous ways the district supported the novice principals through those challenges. The novice principal participants were given pseudonyms: Michelle, Evan, Tamara, and Alice. They provided insight into what challenges they faced, as well as what strategies they utilized to begin their integration into the principalship. What follows is a thumbnail sketch of each participant based upon my observations and interactions with them. This section ends with a summary of the four cases.

Diana

Diana is the district administrator for Huffam School District, and has multiple years of experience at various positions including teaching, vice-principal and principal at multiple schools. She exhibits passion for education, specifically passion for educational leadership: Diana is a strong advocate in the system of education in the district. Through district

committees, task forces, provincial professional development committees, and leadership associations, she has been extremely involved in leadership work within her schools, Huffam School District, and the province. Diana was appointed to the majority of the positions she held, which provides evidence of her expertise. With her confident and knowledgeable demeanor, Diana was intrigued and excited by this study because of the assistance it could offer her in her position, as she seeks to grow in her profession, and assist the growth of others in theirs.

Michelle

Michelle began her principalship partway through the year, following an approximate two-year apprenticeship as a vice principal, and a successful teaching career of almost 15 years. Illustrating a defensive passion regarding her school, Michelle was initially hesitant to speak openly about the challenges she faced in leading her school. However, as trust developed between us, she opened up and revealed challenges she faced, and the details regarding those challenges. Michelle appeared to be a lifelong learner who is blessed with a mix of intelligence, leadership, and toughness; she seemed to challenge herself by moving forward in her career and transitioning to leadership in her school.

Evan

Spending seven years as a vice principal while working with three experienced principals, Evan learned several valuable lessons and leadership skills from his (then) colleagues. Previously, Evan had a successful teaching career. He presently leads a school of over 1000 students and approximately 75 staff members. Evan was candid and forthcoming regarding his experiences as a novice principal. Though he noted challenges during his principalship, he also exhibited confidence in his abilities, which were partially demonstrated through his honest and

informative comments. His interpersonal skills were evident through his interactions with me, and his thought-provoking insight proved valuable to this study.

Tamara

Tamara taught for over twenty years, and was a vice-principal for two years; she contends that it was a leadership position she held at her school that allowed an easier transition to become a novice principal. She presently leads a school of approximately 300 students and over 20 staff members. Tamara is organized, and comes across as determined and goal oriented, yet carries and utilizes great interpersonal skills.

Alice

Alice taught for over twenty years, before transitioning into a vice principal for three years. She is continuing her passion for education as the leader of her school. She presently leads a school of approximately 200 students and over 20 staff members. Alice is passionate about education and her students. She exhibits this passion in a fiery demeanor that makes one immediately feel stimulated.

Summary of the Principals' Characteristics

The novice principals shared many similar characteristics among each other, as well as with the district administrator. An important characteristic the participants shared was that they were all vice principals before becoming principals. None of the participants had any experience outside of Huffam School District. All participants had many years of experience at the various levels of education, as they worked their way through different schools, gained experience and wisdom, and now lead their own school for the first time. The interaction among the novice principal participants at the focus group interview was a beneficial experience. The participants appeared to experience growth through the course of the interview, and shared with vulnerability

the challenges they faced. The participants had similar characteristics, as each participant had experience as a vice principal. Only one participant, Michelle, was the vice principal in her current school, before she transitioned to be the principal this year. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the participants in this study.

Table 1

Novice Principal Demographics

Attributes	Michelle	Tamara	Alice	Evan
Highest Degree	Master's	Master's	Master's	Master's
Previous Position	VP	VP	VP	VP
Teaching Experience	14 years	20 years	20+ years	8 years
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male
School Level	Elementary	Elementary	Elementary	High School
School Size	150 +	300 +	200 +	1000 +

Note. VP = vice principal.

Having described the participants and shared a detailed summary of each of their cases, the next section describes their experiences in the role of novice principal in a decentralized school district in a northern Canadian community. The final categories section begins with a description of the final categories that emerged from the data analysis.

Final Categories

The final categories were constructed upon much reflection, organization, and time. I continually read over the transcripts from each interview, as well as the personal reflections, and this aided my process in narrowing down the number of final categories. Each category was

analyzed numerous times, first within the data from each individual participant, and then by considering that same element across the four different cases. The categories, which emerged from axial coding, included:

- Five challenges faced by the participants
- Entry plan: A vision to begin the year assisted by a guidebook
- Huffam School District: A decentralized district
- Mentorship from experienced principals
- Vice principalship: The ideal training

Each of these categories are introduced, supported with data from the participants, and analyzed across the different cases in their relation to each other.

Five Challenges Faced by the Participants

The five major challenges that the novice principals faced were categorized into the following categories:

- Unique challenges that flummox novice principals
- Staffing: Professional relationships and staff supervision
- Budgeting: becoming an accountant
- Maintaining the operation of the building and property
- The all encompassing, demanding aspects of the job

Challenge #1: Unique challenges that flummox novice principals. I categorized two distinct challenges as unique, and supported the fact the position is all encompassing. The first challenge was how social media broadcasts the complaints of people who are unhappy with decisions made by the principal. Secondly, a principal initiated a lockdown in the school as the

students were arriving to school, due to a report of a teenager with a gun in the vicinity of the school.

Two of the participants, Michelle and Alice, spoke about the influence of social media, and how easily negativity is broadcast on social media sites. Michelle had some advice for the naysayers; “Calm down with what you say on social media, because you are being watched, and whatever you say could paint a picture for you, which isn’t pretty”. Alice was criticized via social media after a meeting, which she thought had gone well. She reflected on these criticisms in her reflection writing:

A hard shell becomes part of this position, knowing that parents are always looking out for their children. Many times in the heat of anger they may lash out at the first person available, which happens to be you. Not to take it personally is hard, as we want to be the best we can and help all our kids.

Alice referred to the principalship as a “thankless job”, despite the praise she received from staff members and students, because their success as the principal is always reflected through the work and success of others. However, the majority of criticism is laid squarely at the feet of the leader, and sometimes in a negative, public forum.

A consensus among all of the participants was that anytime there was a moment of calmness and peace, it was usually followed by an unexpected challenge, which is exactly what happened to Evan early one Monday morning as the students were arriving to school. Evan shared the following challenge in our focus group interview about what occurred at his school Monday morning; “I received a report last Monday morning that there was a student at my school with a gun.... I knew our code red process lockdown well during the school day. However, everything changes when its 8:20 in the morning.” Evan was well versed in initiating

the lockdown procedure during the school day, but the variables of potential risk were maximized due to the timing in the day, where the majority of the students were coming into the building, along with a potential shooter. Evan reflected, “We’re talking the worst case scenario here right? That was a tough day, both my VP’s [vice-principals] were at the CAP [Canadian Association of Principals] conference, so it was like the perfect storm ... *that* [emphasis added] was an overwhelming challenge.” Fortunately, the situation was found to be a false alarm, and the staff members and students were not in danger.

Challenge #2: Staffing: Professional relationships and staff supervision. Three of the four participants spoke highly of the relationships they had developed with their staff members, and how supportive their staff members had been in their inaugural year as they learned the culture, history, and routine of the school. Michelle reflected upon instances of negative encounters with staff members, and Alice was writing a heart-wrenching unsatisfactory teaching report at the time of the focus group interview. All of the novice principals had strong apprenticeships as vice-principals, which they claimed to be an important factor in their smooth transition to the principalship.

Tamara strongly believed in school-wide expectations, by means of celebrating student success through school assemblies (which was not immediately popular). She communicated with her staff members regarding how to improve them, because of positive reactions as well as negative. She was receptive to her staff members’ feedback, and planned to amend her expectations to appease the staff members, while not discarding her belief in the importance of the assemblies.

Tamara was very complimentary of her staff members, and felt they eased her transition into the position and communicated very well to maintain transparency regarding their work.

I spent the first year getting to know my building, I didn't want to come in and rush and do things, you always get that 'well we don't do it that way here', so I thought, well I'll get to know you people and I'll find out where the strengths are, and where the areas of some concerns could be.

Alice concurred with Tamara, as she developed relationships with her staff members before proposing changes in fear of "rocking the boat until you've got some things established". Alice talked a lot about balancing between listening to staff members before making changes, yet using her leadership abilities and experience to gradually instill a change in culture. She stated, "I'm very much a person who's going to walk in, and say, 'I don't like that I'm going to want to change it,' that's been the hardest piece, to step back, watch, listen, and then gradually move forward." However, Alice's wealth of experience and wisdom guided her through these changes by focusing on working with her staff members rather than running a top down hierarchy. Alice reflected, "Letting the conversations happen around you and getting that information from those conversations, knowing and helping that to guide you about what you want to do". Through putting in this extra time and effort, Alice felt the rewards were easily worth it because her staff members felt valued and respected.

The biggest challenge Michelle encountered was with her staff members, as she referred to it as a 'battle'. She encountered a lot of differing personalities, which she managed, and to whom she taught interpersonal skills. Michelle stated, "Through the staff meetings and personal meetings I've had to talk about professionalism and keeping things professional." Michelle placed a lot of emphasis on ensuring her staff members were aligned in a united vision. However, she found it difficult to manage the different personalities. She reflected on her resiliency, "You develop tough skin, because normally I was a very quiet kind of person, pretty

easy going; the job kind of takes over, if you want to be good at it, you say the things you need to say.” Later in the year, following professional growth meetings with her staff members, Michelle was able to get to know her teachers in a more personal manner and was excited about the strides they made as professionals.

Alice was in the middle of writing a difficult teaching report, and it included numerous factors that required a lot of time and energy. Alice reflected about this challenge in one of her personal reflections, and how the process had been frustrating, time consuming, and heart breaking.

The knowledge of curriculum and teaching methods in use in the class do not follow current practice.... After many meetings, suggestions, help, mentors, I’m still not seeing improvements. Conversations of course are hard. Tears are always involved.... The next step is to meet with the teacher and go over it. This is a meeting that I am completely dreading, as I know it will lead to a break down [by the teacher].

Alice had written teaching reports as a vice-principal and a principal, but this was the first report she wrote that was unsatisfactory, and the fact it was not due to a lack of effort and hard work made it so devastating. Alice struggled to align the staff member’s diligent work ethic with the teaching practices that were expected. She reflected, “I love my position...but there are parts that are truly not only difficult, but heart breaking. To work with a teacher that, even though they are trying, and after so much intervention, is not changing practice, weighs heavily.” The damaging influence this teaching report and subsequent meeting would have on the struggling teacher truly bothered the novice principal, yet she has a responsibility of ensuring her students were being educated in a manner that is acceptable.

