12-2020

THE LIFE OF AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

—————————————

by

Catherine Ruth Tamayo

December 2020

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Approved by:

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Dr. Enrique Murillo, Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to provide insight into the daily life of administrators with the hope it would help to identify potential causes of principals leaving the profession within five years. Additionally, the study helps to prepare and inform educators and district leaders in how to support principals. It can also assist is preparing future principals for their administrative roles and what best supports participants to become successful administrators.

The principalship is a unique and multifaceted profession. It requires a specific set of skills to run the organization efficiently and effectively. These skills are difficult to attain from a textbook.

This study utilized a qualitative inquiry model as an autoethnography and is able to shed light on real life experiences. Data collection consisted of a journal of daily occurrences, a reflective personal journal, and a daily work calendar. Additionally there were artifacts such as letters and meeting notes. Data was coded and themed to create meaning. Central themes that emerged were behavior, attendance, trauma, and family involvement.

Problem

More than half of administrators leave the professions within five years (Viadero, 2009). Data suggests that half of principals just beginning are no longer in the same job five years later and some have left the principalship altogether (Viadero, 2009). It is important that experienced administrators are running

schools and mentoring new principals. With such a large turnover it is difficult for administrators to become seasoned.

One fourth of administrators are leaving the professions each year. Dethloff shares that it is difficult for administrators to be prepared for their administrative roles if they do not completely understand the conditions and demands surrounding the position (Dethloff, 2005). You will only know what the principalship entails if you have held the position or if an administrator shares their experiences.

Research Questions

The main research questions were: What challenges did I face in the principalship, and how did I choose to respond to those challenges? What happened on the job? How did I spend my time each week, and how did I determine my priorities? What obstacles did I encounter in attempting to create a positive environment and an organization centered around student learning, wellbeing, and what was my response? How did I continue to believe in the worthiness of being a principal? What did I do on a daily basis, in spite of continually dealing with problems and difficulties, to keep believing in the goodness of people and find joy in my work?

Using self-reflection theory I was able to provide insights that only a practitioner would have. The principalship is a worthwhile calling that helps

support students. Administrators also help to train and support teachers while assisting struggling students and families. Helping a student with academics or behavior can have a positive effect on the rest of their lives. I wanted to help future administrators to be prepared so they can be successful in their roles.

Research Design and Methods

This study is a phenomenological, qualitative analysis research model. Data was collected, coded, and reviewed for meaning and significance. The theoretical frameworks utilized were autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and self-reflection theory. These tell the story of one principal while providing insight regarding what the principalship entails. Data was collected via a daily journal and a reflective journal was used weekly. Artifacts were also collected for the study including a work calendar, agendas, memos, and notes.

Findings

Because it is difficult and stressful, one fourth of principals leave their position each year and some leave the profession entirely. This frequent turnover has a negative impact on schools that need stability and follow through on long term goals. When administrators are successful it helps their school sites, teachers, and students to be successful as well.

Future administrators would benefit from additional support while learning on the job, perhaps via a coaching model. When a new administrator is hired they are expected to be fully prepared for whatever situation may come their way;

earthquake, angry parent, school budget. Even the best student needs time to gain experience and practical knowledge.

Utilizing such a model would help them to receive support in real time for difficult situations they face. Utilizing a veteran administrator as a coach allows the new administrator to glean from their many years of knowledge and experience. This should assist the new administrator to be successful as they are gaining experience. It is important to help train and provide continuing support to the promising new administrators entering the field.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study was able to inform future administrators and programs. If future administrators are given a glimpse into their future roles, they may be able to better prepare themselves for their jobs. Programs may also be able to better prepare students because they will have a better understanding of the skills they will need as administrators. When administrators are well prepared and have realistic expectations they may be less likely to leave so quickly after they have begun. Providing support via a coaching model would also be beneficial in retention of administrators. This research was intended to contribute to both theory and practice.

Keywords: Administrative Credential, Administrators, Principalship, Professional Development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge thank you to Dr. Piller, my committee chair and advisor. Thank you for all of your help and support. Thank you Dr. Piller for all of your input and for helping me to fine tune my research. You spent hours helping me to hone my topic of interest down to a researchable topic. You provided positive support and words of encouragement throughout the process. You gave good insight on what might be included in the research. I am just so thankful to have had the opportunity to work with you through this process. Thank you for all of your time, effort, guidance, and support.

A big thank you to Dr. Murillo for your input, especially regarding the ethnographic process. You provided technical insights that would not have otherwise been reviewed or possibly understood. You also made suggestions that strengthened my research in key areas. I really appreciated your input and support regarding the IRB process. Thank you so much for your time and input throughout this journey.