Evan spoke about tension during our focus group interview, and how he felt that a certain amount of tension was a good thing, rather than always aiming to please his staff members. He stated:

I was always really focused on having good positive relationships, and making sure the tone was comfortable, and I learned this year a little tension isn't bad either. Sometimes you have to say no, and that was stepping outside my comfort zone; usually I just try to please everybody, but that area where things are a little bit tense, but still operating well, that's a good place to be, because then everybody isn't so comfortable ... a good idea is always met with resistance, and resistance is good.

This brought forth agreement from the other participants, as they felt more respected after saying no to requests, and that their staff members understood what was non-negotiable. Evan revealed his confidence by reflecting on why he was hired, "When you become a principal, somebody believes that you're a good decision maker ... I think that's a big part of our job so what I've tried to do, I've tried to listen and digest and then decide." Evan showed how he listened to the suggestions made by his staff, yet is ultimately responsible for making decisions.

Challenge #3: Budgeting: Becoming an accountant. The budgeting is an added responsibility within Huffam School District, because it is a very decentralized school district. This added responsibility was a major challenge for the novice principals; despite the support they received from the district, they struggled to manage their budget. The budget for the entire school district is well over 100 million dollars. Diana spoke of how the school district supported their novice principals through learning about budgeting by allowing the novice principals to work with experienced principals in a mentoring process. She noted, "We require our principals to make sure vice principals are involved in budgeting... We take some of our principals, who

are far more experienced, and they do a session with our novice principals on budgeting and planning.” Despite this training and support, the principals felt they needed more assistance while working on their school budgets, as they struggled to access the knowledge they had learned from the budget seminars and apply it to their budget.

Tamara concurred how valuable the budget mentoring process was, and in the initial interview she felt confident in her budgeting ability. She reflected, “I think having somebody mentor you into it is crucial, I was really lucky because I had that leadership position before I actually went into a vice principalship so I knew my budget file.” However in the second individual interview, she referred to budgeting as her current challenge, and how she needed more training:

We’re in charge of the budget for the whole school, and we get some help with it in the beginning, there’s some training. I still need more, and I just got another email last night reminding me to do certain things; well, it’s not something I was taught to do, so now I have to go back to the drawing board, and learn how to redo this.

Tamara had training in her leadership position regarding budgeting. She also worked on budgeting as a vice-principal. Despite these experiences, and the training she received through the district at the beginning of the year, she continued to struggle with certain facets of the budget due to its intricacy.

Even though Evan was trained regarding the budget file, he had a difficult time using that knowledge when he was working on the budget.

There are these workshops that are offered, but I just don’t engage as much as I should until it’s my responsibility, so I sat through that school org [sic] session and I learned

about the school budget, but I didn't learn until its mine. I wish I took it more seriously, because you can learn it, so I think that may be more specific to me and my style.

Alice felt similar to Evan regarding the difficulty in learning something before you are solely responsible for it, and she was stressed by the budget. She does not feel confident in her ability to manage the budget, because she does not have a background in accounting or finances.

The budgeting accounting piece for me, is one of the huge stressors, because I still don't fully understand, it's all a money game. It's a numbers game, I mean bottom line we're teachers, we're educators, we're not accountants, and doing that piece, it still is difficult for me so I mean you're juggling one account to the next account and where's this money going to come from? How am I going to pay for this bus? We did get together and we did go over the 'my budget' program. We were guided and we've had the information and everything, but until you're actually responsible for a school it's not the same.

Managing the budget was stressful because it required a lot of learning. They required assistance with their specific budget because of the intricacies and circumstances of each school. Rather than working through a general budgeting course, they need specific assistance regarding the details of the budget of their school.

Challenge #4: Maintaining the operation of the building and property. Three of the four novice principals were frustrated about different aspects of maintaining their building, and the frustration increased when it influenced the students' education in a negative way. Tamara planned to install technological equipment in her gym for assemblies and parent nights.

However, she experienced delays because she was told it was not allowed, despite the fact she used an identical model in her previous school. She frustratingly stated, "What I think is maybe a four week project has turned into 12 months and I find that piece frustrating.... I find that

challenging when you don't know what you don't know." Tamara knew this equipment would positively influence her students' learning once it was set up, and so she planned to continue to work through this challenge until she succeeded.

Alice vented about maintaining the building in our focus group interview. She related it to the demands of the job and the numerous hats worn by principals:

It's when I have to talk to the custodian.... *Oh my soul* [emphasis added], 'this is not my job, clean the building'! The education is my part, it's when you have to deal with the stupidity of the building, when there's heating or there's lights or there's no hot water, or the toilet's plugged, that's the piece where I go, '*really?*' [emphasis added].

In our second interview, Alice again expressed infuriation regarding building matters; "The operation of the building and looking after the facility part of the building, is a difficult piece for me; I received an email message this week, that some of the flooring will be replaced in some of my classrooms." Alice and the teacher involved did not know when the flooring would be put in, although she mentioned it was the school boards' responsibility to put in the flooring.

Evan recalled a humorous story about an incident that took place near the beginning of his novice principalship; "I got the principalship at Kaluna High, [a pseudonym]; I'm playing in the gym with my own kids, the roof, the old gym, started to leak, and we laughed, 'Someone should get on that,' and I just kept playing." Evan soon realized it was now his responsibility, because he was in charge of the building, but the building manager title was one aspect of the job that did not come as naturally to him as the other responsibilities.

It was unnatural for the novice principals to think of themselves as the building managers, because their primary concern is educating the teachers and students. The participants seemed frustrated by the amount of time it took to manage the building, as they were required to

make decisions on matters of which they had minimal knowledge. It is a major challenge for principals, and one of the many complexities that is part of their job.

Challenge #5: The all encompassing, demanding aspects of the job. Diana stated the demands of the job are the biggest challenges that novice principals' faced; "I think truly they struggle with the demands of the job, the transition from a start and an end time to your day, to you are a principal '24/7', and you can expect calls anytime." Diana referred to the constant pressure to make correct decisions all day long, and to correctly maneuver through extremely difficult situations. She referred to it as "all encompassing, the struggle is the time management, and how much you have to do, it's a huge responsibility.... Your name's at the top of the page, and you really have to have a different awareness of that." The awareness Diana alluded to, in terms of being the sole person responsible, is something that can be overwhelming.

Evan was not used to being the person in charge of everything, and it was a transition for him to realize that. He recalled another humorous story where it was clear he had not yet made the transition to being in charge of everything:

You really are 'the everything', two weeks into the year one of my teachers on call (TOC) fell asleep in class. The kids came and said 'our TOC is sleeping, yeah, fell asleep, eyes are closed in front of the desk.' So what's my first reaction? I kind of laughed a little, and I thought 'oh shoot I have to go discipline this TOC now', those moments come up all the time, I wasn't jumping to them initially, it was always somebody else's job.... It's not a lesson, it's a realization, it starts and ends with you, you are the custodian if you have to be.... You're in charge of the building, you're the plumber if you have to be, you do whatever you have to do to make sure people are safe in the building... Things cannot wait until tomorrow.

Evan's story makes an excellent point about the all-encompassing nature of the principalship.

All of the different job titles were a challenge but also provided adrenaline for Alice, a challenge that she loved. Alice is in her fourth year of administration, her first as a principal, and still finds she does not know all the answers. However, she reflected on her passion for education, for the students, and how her many job titles gave her satisfaction in accomplishing a multitude of tasks throughout each day.

What I love about it is the adrenaline, you're constantly on the go, everything is constantly different, yes there's paperwork and sometimes you're stuck in your office, but I get to hang out with 200 kids instead of my classroom of 30. I get to be a leader, and an educator, and a social worker, and a counselor, and a disciplinarian, all of those different pieces.... We have a very complex position in our schools from cleaning up in bathrooms to determining people's future, and I think sometimes, when we decided to go into administration we did not realize just how complex our job may be.

Alice was passionate when speaking about her profession, and seemed energized by conversation about her different roles.

Tamara enjoyed the demands of the job, and had a vision for the school that she wanted portrayed through every aspect, which is why she enjoyed the different job titles. She stated, "I would be afraid if I lost something, then when I want a say in it, I would no longer have it because I removed it, so I would be leery to give anything up." This provided insight into Tamara's personality, and reflects her leadership style, in which she is extremely particular, detailed, and motivated to attain what she desires.

Michelle did not feel overly stressed, but emphasized that the job never ends, stating, "I'm here until five or six, and then I go home, spend a couple hours with my kids, then I work

again, your head becomes constantly thinking about this, even on weekends.” Her responsibilities were constantly on her mind:

There are days that never end. It is one thing after another. Meeting, after meeting, after meeting. Dealing with students in between. Having staff text, email, or contact you regarding student issues, school issues.... Bathroom duty, having to be everything, the janitor, the counselor, the social worker ... you have several hats on throughout the day; the janitor is probably one of them I would like to remove.

However, Michelle seemed to enjoy the challenge and the gratitude the position brought her. She needed a new challenge after teaching for numerous years and after becoming a master teacher, she set her sights on a more challenging position.

Entry Plan: A Vision to Begin the Year Assisted by a Guidebook

The leadership of the principal is essential from the beginning, which is why it is vital to begin the year with a plan. The participants refer to “school org” [School Organization], a district led process that takes place prior to school opening in the fall, where principals organize their schools in terms of staffing and resources based on the enrollment numbers. The district offers the principals suggestions and guidelines in regards to their budget. Huffam School District does not require its novice principals to enter the principalship with a formal entry plan. The district administrator, Diana, stated what is required:

We start every year with a two day, vice principals and principals working session before the school year actually starts. Within that time we review district initiatives for the year, what’s on the horizon provincially and that’s the opportunity for our principals to work as teams to navigate what their start up is going to look like. We have a school organization

process that takes place in the fall as well, where our principals present their budgets and their school organization plan to their assistant superintendent.

Because of the uniqueness of every school, community, and leadership style, Diana stated that while it is possible to have a foundation in place for novice principals, several variables exist within the job; there is only so much you can do to prepare. Diana concluded, “There isn’t a cookie cutter way to do this, that’s my belief.” It is more important to have a strategic plan in place to begin the year; this vision will be useful when problems arise with an unknown solution.

Tamara referenced the teacher’s strike as an influence over how she had to start the year, as opposed to how she wished to have started it. She reflected:

We were in our buildings without being able to ask teachers for their feedback or input on many decisions ... all of the school start-up had to happen without consulting with staff. This was hard, as I believe it is important for the staff to have a voice in what the school calendar and culture should look like. I felt that I was doing all of the decision-making and they would be ‘told’ when and where. In order to move the year forward this had to happen or we would have never been ready.

The strike forced Tamara to begin her first year as a novice principal with a top-down hierarchical leadership style, of which she was not comfortable at all.

A guidebook could assist with certain technical problems. Alice felt the idea of a guidebook could assist in forming a basis for solving problems, but that most issues facing principals are unique to each school and community, and require a distinctive plan:

I think it may have given you guidelines, a lot of times when you are faced with something, you don’t know whether to go right or left, if you had that guide, at least it may be able to give you a basis of an idea what to do, or how to first approach it.... I

think everything that you have at your fingertips is definitely going to help you, but if somebody said specifically what could help you most, I probably couldn't give them any ideas until it's in front of me and I need to solve that problem.

Tamara echoed the uniqueness of every incident and how they are approached differently, but that a guidebook would be a valuable resource for certain problems. She stated, "Your situation is always so unique, you just never know if that is going to be that certain circumstance, and is that decision going to fit for that, so, definitely I would have loved a toolkit." A guidebook would be valuable when similar answers exist for every situation.

Michelle believed a guidebook could have helped her with the basics of technical tasks such as budgeting and bell schedules, but also re-emphasized the uniqueness of every school. A guide that is useful for her school would probably only be useful for other inner city schools. She stated, "Every school is different, I think we could write our own book here, and that would be helpful to a lot of inner city schools everywhere." However, if inner city schools could collaborate and create a guidebook together, it would be beneficial for them.

It is impossible to have pre-made solutions to the problems faced by novice principals, due to the uniqueness of the context surrounding those problems. One aspect of an entry plan that could help novice principals is a guidebook for technical issues that are similar under most circumstances. It would serve novice principals well to be prepared to start their new position.

Huffam School District: A Decentralized District. The decentralized management plan in Huffam School District increased the complexity of the responsibilities of principals, specifically in the area of budgeting. The experiences of novice principals, who are coping with the added challenge of decentralization, are not well covered in the literature making this study somewhat unique. The majority of the population of the school district is in a large urban

community, Hawalli. There are a number of schools in rural towns within Huffam School District that surround the perimeter of Hawalli; the farthest town is less than 300 km away.

Decentralized school districts are the minority in the province; Diana communicated that some districts are partially decentralized, while others are not at all. Diana described how this affects principals, especially those new to the profession:

We are a very decentralized school district, meaning our principals are site-based managers, so the majority of the budgeting that we receive for education goes to schools. Principals are responsible for staffing, for every component of operating the school; for a lot of our novice principals, you didn't go to school to be an accountant. You have no business training whatsoever, so we require them to acquire those skills, to work with someone else so that their budget is passed at school organization.

A definitive process for decentralization of school districts does not exist. Therefore, school districts choose to decentralize systems, processes, and finances in ways that work for their unique contexts. As a result, decentralization often looks quite different in one school district than it does in another.

Tamara did not deem this added responsibility as a negative, but rather as a necessity to have a greater knowledge of their responsibilities. Because of her responsibility, she wanted absolute knowledge to make informed decisions:

Huffam School district is unique in that the schools look after their own budgets, where as other districts don't do that, which I'm glad we have that here, because it allows you to see all of the inner workings of what a school looks like. You know where the money is coming and going, who is spending where, what is happening, you do the hiring, you do all the managerial tasks, and I find that makes you a better, more knowledgeable person

about your building. So I really like it and I would be worried, if I would go to a district where I didn't have as much say.

Tamara was the outlier compared to the other participants in terms of wanting the added responsibility of the budget.

Michelle's school is inner city, which adds unique challenges specific to the budget, which she found challenging:

Other districts don't have their budget at the school, the board office handles all the budgets and says 'this is what you're spending on this', so that's a challenge, and working in the inner city, you have community links [nutrition programs] money, so balancing your budget might be a little bit more convoluted than other schools.

Michelle has a background in mathematics, which she found useful for budgeting, but still faced challenges with the budget throughout the year.

Alice referenced a huge challenge of her school is that it is lower income, and on the edge of poverty, which had an enormous effect on the amount of resources needed in place. She stated this was an issue across the whole district, which is difficult to facilitate due to budget cuts and a lack of funds.

It is people who have more difficulties with their social lives, as well as being on the edge of poverty ... kids who come in who have social emotional difficulties, have trauma difficulties who are experiencing difficulties at home. It's hard to be able to help them out when you don't have the resources to do so. I mean that's a challenge here in this building, which is a challenge in almost every building in the district now.

Alice found it difficult to manage the budget, and was frustrated the school was not given enough funds to provide resources for all of her students in poverty.

The district is faced with difficulties due to socio-economic challenges with many students and families. These challenges are directly related to funding because of the need for extra resources to assist the students who need assistance. The budget cuts make this difficult and frustrating for novice principals. Because they are in charge of their budget, they wished to support these students, but found it difficult due to a lack of funds.

Remote, Northern Communities

Diana stated the challenges posed by the schools within the district that are remote, and solutions are available for some aspects, but other facets cause tough challenges. There are towns outside of Hawalli, that are part of the school district but they are more remote. The district sets up one-on-one mentoring sessions between those remote principals and selected principals within Hawalli. Diana noted, “We have an elementary school and a secondary school in each one of those communities, and that poses challenges because if personalities don’t work, there isn’t a lot of mentorship that’s going to be taking place.” Diana emphasized, “We utilize technology as much as we can, we have a district license for our software that allows us to do video conferencing and desktop sharing at the same time so [principals] can participate in what’s happening here.” Technology use reduces the isolation of these smaller communities, and allows those principals to feel involved in the district.

Evan agreed that isolation is no longer an issue because of the availability of social media and different technologies available to novice principals. He stated, “The world is a click away, so whether we need to get a hold of our PVP [Principals and Vice Principals Association] people or somebody you know in Copeland [a pseudonym, a major city in the province], it’s really an email or phone call away.” He contended that 20 years ago he would have had a vastly different answer, and a heightened sense of isolation would have heavily influenced development. Evan

stated how “twitter is exploding with all sorts of educational stuff; there are avenues to get this type of development in today’s technological world.” The majority of professional development seminars utilize technology for its participants to follow on, and for others who are not in attendance to follow as well.

Alice did not consider the district remote, but noted how the small size of the town was a factor in making decisions. She noted, “I don’t know about the isolation, but the size of the town? Yes, because I think we’re always in the public eye, and it’s very difficult to make a move without that networking, that grape vine, and community members.” Alice concluded that this added pressure to ensure the correct decisions are being made.

The participants did not consider themselves to live in a remote community, partly due to the fact they lived in the large urban area of the district as opposed to one of the small rural communities. They explained how they were able to mediate some of the isolation through technology and they admitted that they might not recognize some of the challenges of working in a remote location because they have not worked in districts outside their current one. The novice principals felt supported by the leadership in the district. They felt supported by all of the different mentorship programs that were made available to novice principals, and the experienced principals they were partnered with to help ease their transition.

Mentorship from Experienced Principals

Huffam School District employs a plethora of mentorship opportunities for novice principals to ease the challenges they face. Diana described one program, “Learning leaders is a mentorship program where we bring experienced principals to work with novice principals or vice principals.” This program runs once a month, and includes workshops. Moreover,

experienced principals are available to assist novice principals as they discuss complicated topics and engage in conversation. In addition to that, the following opportunities are utilized:

- ***A family of schools structure.*** These families have regular meetings, where a novice principal is mentored, and works with experienced colleagues on moving forward with initiatives.
- ***Cohorts of a ‘Supervision for Learning’ course.*** These are organized with the Principals and Vice Principals Association (PVP), which is a collaboration including principals from districts across the province to have facilitated conversations and face-to-face meetings. Technology (Skype) is also used to meet on a two-week basis in between the face-to-face meetings.
- ***Monthly principal meetings.*** These include business management, district goals and the learning agenda. Experienced principals are paired with novice principals, in a mentor/mentee arrangement.
- ***One-on-one setting.*** Each novice principal is paired with an experienced principal to discuss case studies, hypothetical situations, and experiences.

Michelle appreciated the mentorship she has received through the district, “We have our admin [administrative] meetings, whenever we want we go to the board office, and we can do little mini sessions with the departments over there whether it be HR [Human Resources], CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees], or budget.” Michelle felt the district leaders’ support over the phone was admirable, as well as their knowledge of their principals and their personalities, as they matched up different skill sets and personalities that would work well together.

Alice valued the learning leaders group, and reflected how they were not sure at the first meeting what challenges to discuss because, as she stated it, “We don’t know what we don’t know until we’re faced with it”. She also found technological help from online forums, private to Huffam School District, and simply phoned the school district office to garner advice when needed; “Even after four years I’m still faced daily with ‘I don’t know this.’ ” Alice praised the board office administration for their realization of the learning process for novice principals.

The district does an admirable job setting up their novice principals to succeed, and ensures they experience success with a wide variety of mentorship options, including technological avenues which help to alleviate isolation. Aside from the mentorship the novice principals received from the district, each novice principal participant forged strong relationships in administration with their principals when they were vice principals. Those relationships were the strongest because they worked together closely through many issues, and a sense of trust and respect was developed between professionals.

Vice-Principalship: The Ideal Training

The natural progression for a teacher who has achieved their Master’s of Education degree and is interested in administration is to obtain the position of vice-principal. Ideally, as Diana mentioned, they have “some kind of district level work in addition to being in the school so we need to support them in not only moving the learning agenda forward in a school but contributing at the district level”. Diana affirmed that the preparation and planning to become a principal is learned in the district as a vice principal. Vice principals are able to learn various responsibilities before they become the principal; they have a colleague to share ideas with, as they gradually learn each of the copious responsibilities. Diana stated, “We require our principals to make sure vice principals are involved in budgeting, more of the leadership with the

learning agenda and the staff relations”. Diana added that responsibilities are increased for vice-principals as they progress in their careers, and before they move to the position of principal they have dealt with “an investigation or a teacher report or working on a committee of some form within the district...ideally, their training, their planning, is all done as vice principals, in a school.” Ideally, before becoming a principal, each vice principal is afforded the opportunity to work through a variety of challenges before they have the added pressure of being the principal.

All participants favorably recalled and praised the principal they learned from as vice principals. Evan mentioned how he learned a lot from his experience as a vice principal; “I really believe the best program for principal preparation, is the relationship you have as a vice principal with your existing principal.” Evan had the luxury of working with three skilled principals and he learned a great deal from each of them. He listed the different avenues in which he learned; “watching those people work, set up systems, manage staff members, implement change, ideas, and seeing a few different people do that, and then building your own style was probably the best preparation I received”. Evan was grateful for his experience as a vice principal, and showed gratitude to the principals from whom he learned from.

Each participant was successful in their role as a novice principal, due in large part to their leadership skills and passion for education, but also because of their experiences as vice-principals where they learned the role of the principal. Each participant was looked upon as the instructional leader, where they were given reverence and respect due to the time they spent as classroom teachers. A demeanor of confidence was evident in each participant, which was evident in the interviews as they reflected on certain circumstances, educational philosophies, and distinct challenges they faced throughout the year as novice principals. As the participants became more comfortable with me, they opened up and shared more, especially during the focus

group interview and through the personal reflections. It was through this developed, trusting relationship that the participants opened up, and revealed their stories and experiences, which allowed me to garner valuable and insightful data.

Summary

This chapter described the participants Diana, Alice, Tamara, Michelle, and Evan, along with their educational backgrounds and qualifications. The findings were supported by the data, and categorized into a number of final categories. It is important to note the similarities between the data from the district administrator, Diana, and the novice principals, Michelle, Tamara, Alice, and Evan.

Chapter five contains a review of the entire thesis, including a final review of the analysis and a summary of the research design. The research questions are answered through the data, aligning with the literature. Implications of this research for practice and policy are included, and recommendations for future research are proposed. I end the study with my final thoughts regarding this topic.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

This research study explored the challenges faced by four novice principals in their first year in the context of a decentralized school district in a northern, remote Canadian community. The study also discovered what strategies novice principals utilized to begin their year, and how novice principals were supported by Huffam School District. The study used qualitative comparative case study methods to explore the following research questions:

1. Which aspects (real-life experiences) of the principal's role do novice principals perceive as challenging?
2. What strategies do novice principals implement to begin their year with success?
3. What challenges do novice principals face from the perception of the district administrator?
4. How does Huffam School District support its novice principals?

In the first section of this chapter, I draw connections between the findings of this study and the existing literature to develop answers to my four research questions. In the next section, I support the answers to the research questions by referring to the findings, and supporting and comparing them with the existing literature, specifically the topics that were outlined in my literature review in Chapter 2: (a) principal complexity, (b) principal preparation, (c) entry plan, (d) resiliency, (e) instructional leader, and (f) leading staff members. The conclusions from the research questions, along with these topics contribute to the literature in a new way, which I describe in the section titled 'Contribution to Literature'. The chapter concludes with my acknowledgement of the limitations of my research, and how those factors influenced the study. The implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for further study are described

based on the findings I discovered from the data. I summarize my final thoughts to close the chapter, concluding the findings of the study, based on the research questions.

Case Findings Related to the Research Questions:

I collected data from the district administrator and four novice principals in the School District. Data collection began with an interview with the district administrator. Two sets of interviews, a focus group interview, and two personal reflections comprised the data collection from the novice principals. These data were analyzed, coded, interpreted and presented as findings in relation to the research questions, which form the foundation of this study. By integrating the data with the literature, this section outlines my responses to the research questions.

Research Question 1: Which aspects (real-life experiences) of the principal's role do novice principals perceive as challenging?

The findings of this study indicate the demands and the complexity of the job are the two overwhelming aspects, which makes being a novice principal challenging. The principalship consists of many layers, which go unseen, as the principals are in charge of an extensive range of tasks (Daresh & Male, 2000; Walker et al., 2003). Participants noted that their job is to be an instructional leader, yet they spent a lot of time on, seemingly unrelated, tasks. Such tasks therefore became increasingly frustrating for participants as many noted that not only did the completion of these tasks take too much time away from being an instructional leader, but also that novice principals were unprepared to take on such chores. Throughout the study, participants each faced unique and indiscriminate complex tasks such as: organizing the installation of flooring in the classrooms, maneuvering through district legislation to install technology in the gymnasium, cleaning the bathrooms, fixing leaks in the ceiling, writing reports of unsatisfactory

teaching, and facilitating a lockdown because of a teenager with a gun in the vicinity of the school. Being in charge of the budget, including both teachers' salaries and building maintenance, was a job requirement for principals in this decentralized school district and was a constant challenge for the novice principals. Most participants specifically mentioned organizing a budget, and managing the building as two of the most problematic responsibilities. While participants acknowledged the main role of the principal is to provide instructional leadership, they found that they spent too much time on their budget, and on maintaining the building.

Research Question 2: What strategies do novice principals implement to begin their year with success?

Two of the four principals focused on setting a foundation to begin the year by developing relationships with their staff members. The novice principals developed a respectful rapport with their staff members by listening to the needs and concerns of the staff members before making major changes. This finding agreed with the literature stating novice principals should "hit the ground learning, rather than running. Entry requires that they build relationships with stakeholders' and develop a process for learning, rather than reflexively focusing on tasks" (Jentz & Murphy, 2005, p. 738). Novice principals should include their teachers in decision-making, and find out what the teachers' strengths are before making bold decisions, or they will lose the respect of their staff members. As novice principals seek to align their schools with their own beliefs, visions, and philosophies, they need to allow staff members' input. Principals in this study noted that their job requires balance (in regards to many topics), and much wisdom and experience is needed to learn how to implement and maintain that balance in their relationships.

In the school district in this study, a teacher strike occurred at the end of the previous school year and extended into the beginning of the current year. This disruption altered the beginning of the school year; yet, it appeared minimally in the data. The participants, therefore, focused on building relationships and seeking teacher input in decision-making to begin their year. This is consistent with the literature, as Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, and Ikemoto (2012) reported “principals were more successful in garnering teacher buy-in when they consulted with staff to gain information on perceived strengths and weaknesses at the school” (p. 43). The novice principals found in this study it was instrumental to learn about the uniqueness of their school, staff members, and community, and then, used that knowledge to build upon the strengths that were already in place.

The literature stated that novice principals often begin their year making mistakes (Jentz & Murphy, 2005). Advice on bell schedules, staff meetings, and certain case study scenarios would be helpful in the form of a guidebook to supply technical advice to any school community. Access to these technical resources to study participants may have reduced simple errors at the beginning of the year, specifically regarding the budget, and would have supplied the participants with a checklist to follow. The participants concluded a technical guidebook would specifically be useful in the area of budget management; by the end of the study three of the four principals continued to struggle with their budget. Novice principals may err less often, if they had a resource guiding them through technical issues.

Research Question 3: What challenges do novice principals face from the perception of the district administrator?

The district administrator declared the biggest challenge novice principals faced was the demands of the job, specifying the all encompassing requirements of the job, and the lack of a

start and end time to the work day. The word ‘demands’ appeared frequently in the literature in describing the role of principal, specifically the novice principal (Walker et al., 2003; Woods et al., 2007). The transition to a job demanding responsibility and dealing with multifaceted tasks is arduous for novice principals. They must familiarize themselves with different government acts, laws, legal issues, and legislation. This administrative knowledge takes years to learn, and a lot of legalities are involved with its relation to progressive discipline management. The participants agreed these demands are overwhelming, supporting the view of the district administrator. There is added pressure of being the sole person responsible for decisions made within the school.

Research Question 4: How does Huffam School District support its novice principals?

The formal mentorship that novice principals receive in Huffam School District helped to alleviate the pressure associated with the principalship. Such mentorship is strongly recommended by the literature (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Briggs et al., 2006; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Sackney & Walker, 2006). The participants relied heavily on their personal mentors, as well as the mentors the district supplied, to navigate through these challenges on a daily basis. Sackney and Walker (2006) noted that if support is absent, novice principals could not survive the challenges of running a school. Each school in the district is part of a family of schools, which meets regularly, where novice principals have a chance to be mentored through different initiatives. To alleviate possible issues caused by isolation, principals from the School District are invited to participate in online courses with their counterparts from across the province. The district runs workshops for all principals where they analyze different scenarios and case studies to prepare them for situations they may face. Learning Leaders, a program that is unique to the School District, paired novice principals with experienced principals to facilitate formal learning,

and also, provided time for informal conversations regarding the latest issues the novice principals are facing.

The four research sub questions were answered by the data and supported by the literature. The data answered the questions regarding the challenges faced by novice principals and their entry into the principalship. The data also answered what the district administrator believed to be the biggest challenge for novice principals, and how the district supported them. The next section indicates how the findings are supported by the literature.

Connecting the Findings to the Literature

This section discusses how the results of this study relate to the literature review, regarding the following topics, (a) principalship complexity, (b) principal preparation, (c) entry plan, (d) resiliency, (e) instructional leader, and (f) leading staff members. I explain how the findings are supported by the literature, and vice versa. This research study contributes to the literature as it suggests that the vice principalship is a successful route to the principalship, due to the relationships that are developed between vice principals and principals and the learning that occurs in that role. Each participant relied heavily on personal relationships they had developed with principals when they were vice principals, and those mentorships were influential in guiding the novice principals through different challenges on a daily basis.

Principalship Complexity

In this research, the principals' responses mirrored the literature regarding the increasing complexity in their new position (Bengston et al., 2013). The responsibility of managing the building was a complex challenge for which the principals were responsible, which took an exasperating amount of time, due to the lack of simple solutions to problems (Jentz, 2009). The data revealed certain responsibilities of managing the building that were frustrating; they were in

addition to the numerous tasks each participant faced. The participants were expected to switch tasks from managing a budget, to cleaning a toilet, to writing a tear-inducing teaching report, to deciding where the new flooring should be installed in a classroom. The complexity and variety of tasks were at times overwhelming for the participants.

Changes in society affect the complexity of the principalship. Students are changing. There was a general consensus that socio-economic issues and mental health issues have increased in the district in all areas. Learning will continue to change due to the volume of information accessible through technology,, lessening the need for memorization and focusing more on information literacy skills. As teaching and school organization becomes more complex, influenced by society, it influences the complexities of the principalship (Crow, 2007, Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013, Holmes, Clement, & Albright, 2013). Novice principals must be adequately prepared to handle the complexities of this job, as they learn theory through their university degrees, and practical knowledge through their on the job training as vice principals.

Principal Preparation

Principal preparation is achieved in theory through a master's degree, and also through practice, through the vice principalship, or possibly a different leadership position. As stated in the literature review in chapter two, principal preparation programs are frequently perceived as insufficient preparation for future administrators (Crow, 2006; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Walker & Qian, 2006). The novice principals benefitted greatly from the knowledge and wisdom they learned during their years as vice-principals. They did not refer to utilizing the knowledge they gained in their graduate degrees.

The participants affirmed the problems they solved were distinctive to their school, community area, and demographic environment. They felt unprepared for these challenges. This is consistent with the literature, which stated how it is difficult to completely prepare for the challenges of administration, or to replicate those challenges in a classroom environment (Duncan et al., 2011; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Sackney & Walker, 2006). Problem solving skills are essential to navigate through the different challenges the novice principals faced daily.

To learn from an experienced principal as a vice principal, who takes on authentic responsibilities, would appear to be the best preparation for a novice principal. As vice principals transition to become novice principals, they benefit greatly from mentorship. They rely on their colleagues and mentors on a daily basis. The participants in this study consistently referenced how much they relied on their mentors, both personal and district initiated, as well as their family of schools. Certain challenges cannot be prepared for, therefore, novice principals must utilize resilient problem solving skills to navigate through sudden challenges specific to each school. Principal preparation continues to be a debated topic, but the experience gained from the vice principalship was an invaluable practice for the participants of this study.

Entry Plan

Rather than following a detailed plan entering the principalship as a novice principal, it emerged from the data that participants should develop relationships with staff members before bold decisions are made. Burkhauser et al. (2012) discovered there are many different approaches that principals can utilize to open a school year with success. The participants agreed that changes need to be grounded in sound reasoning and communicated thoroughly to be readily accepted by staff members. As novice principals share their visions and leadership styles, it is

crucial that they have communication skills to explain why they are making decisions and how those decisions benefit the students and the staff members.

Mentorship can help nurture novice principals into the position with success (Duncan & Stock, 2010), and help novice principals to use their skills to problem solve and make decisions. Novice principals must be vulnerable and ask for help when unsure: as one participant stated she was faced daily with unknown answers, despite being in her fourth year of administration. This was strongly supported by the district administrator who urged the novice principals to ask questions when they were unsure.

Daresh and Male (2000) recommend principals refer back to their values when making decisions through the complexity of the job. Principals must be confident in their ability to make decisions, and whenever they are faced with a question, and need to show vulnerability, and seek assistance, rather than make an error in judgment. However, they must remain confident in their skills, as they will be questioned. They need to withstand pressures from many different stakeholders within the school and community. How novice principals enter their position is important and how they begin to build relationships with their staff members will have a lasting influence.

Coping with Complexity through Resiliency

Participants explained that resiliency is a pre-requisite for novice principals because they need thick skin to navigate through difficult decisions that often leave people unhappy. Fortitude and confidence are necessary in decision-making and problem solving when in a new position where every change is questioned. This finding is consistent with the literature, which authenticates the need for resiliency and self-reliance to handle the criticism and anxiety associated with positions of leadership (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Crow, 2007; Heifetz, Grashow

& Linsky, 2009; Jentz & Murphy, 2005; Kelly & Saunders, 2010). The novice principals, who participated in this study, were passionate educators with many years of experience in education and were part of a connected network of teachers and principals in a tight-knit community. However, they still faced challenges that hardened them and certain situations still shocked them: yet, they continued to make decisions that aligned with their leadership philosophy, despite the fact they may have left people unhappy. Novice principals must continue to develop their fortitude throughout their first few years as challenges arise.

The literature emphasized the need for resiliency. Hobson et al. (2003) stated how essential it was for novice principals to increase their resiliency and strategies to handle stress. Daresh and Male (2000) reported that novice principals underestimated the amount of personal resilience that was necessary in the role. This fortitude displayed by the participants is why they have successfully transitioned into the principalship this year.

Instructional Leader

The literature emphasized the influence a principal has on student learning and school enhancement (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Webber et al., 2013). The role of instructional leader, where principals augment teacher propensity for learning, and the expectations for instructional leadership are increasing for principals (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Purington, 2013; Supovitz et al., 2010; Webber et al., 2013). The participants acknowledged themselves as instructional leaders, as their staff members sought their guidance to facilitate growth in their students' education. However, their responsibility as instructional leaders received less attention in the data than other duties, in which they had less training.

Portin, Alejano, Knapp, and Marzolf (2006) claimed, "one of the primary responsibilities of formal school leaders is to support the professional learning of teachers" (p. 25). The

participants were passionate about learning and assessment, and they continued to seek professional development in those areas. This influenced the staff members, as the staff members sought to access the knowledge their principals possessed. Portin et al. (2006) described teacher collaboration time as a place “where teachers have the opportunity to learn together through teaming and collaboration” (p. 25). The participants noted their support of teacher collaboration as means for professional growth, which resonated well with their staff members.

Leading Staff Members

A reoccurring finding in this study was the importance of relationships, specifically the relationships that each novice principal built with their staff members. All four novice principals stated the importance of building and maintaining relationships with their staff members, which echoed the literature recommendations to build alliances and increase influence (Burkhauser et al., 2012; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Meyer et al., 2011). Kelly and Saunders (2010) phrased it “ ‘people first; work second’. To me that is the crux of headship” (p. 138). It is essential for principals to exhibit transparency through their communication; those skills are vital in leading staff members. Novice principals must prioritize the relationships they build with staff members, to begin the year properly, and to seek their input in decision-making throughout the year.

The conclusions of this study, and their relation to the literature review were examined in this section, under seven different headings. The findings obtained were well supported by the literature.

Contributions to Literature

This section details the contributions this study makes to the existing literature. Three new additions to the literature are:

- There are distinct responsibilities in a decentralized school district that add to the challenges experienced by novice principals.
- The vice principalship can be a strong element of principal preparation.
- A guidebook may assist novice principals with solving technical challenges.

The study also confirmed several points that were already documented in the literature:

- The principalship is complex and all encompassing.
- Mentorship is important.
- Resiliency is required for success in the principalship.

One contradiction to the literature was found:

- The participants did not report that they felt isolated in their positions.

New Additions to the Literature

This study has added three findings to the existing literature regarding novice principals. These additions are listed below in three sections: (a) there are distinct responsibilities in a decentralized school district that add to the challenges experienced by novice principals, (b) the vice principalship can be a strong element of principal preparation, and (c) a guidebook would assist novice principals with solving technical challenges.

There are distinct responsibilities in a decentralized school district that add to the challenges experienced by novice principals. The fact the school district is decentralized was important to the study, because of the added responsibilities of budget management for the novice principals. This was a stress that continued throughout the entire year. The responsibility

of budgeting for the principals within this school district was a major challenge for the novice principals. The novice principals did not feel isolation being in a remote northern community. Huffam School District was the only district each of the participants had worked in, therefore, they had no reference point by which to compare to other school districts.

The vice principalship can be a strong element of principal preparation. Within Huffam School District, the vice principalship is a crucial part of the training process for the principalship. The findings of the data from the novice principal participants and the district administrator stated how important this step was in the process of becoming a principal. The experiences and knowledge these novice principals utilized from their vice principalship was invaluable. Furthermore, the novice principals reported that their former principals became natural mentors, who were familiar with the system and helped them to successfully navigate through the complexity of their new jobs.

A guidebook may assist novice principals with solving technical challenges. A guidebook to lead novice principals through technical challenges is important. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) define technical challenges as being easy to classify, lending themselves to exact solutions; solutions that are found quickly, and solutions are well received by others. Heifetz et al. (2009) define adaptive challenges as requiring philosophical change, requiring multiple aspects of change, which take a lot of time, and are resisted by others. Adaptive challenges are unique to different situations, and must be solved via collaboration with staff members, rather than a handbook (Heifetz et al., 2009). However, a guidebook addressing technical challenges, written for the principals within the district, would benefit all novice principals.

Confirmation and Added Descriptions of Ideas Already Included in the Literature

This section will reinforce the literature on novice principals. It is divided into the following three sections, (a) the principalship is complex and all encompassing, (b) mentorship is important, and (c) resiliency is required for success in the principalship. The data strongly supported these aspects of the literature.

The principalship is complex and all encompassing (Bengston et al., 2013; Crow, 2006; Walker et al., 2003). Novice principals in this study struggled with the complexities of the principalship, specifically the plethora of requirements, regardless of prior training in those areas. The participants stated that there were times they were oblivious to aspects of their position because of its density, and they were unfamiliar with these facets of the principalship.

Mentorship is important (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Briggs et al., 2006; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Sackney & Walker, 2006). Mentorship is important, and allows the novice principal to feel confident in moving forward. The participants referenced how they relied on their mentors on a daily basis, and felt comfortable asking them anything. Within their mentorship relationships were strong personal relationships, which supported the professional aspects of their work. Included in one of Evan's mentorship relationships was a bi-weekly breakfast date that meant a lot to him.

Resiliency is required for success in the principalship (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Crow, 2007; Kelly & Saunders, 2010). The principalship requires an individual to be resilient, because of the tough decisions that are made. These decisions may leave others unhappy, however, the participants must be comfortable with themselves because of the implications of their decisions.

Michelle engaged in many difficult conversations with her staff members, as she sought to improve their professionalism, despite the fact those conversations were often uncomfortable.

A Contradiction to the Literature

The participants did not feel isolated in their position, opposing the strong contingent of literature that refers to the professional isolation of being the principal (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Spillane & Lee, 2013). I suggest the reason why this isolation was not a factor was the support network developed with other principals, as the participants had already served as vice principals within the district. These participants also developed strong relationships with their staff members, which assisted in alleviating the feeling of isolation within their schools. Evan referenced how he went out with his staff members on Friday afternoons to join the group and to learn the culture. Tamara referenced feeling “on her own” in a personal reflection, but that was the sole piece of data referencing isolation. This finding further supports the conclusion of the importance of the vice principalship, as the relationships the participants had with other principals created a support network that seemed to shield them from feeling isolated.

These conclusions and findings contribute to the existing literature on novice principals, and have implications for many involved in this study. The next section explains the limitations of this study. Then the final sections explain the implications this study has for Huffam School District, as well as other school districts in Canada and beyond. Recommendations for future policy and practice both for novice principals and for their school districts are included. Finally, suggestions for future research based on the findings from this study are recorded.

Limitations of the Study

This research is limited by elements that are out of my control as the researcher. The small number of participants limited the results of this study. I chose to have this research focused on rich descriptions of the experiences of a small number of participants, rather than arriving at a general conclusion based on a large sample size. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable beyond the context of Huffam School District but the descriptions do provide readers with a deep understanding of the experiences of these individuals. In the future, similar research could be conducted that would survey a large number of novice principals across remote, northern Canada to see, if their experiences were similar to the experiences of the novice principals in my study.

The results are also limited by the fact that many variables existed within the sample of novice principals, such as gender, race, age, and whether the novice principal was hired from within or outside of their current school. The novice principals had several similarities (teaching experience, hired within the district, rise to the principalship), which made it difficult to assess how their personal differences affected their experiences. However, the study provided me with an opportunity to gain an understanding of their unique experiences within the complexity of their environments. A similar study could include a group of participants with similar characteristics to find out if their challenges and experiences were similar.

The teachers and staff members (excluding principals and vice-principals) of Huffam School District began the 2014-2015 school year on strike (three weeks), after ending the 2013-2014 school year on strike (two weeks), which influenced the beginning of the year for the principals. This year was not a typical school year, and therefore the experiences of the participants might not be typical. However, because I only started collecting data in the latter of

the school year, which is when the strike was least influential, I decided it was still valuable to continue with the study. I also believed that the majority of the challenges faced by the novice principals would not have been influenced by the strike. It could be valuable to conduct a similar study during a year that does not begin with a strike.

Implications

The findings from this research have implications for Huffam School District (and similar Canadian, decentralized school districts), and for novice principals in general. The School District should continue the current variety of support it provides for novice principals, and improve support for novice principals, who are learning to manage the decentralized school budget. Novice principals can benefit from the support of principals who are currently in the position, or have experience in the position; the novice principals can apply that wisdom to the challenges they face.

Huffam School District

Huffam School District should continue to provide their future principals with positions as vice-principals, working alongside veteran principals from whom they can learn, and with whom they can build relationships. The district should continue to support its novice principals in a variety of ways, and encourage them to seek assistance from a position of vulnerability, because it is benefiting them greatly. Decentralized school districts, like Huffam School District, should be cognizant of the added responsibilities of budgeting placed on their principals, and support them accordingly. Despite the support and training offered within this context the novice principals in this study continued to find that managing their school-based budgets was a major challenge.

Novice Principals

Novice principals should be prepared for the challenges associated with the job, and they should surround themselves with mentors, as they face numerous tough decisions in their position. The novice principals in this study pointed out the importance of having mentors and colleagues to ensure they enjoy success. Based on the participants' experiences, those considering the principalship and those who have recently been hired into the position of principal should prepare for the challenges and surround themselves with experienced mentors. Furthermore, it is essential to be leery insofar as making changes immediately, as novice principals need to gain a greater understanding of their students, community demographics, and staff members. It is insufficient for novice principals to simply learn to be novice principals; they must learn to be novice principals within the context of their school, community, and larger environment. This is accomplished through building relationships, listening to and respecting suggestions from staff members, and simply learning about the community.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This section outlines four recommendations that arose out of the data from this study. The first recommendation is that school districts should take on more responsibility regarding building maintenance, and through their communication with principals. Secondly, novice principals require more practical support in managing their budgets, throughout the entire school year. Third, Districts should hire their leaders from within their school district, and have their prospective principals apprentice in the position of vice principal. Finally, providing novice principals with different avenues of support allows the novice principals to successfully accomplish their tasks.

The findings of this study suggest that novice principals benefit when school districts are clear about communications regarding building maintenance and other regulations concerning aspects related to the school buildings. The participants found the lack of transparent communication to be frustrating and time consuming. There should be clarity regarding the regulations for each school building.

These novice principals required additional support in the financial management of their schools. I would recommend a course in accounting, regarding how to manage a budget, as the majority of the participants deemed this a challenge. This increased responsibility, especially in a decentralized school district, was a challenge for which the novice principals were not adequately prepared, notwithstanding the outstanding support they received. These leaders would benefit from increased training in matters related to the budget within a context specific to their school. This is not a course that can be learned adequately prior to taking on the principalship; it is a subject matter that is mostly learned while doing, applying budgeting techniques and skills to budgeting matters related to a novice principal's current school. Even though they were introduced to budgeting as vice principals, the knowledge did not resonate, perhaps, because they were not solely responsible. It is the school district's responsibility to supply their novice principals with this support, and the novice principals' responsibility to take advantage of such learning opportunities.

School districts should hire novice principals from within their district, because they are familiar with the schools and community. The participants of this study benefitted in their leadership positions because of their familiarity with the district. School districts should place prospective principals in the position of vice principals, if possible, to allow them to develop

their leadership style within a secondary leadership position. Each participant of this study referenced the value of his or her apprenticeship in the position of vice principal.

School districts should invest in providing a variety of supports for novice principals. Huffam School District provides their novice principals with a lot of support, and the principals acknowledged how much more achievable their tasks were because of that support. The novice principals had a definite level of comfort asking their school district leaders for assistance, which implied the strength of leadership their district leaders possessed.

Two of these recommendations would have alleviated frustrations for the novice principals in my study, and freed up time they spent on aspects unrelated to being an instructional leader. Building maintenance and budgeting were constant sources of irritation for each participant, and time-consuming responsibilities. Two recommendations are offered to other school districts based on the success of Huffam School District. School districts should hire from within their school district because of the familiarity for leaders in their transition to the principalship. Finally, school districts should support their novice principals in a variety of ways that allows their new leaders to conquer challenges and accomplish their tasks.

Recommendations for Further Study

In this section, I will recommend several possibilities for future research. First of all, I think it would be important to conduct similar research with novice principals who have not apprenticed as vice principals. A study comparing the challenges of principals who have apprenticed as vice principals with the challenges of principals who have not apprenticed as vice principals would be beneficial. Novice principals who have not completed their Masters degrees would shed light on how principals experience the principalship when they do not have a graduate background in theory. Researching novice principals and their influence as an

instructional leader within a decentralized school district would be valuable. Finally, a study of principal preparation programs across Canada would be valuable to assess how each program is preparing future novice principals.

Suggestions for future research of novice principals should include participants who have not experienced the vice principalship. How they transitioned into the principalship, presumably from a teaching role, would be a valuable comparison with principals who have experienced the vice principalship. Even though it was not a requirement for participants in this study to have experience as a vice principal, every novice principal referred to their experience as a vice principal as greatly influential, specifically the relationships they built with the principals they worked alongside.

Further research should also address novice principals who are hired before they have completed their Master of Education degree, and how their practice is influenced without that preparation and knowledge of theory. A surprise for me in this research was how little each participant referenced the knowledge they gained from their degree, or how they relied on that theory to guide them through their challenges. Other implications for further research might include consideration into how principals learn the skills required for the job. How do theory and practice come together? Perhaps there is a need for universities to work closer with novice principals to gain a greater understanding of how they can improve their programming in a way that benefits the practice of principals.

Further research would be valuable in understanding how novice principals function as the instructional leader. The participants of this study rarely referenced their role as the instructional leader; however, the district administrator defined the role of principal to be the educational leader. A study that specifically focused on the correlation between novice

principals and instructional leadership would be beneficial to gain insight into the phenomenon of instructional leadership.

A study across Canada regarding principal preparation programs would be beneficial for all school districts across the country. As the principalship grows in complexity, the preparation to become a principal becomes more important. What types of principal preparations are the most successful in Canada? How many school districts require their principals to apprentice as a vice principal? What are the most successful educational administration graduate programs, and how does their teaching of theory translate into practice in a way that allows novice principals to succeed in their position?

The preceding sections have included the implications of this study, recommendations for policy and practice, and recommendations for further study. Principals must develop relationships with their staff and gain a sense of the culture of their school and community before initiating changes. Finally, further research is necessary in linking the theory behind what is learned in principal preparation programs and the practice that novice principals employ in their first year.

Conclusions: Final Thoughts

This study explored the challenges experienced by four novice principals in a remote community in a decentralized northern Canadian school district. The novice principals detailed the challenges they faced. They noted the budget as a constant challenge, as well as the arduous nature of the position, which involves many unique, unrelated tasks. Despite my knowledge of the literature, and background in education, it was still surprising to learn of the number and diversity of tasks the novice principals faced. From flooring to lockdowns, the novice principals needed to demonstrate the fortitude to lead staff members and other employees in a wide range

of subject areas. The role of building manager was something that stretched the boundaries for each of the novice principals in this study. Being expected to make decisions regarding flooring, for example, when they had little expertise in that area, added undue stress to their jobs. The principalship, it seems, is truly a job that never ends, a job that receives little glory, and a job that can create a lot of negative attention over decisions made.

The educational field is a workplace that creates family-like ties. A comfort level among the participants was evident as they relied on their mentors, and considered them friends. The mentors, upon whom these novice principals relied, should be, and need to be, acknowledged and praised. As these novice principals gain experience and wisdom they will transition into experienced principals. No doubt some of the participants in this study will utilize their journey through the principalship to, one day, guide a novice principal and the cyclic relationship between novice principals and experienced principals will continue.

My hope is that future novice principals will benefit from this research. Nothing is more important than education in our society, and the leadership that develops our youth is a momentous task. We must continue to develop strong relationships and learn from each other. By contributing to our collective knowledge of education and educational administration, we will strengthen the minds of those in our care. Novice principals are our future educational leaders, and they must be put in a position that allows them to succeed, and which in turn, translates to the success of staff members and students.

References

- Ashton, B., & Duncan, H. E. (2012). A beginning rural principal's toolkit: A guide for success. *Rural Educator*, 34(1), 19-31. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1000100.pdf>
- Beeson, G. W., & Matthews, R. J. (1991, April). Early professional concerns: Becoming a principal in Australia. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED356571.pdf>
- Bengston, E., Zepeda, S. J., & Parylo, O. (2013). School systems' practices of controlling socialization during principal succession: Looking through the lens of an organizational socialization theory. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 41(2), 143-164. doi:10.1177/1741143212468344
- Blendinger, J., & Snipes, G. (1996, November). Managerial behavior of a first-year principal. Paper presented at the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Tuscaloosa, AL. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED404726.pdf>
- Brazer, S. D., & Bauer, S. C. (2013). Preparing instructional leaders: A model. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(4), 645-684. doi:10.1177/0013161X13478977
- Briggs, A. R. J., Bush, T., & Middlewood, D. (2006). From immersion to establishment. The challenges facing new school heads and the role of 'new visions' in resolving them. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(2), 257-276. doi:10.1080/03057640600718687

- Browne-Ferrigno, T. (2003). Becoming a principal: Role-conception, initial socialization, role-identity transformation, purposeful engagement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(4), 468-503. doi:10.1177/0013161X03255561
- Burkhauser, S., Gates, S. M., Hamilton, L. S., & Ikemoto, G. S. (2012). *First-year principals in urban school districts: How actions and working conditions relate to outcomes*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Education.
- Bush, T. (2011). Becoming a school principal: Exciting opportunity or daunting challenge? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39(5), 514-515. doi:10.1177/1741143211409506
- Campbell-Rush, P. (2013). My first-year journey. *Educational Leadership*, 70, 78-82. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/jun13/vol70/num09/My_FirstYear_Journey.aspx
- Cortez, M. T., Sorenson, R. D., & Coronado, D. (2012). A case study of a new high school principal: Instructional challenges and administrative interventions relating to immigrant students and teacher apathy on the U.S./Mexico border. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 15(7), 7-24. doi:10.1177/1555458912440645
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

- Crow, G. M. (2006). Complexity and the beginning principal in the United States: Perspectives on socialization. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(4), 310-325.
doi:10.1108/09578230610674930
- Crow, G. M. (2007). The professional and organizational socialization of new English headteachers in school reform. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 35(1), 51-71. doi:10.1177/1741143207071385
- Daresh, J. C. (2001). Support for beginning principals: First hurdles are highest. *Developing Administrative Leadership*, 25(3), 168-173. doi:10.1080/00405848609543220
- Daresh, J., & Male, T. (2000). Crossing the border into leadership: Experiences of newly appointed British headteachers and American principals. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 28(1), 89-101. doi:10.1177/263211X000281013
- Devos, G., Hulpia, H., Tuytens, M., & Sinnaeve, I. (2013). Self-other agreement as an alternative perspective of school leadership analysis: An exploratory study. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, 24(3), 296-315. doi:10.1080/09243453.2012.693103
- DiPaola, M., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The principalship at a crossroads: A study of the conditions and concerns of principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, 87(43), 43-64.
doi:10.1177/019263650308763404
- Drago-Severson, E., & Blum-DeStefano, J. (2013). A new approach for new demands: The promise of learning-oriented school leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 16(1), 1-33. doi:10.1080/13603124.2012.741265
- Draper, J., & McMichael, P. (2000). Contextualizing new headship. *School Leadership & Management*, 20(4), 459-473. doi:10.1080/713696965

- Duncan, H. (2011). From online dialogue towards critical practice: Beginning school administrators' reflections. *Management in Education*, 25(2), 67-70.
doi:10.1177/0892020611398928
- Duncan, H., Range, B., & Scherz, S. (2011). From professional preparation to on-the-job development: What do beginning principals need? *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 6(3), 1-15. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ974249.pdf>
- Duncan, H. E., & Stock, M. J. (2010). Mentoring and coaching rural school leaders: What do they need? *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 18(3), 293-311.
doi:10.1080/13611267.2010.492947
- Fullan, M. (2002). Leadership and sustainability. *Principal Leadership*, 3(4), 14-17. Retrieved from <http://www.michaelfullan.ca/media/13396047460.pdf>
- Fullan, M. (2003). Leadership and sustainability: Systems thinkers in action. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Goleman, D. (1998). What makes a leader? *Harvard Business Review*, 76(6), 93-102. Retrieved from http://www.undp.org/content/dam/samoa/docs/UNDP_WS_TLDP2_Whatmakesaleader.pdf
- Hare, C. (2014). School principals under great stress. Retrieved from <http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Publications/ATA%20News/Volume%2049%202014-15/Number-3/Pages/School-principals.aspx>

- Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Hess, F. M., & Kelly, A. P. (2007). Learning to lead: What gets taught in principal-preparation programs. *Teachers College Record*, 109(1), 244-274. Retrieved from http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/Hess_Kelly_Learning_to_Lead_PEPG05.02.pdf
- Hobson, A., Brown, E., Ashby, P., Keys, W., Sharp, C., & Benefield, P. (2003). *Issues for early headship – problems and support strategies*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/issues-for-early-headship-problems-and-support-strategies.pdf>
- Holmes, K., Clement, J., & Albright, J. (2013). The complex task of leading educational change in schools. *School Leadership & Management*, 33(3), 270-283.
doi:10.1080/13632434.2013.800477
- Huffam School District. (2014). *District achievement contract 2014-2017* [Data file]. Retrieved from <https://www.huffamschooldistrict.ca>
- Jentz, B. (2009, September). First time in a position of authority. *Phi Delta Evanpan*. 56-60.
Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.berlioz.brandonu.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=10&sid=c0b0e0dc-ed11-40c2-81fb-42c29662c211%40sessionmgr4002&hid=4107>

- Jentz, B. C., & Murphy, J. T. (2005, June). Starting confused: How leaders start when they don't know where to start. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 736-744. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.berlitz.brandun.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=12&sid=c0b0e0dc-ed11-40c2-81fb-42c29662c211%40sessionmgr4002&hid=4107>
- Kelly, A., & Saunders, N. (2010). New heads on the block: Three case studies of transition to primary school headship. *School Leadership and Management*, 30(2), 127-142. doi:10.1080/13632431003663180
- Loder, T. L., & Spillane, J. P. (2005). Is a principal still a teacher? US women administrators' accounts of role conflict and role discontinuity. *School Leadership and Management*, 25(3), 263-279. doi:10.1080/13634230500116348
- Lujan, B. A. (2011). *School-based management in Colorado public schools: The impact of administrative decision making on the achievement of low socio-economic and minority students* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest LLC. (UMI Number 3457754)
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Meyer, M. J., Macmillan, R. B., & Northfield, S. K. (2011). Principal succession and the micropolitics of educators in schools: Some incidental results from a larger study. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 117, 1-26. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov.berlitz.brandun.ca/fulltext/EJ923617.pdf>
- Northfield, S. (2013). The novice principal: Change and challenges. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 142, 158-182. Retrieved from http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/pdf_files/case10-northfield.pdf

Ouchi, W. G. (2006). Power to the principals: Decentralization in three large school districts.

Organization Science 17(2), 298-307. doi: 10.1287/1050.0172.

Paese, M., & Mitchell, S. (2007). *Leaders in transition: Stepping up, not off*. Retrieved from

http://www.ddiworld.com/DDIWorld/media/trendresearch/leadershiptransitions_ang_rr_ddi.pdf

Portin, B. S., Alejano, C. R., Knapp, M. S., & Marzolf, E. (2006). *Redefining roles,*

responsibilities, and authority of school leaders. Retrieved from

<http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Roles-Oct16.pdf>

Rooney, J. (2013). For principals: Planning the first year. *Educational Leadership*, 70(9), 73-76.

Retrieved from

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.berlioz.brandonu.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c0b0e0dced11-40c2-81fb-42c29662c211%40sessionmgr4002&vid=21&hid=4107>

Sackney, L., & Walker, K. (2006). Canadian perspectives on beginning principals: Their role in

building capacity for learning communities. *Journal of Educational Administration*,

44(4), 341-358. doi:10.1108/09578230610676578

Slater, C. L., Garcia, J. M., & Gorosave, G. L. (2008). Challenges of a successful first-year

principal in Mexico. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(6), 702-714. doi:

10.1108/09578230810908299

Spillane, J. P., & Lee, L. C. (2013). Novice school principal's sense of ultimate responsibility;

Problems of practice in transitioning to the principal's office. *Educational Administration*

Quarterly, 20(10), 1-34. doi:10.1177/0013161X13505290

Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May, H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(31), 31-56.

doi:10.1177/1094670509353043

Tooms, A. (2003). The rookie's playbook: Insights and dirt for new principals. *Phi Delta*

Evanpan, 84(7), 530-533. Retrieved from

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.berlioz.brandonu.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=26&sid=c0b0e0dc-ed11-40c2-81fb-42c29662c211%40sessionmgr4002&hid=4107>

<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.berlioz.brandonu.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=25&sid=c0b0e0dc-ed11-40c2-81fb-42c29662c211%40sessionmgr4002&hid=4107>

Walker, A., & Qian, H. (2006). Beginning principals: Balancing at the top of the greasy pole.

Journal of Educational Administration, 44(4), 297-309.

doi:10.1108/09578230610674921

Walker, K., Anderson, K., Sackney, L., & Woolf, J. (2003). Unexpected learning by neophyte

principals: Factors related to success of first year principals in schools. *Managing Global*

Transitions, 1(2), 195-213. Retrieved from

http://www.fmkp.si/zalozba/ISSN/15816311/1_195-213.pdf

Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership*. Aurora, CO: Mid-

continent Research for Education and Learning

Webber, C. F., Scott, S., Aitken, E. N., Lupart, J., & Scott, D. E. (2013). Leading assessment for

enhanced student outcomes. *School Leadership & Management*, 33(3), 240-255.

doi:10.1080/13632434.2013.773885

- Woods, P. A., Woods, G. J., & Cowie, M. (2009). Tears, laughter, camaraderie: Professional development for headteachers. *School Leadership and Management*, 29(3), 253-275. doi:10.1080/13632430902793825
- Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The Qualitative Report* 20(2), 134-152. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR20/2/yazan1.pdf>
- Yin, R., K. (2002). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Appendix A: Collecting Data From the District Administrator

Research Participant (District Administrator) Consent Form

Title: The Challenges of Being a Novice Principal

Researcher: David K. Schroeder

Purpose: As the District Administrator in Huffam School District, you are invited to participate in a research study to evaluate the challenges faced by novice principals in their first year of the principalship. Mr. David K. Schroeder, a graduate student in the Masters of Education program at Brandon University, is conducting this study for my thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirement of my Master's of Education degree. My supervisor is Dr. Jacqueline Kirk, Chair, Graduate studies & Associate Dean of Education at Brandon University.

Timeline: The first phase of this study will take place in March 2015, and as the District Administrator, you are asked to participate in the following: one personal interview, which will take approximately 30 – 60 minutes of your time. The interview will take place at the location where the participant feels most comfortable. The timing of this interview is unimportant in relation to the interviews of the novice principals, but ideally will take place in March/April, 2015.

Confidentiality: Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty by contacting me. You may skip any questions posed in the interview that you do not wish to answer. I will conduct the interview, which will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The audio recorder will be

stored in a safe and locked location at all times, and the transcript file will be stored on a locked USB drive at all times. I will transcribe the audio file myself. Your name will not be used in this research, although your position is named and this information will lend itself to your identity.

Potential Benefits: The benefit to you will be in having the opportunity to take part in a self-reflective discussion in a non-threatening environment. This research will contribute to the collective knowledge of the challenges faced by novice principals, and how they can be supported to succeed, based on collecting and analyzing data, and explaining the challenges they are presently facing.

Participants: Participants assist me in investigating the challenges faced by novice principals. The data collected from the interview will be recorded and then transcribed. I will use the transcriptions for the purposes of qualitative analysis to look for the central phenomena and ideas that emerge from the data. Both the recordings and the transcriptions will be stored in secure locations. Only my advisor and I will have access to the recordings and the transcriptions.

Potential Risks or difficulty: It is not expected that participants will experience any risk or discomfort during the interview. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time prior to data analysis.

District Administrator: Interview Schedule and Protocol

My study is aimed at examining the challenges identified by selected novice principals, and what strategies they have employed at working through those challenges. Before proceeding, I'd like to explain what I mean when I use certain terms in my interview questions. I am using the term 'challenges' to mean the tasks or situations the principal must work through or accomplish. This research is part of my thesis for my Master's of Education degree through Brandon University, and I will be guided through this research by Dr. Jackie Kirk, Chair of Graduate Studies, and Associate Dean of Education at Brandon University, in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada.

Are you ready to proceed?

1. Please identify yourself, and explain the journey/steps you have taken to become a District Administrator.
2. What technical qualifications do novice principals require before you hire them?
3. Do you require novice principals to have an Entry Plan to guide them into the principalship for the first day, week, and/or month?
4. Do you supply novice principals with an Entry Plan to assist their transition in this position?
5. What are the major challenges that you believe novice principals are experiencing in their first year as a principal? In this study, I am using 'challenges' to mean the tasks or situations the novice principal must work through or accomplish.
6. What do you believe are some of the critical skills novice principals need in order to be successful school leaders?
7. Describe any mentorship you have supplied, or made available for novice principals with this year.

8. Is the transition for novice principals different in this school district because we are in an isolated community in northern Canada?
9. How has the history and/or culture of this school district affected novice principals?
10. What do you believe is the hardest lesson for novice principals to learn?
11. What experience/skills do you require and/or wish novice principals had prior to entering the principalship?
12. What advice do you have for first-time principals?

Consent: If you consent to participate, please sign the attached form and return this form to me via email (schroedk48@brandonu.ca) so that I can contact you regarding possible interview times. A copy will be made for your records. If you have questions about this project, you may contact me, David K. Schroeder at 250-963-8245 or 867-336-0964 or (schroedk48@brandonu.ca) Dr. Jacqueline Kirk may be contacted at 204-727-7380 or kirkj@brandonu.ca.

Ethics: This research has been approved by the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee (BUREC). If you have any ethical questions about this research, please contact BUREC (Phone: 204-727-9712; Email: burec@brandonu.ca). Once the study is complete, the results will be made available to you directly from myself.

Consent:

Name (printed)

Signature

Date

Thank you for your anticipated participation.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. David Schroeder

Appendix B: Collecting Data from the Novice Principals

Research Participant (Novice Principal) Consent Form

Title: The Challenges of Being a Novice Principal

Researcher: David K. Schroeder

Purpose: As novice principals in Huffam School District, you are invited to participate in a research study to evaluate the challenges you face in your first year of the principalship. Mr. David K. Schroeder, a graduate student in the Masters of Education program at Brandon University, is conducting this study for my thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirement of my Master's of Education degree. My supervisor is Dr. Jacqueline Kirk, Chair, Graduate studies & Associate Dean of Education at Brandon University.

Timeline: The first phase of this study will take place in March 2015, and participants are asked to participate in the following: the first of two personal interviews, which will each take approximately 30 – 60 minutes of your time. The interview will take place at the location where the participant feels most comfortable. The two personal reflections will take approximately 15-30 minutes each, which are done at any point between the two individual interviews, ideally, April, 2015. The second of two interviews will take place in April/May, 2015, taking approximately 30-60 minutes. The subsequent focus group discussion will take place following the second round of individual interviews in May/June, 2015, and will take approximately 30-60 minutes. The maximum amount of time required for all novice principal participants is 4 hours (240 minutes).

Confidentiality: Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty by contacting me. You may skip any questions posed in the interview that you do not wish to answer. I will conduct the interview, which will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The audio recorder will be stored in a safe and locked location at all times, and the transcript file will be stored on a locked USB drive at all times. I will transcribe the audio file myself. Because of the small population of the school district, and the fact there are relatively few novice principals, some participants may be identifiable through their stories or events shared. However, every effort will be made to protect your identity. Your participation in this research will be completely confidential and pseudonyms will be used in any presentations or publications based on this research.

Potential Benefits: The benefit to you will be in having the opportunity to take part in a self-reflective discussion in a non-threatening environment. This research will contribute to the collective knowledge of the challenges faced by novice principals, and how they can be supported to succeed, based on collecting and analyzing data, and explaining the challenges they are presently facing.

Participants: Participants assist me in investigating the challenges faced by novice principals. The data collected from the interviews and personal reflections will be recorded and then transcribed. I will use the transcriptions for the purposes of qualitative analysis to look for the central phenomena and ideas that emerge from the data. Both the recordings and the transcriptions will be stored in secure locations. Only my advisor and I will have access to the recordings and the transcriptions.

Potential Risks or difficulty: It is not expected that participants will experience any risk or discomfort during the interviews and/or personal reflections. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time prior to data analysis.

Novice Principals: Protocol

Before we begin, I would like to assure you that neither you nor your school will be identified by name in my study. As I explained in my initial letter, my study is aimed at examining the challenges identified by selected novice principals, and what strategies you have employed at working through those challenges. Before proceeding, I'd like to explain what I mean when I use certain terms in my interview questions. I am using the term 'challenges' to mean the tasks or situations the principal must work through or accomplish. This research is part of my thesis for my Master's of Education degree through Brandon University. I will be guided through this research by Dr. Jackie Kirk, Chair of Graduate Studies, and Associate Dean of Education at Brandon University, in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada.

Novice Principals: Interview Schedule 1

1. Please identify yourself, and explain the journey/steps you have taken to become a novice principal.
2. What principal preparation program have you attended, are you attending, or do you plan on attending?
3. Did you have an Entry Plan to guide you into the principalship for the first day, week, and/or month?
4. What are the major challenges that you experienced in your first year as a principal? In this study, I am using 'challenges' to mean the tasks or situations the principal must work through or accomplish.
5. What do you believe are some of the critical skills new principals need in order to be successful school leaders?
6. Describe any experiences you have of mentorship this year.
7. Is your transition different because you are in an isolated community in northern Canada?
8. How has the history and/or culture of the school affected your role as a novice principal this year?
9. What's been the hardest lesson to learn this year as a novice principal?
10. What experience/skills would you have liked to explore/develop prior to entering the principalship?
11. Do you have any advice for first-time principals?

Novice Principals: Interview Schedule 2

1. In our first interview, you described certain challenges that you faced as a novice principal. Are you progressing with these challenges?
2. What challenges do you anticipate will arise as you finish off the year?
3. How will the challenges that you faced this year influence the way you plan to begin next year?
4. Do you think there is a challenge unique to Huffam School District that all novice principals encounter?
5. If you could remove a responsibility from your job title what would it be? Why?
6. How is a 2015 novice principal different than a novice principal in 2005 or 2010?
7. How do you anticipate the principalship will change in the next 5 years?
8. Socialization is defined by Duncan and Stock (2010) as “the process of learning the culture of an organization, including cultural norms and conceptions of appropriate and expected behavior”, where do you feel you’re at in that process? In what way have you led a change in culture in your school?
9. Tooms (2003) wrote “many novice principals wish they were handed a guide”, and Ashton and Duncan (2012) created a “toolkit for rural principals”, describe how this could have helped you, if at all?
10. Would you like to elaborate more on the challenges you spoke about in the focus group interview?

Consent: If you consent to participate, please sign the attached form and return this form to me via email (schroedk48@brandonu.ca) so that I can contact you regarding possible interview times. A copy will be made for your records. If you have questions about this project, you may contact me, David K. Schroeder at 250-963-8245 or 867-336-0964 or (schroedk48@brandonu.ca) Dr. Jacqueline Kirk may be contacted at 204-727-7380 or kirkj@brandonu.ca.

Ethics: This research has been approved by the Brandon University Research Ethics Committee (BUREC). If you have any ethical questions about this research, please contact BUREC (Phone: 204-727-9712; Email: burec@brandonu.ca). Once the study is complete, the results will be made available to you directly from myself.

Consent:

Name (printed)

Signature

Date

Thank you for your anticipated participation.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. David Schroeder

Appendix C: Collecting Data from a Focus Group Interview

Focus Group Interview Schedule and Protocol

Location:

Huffam School District Board Office: 94 Kernel Drive, Hawalli, Canada

1. I am interested in gaining understanding of novice principals. I hope you are willing to add comments to others perspectives on top of your own. The object is to get high quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. There will be differing opinions in this discussion, and I ask that you politely respect others opinions and insights, as you wish for them to respect yours.

2. The topics we will discuss stem from my research objectives, and from the data I have collected from individual interviews and personal reflections. If I commence a conversation based on data obtained from a participant in the study, I will ensure confidentiality is maintained. Topics obtained from data will be presented in a way to ensure confidentiality is maintained at all times.

3. Please speak one at a time so that we to hear everyone's insights and get them on tape, along with your name. Please say your name before you speak so that when I transcribe the tape, I will know who is talking. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality upon transcribing data. The audio recorder will be stored in a safe and locked location at all times, and the transcript file will be stored on a locked USB drive at all times.

Opening Notes

Thanks for supporting my research through this focus group. Merriam wrote that “data obtained from a focus group is socially constructed within the interaction of the group, a constructivist perspective underlies this data collection procedure”. I've created a series of questions based on my research objectives, and from the data collected in this study thus far, but we will also let the tone of the group determine where the questions go.

Confidentiality

This form is intended to protect the confidentiality of what members of this discussion group say during the course of this study. Please read the following statement and sign your name indicating that you agree to comply. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the nature of this group, so proceed with caution at your own risk.

I promise that I will not reiterate information discussed during the course of this focus group with anyone outside of my fellow focus group members and the facilitator, David Schroeder.

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Facilitator Name: _____ Signature: _____

Focus Group Questions

1. Has anyone had any overwhelming challenges in the last month that you wish to elaborate on?
2. What is the most effective strategy you employed to surmount challenges this year?
3. As invested northern community members, do you feel more pressure to succeed because of the size of this town and its isolation?
4. Describe your leadership style and how it has been influenced by your experience throughout this year?
5. Was there a moment, realization or epiphany where you realized you were in charge? Of the custodians, the building, the cafeteria, etc? Describe this feeling, and the context surrounding it.
6. Describe your influence as an instructional leader this year.