Finally, thank you to Dr. Jindra for your knowledge and input regarding the principalship and preparation for it. You were always so helpful and positive, which I appreciated. You have boots on the ground and are currently helping to train future administrators. Thank you for guiding them and providing them with real worked examples, such as practice with case studies, to help prepare them. Right now, you are shaping the future.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Ruth Durant, the hardest working woman I know. Today would have been her 76th birthday and we miss her terribly. I know she would have been best friends with my son, plotting for candy and play dates. She always provided for her family and made sure we had everything that we needed. She worked overtime and all available holidays to earn additional wages as a single parent. She had an incredible work ethic and was responsible so you knew the job would be done well and correctly the first time. She imparted that knowledge on all of her children so we are thankful for that. I know you would be so proud and brag about how you had raised a doctor. I hope you are smiling in Heaven today! We love you!

And to my husband whose support is invaluable. He encouraged me throughout the process. He was made to read and provided suggestions for many drafts and he did it with a smile, or without a frown, which is the same thing. He took care of the children while I was working and while I needed to complete classes and this research. He encouraged me through difficult days and reminded me of my strength. Thank you for all of your love and support. I could not have done it without you.

And to my son and daughter, whom I love dearly. You two are the meaning of life and I am so happy I get to be your mother. There were many hours spent on this but I tried to always make time for you. I took a break to play a game or go swimming. Two years ago this month I gave birth to my daughter

who would often be sitting on my lap as I typed. Sometimes my son sat by my side and did his, "work" with me. He would pretend to be writing something important and reminded others to keep it down so he could concentrate, he is 4.

And to my family and friends, especially my Brother and Sister-in-Law, who babysat on Saturdays when I needed to attend classes while my husband was working. I so appreciated the fact my kids were safe and having fun while I was fulfilling educational obligations. I was able to concentrate on the lecturer and when my mind drifted to the children I knew they were safe.

And last but certainly not least, to God for blessing me with all that I have. I appreciate the gifts you have given me including my family and this beautiful world we live in. Thank you, Jesus!

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CHAPTER ONE

THE BEGINNING

If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person.

—Fred Rogers, Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood

When I began teaching many years ago I had my elementary school classroom filled with students, and I was thrilled. I could not believe they were paying me to do this job, I loved it! I was a K-3 Special Day Class teacher with sixteen students and no aide for most of the time. This was a high poverty school with the majority of the students on free and reduced lunch. Their parents cared but many lacked the means to be around for their students as they were working and trying to provide the essentials for their family. If their children were able to take a trip to the beach, that was a big deal. These parents were happy their children had a safe place to go during the day. Looking back now, I realize just how specialized that job was and the skills that were needed to be successful. I needed to be able to provide help and support to every student in my class including a severely Autistic student who was nonverbal and had behavioral outbursts, and students with traumatic brain injury who had difficulty identifying

their own parent. I definitely felt like I was important to the students I was helping on a daily basis.

I then got married and moved to a new town to begin my work as a Resource Specialist. I loved that work as well and thought I would retire at that school, as many had before me. It was the type of school that you never wanted to leave. The students were generally well cared for, and the parents were very involved with their students. Many of the students had been out of the state or even the country on vacations. The parents were vocal about the education their children received. I learned that not all schools are equal in areas such as materials, student preparedness, training, and teacher quality. I was also the Administrative Designee for the school site. This is a person selected to fill in when the principal is off campus or unavailable to handle school business such as student discipline and parent complaints. This school site did not have a vice principal due to budget cuts. In many ways I filled that role without the title. Little did I know I was embarking on a journey to the principalship. This dissertation will share some memorable experiences, provide critical insight, and shed some light on what it is like to be a principal in the US today. The specific parameters for the study will be presented later.

The Problem

In consideration of this topic I discovered that more than half of all administrators leave the profession within five years. Viadero (2009) shares, "Data available from a handful of states suggest that only about half of beginning

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principals remain in the same job five years later, and that many leave the principalship altogether when they go" (p. 1).

This information led me to the question, why are so many administrators leaving the profession? Is it due to a lack of preparation? Dethloff (2005) stated that individuals cannot be properly prepared for the role of the principal in the 21st century if they do not completely understand the conditions and demands surrounding the position. How can they possibly know what the job fully entails if they have never been in the position themselves?

This is a problem that should be researched and addressed. This is especially true today because we are in a cycle of education where we have a large number of administrative retirements and this exodus may have a negative impact on the school system. According to Gajda and Militello (2008), "The species of "principal" is dwindling. National reports indicate that a great number of schools and districts are experiencing a shortage of a qualified pool of principal candidates (p. 14).

Why does it matter that so many administrators are leaving the profession? It could be likened to a student going to school to become a doctor, which takes seven to eleven years of preparation, and then after their first year or two in the field, they leave. Why invest all of that time and money just to leave?

Like a doctor, a school administrator also needs seven to eleven years of preparation to become a principal. In California, principals usually start with their four year college degree, followed by a teaching credential. Then they work for

five years in the school setting before completing their preliminary credential.

They can take an examination instead, but it is generally more difficult to attain

an administrative position if they go that route. California school administrators

have five years to clear the preliminary credential once they have a position as

an administrator. Once they have the preliminary credential cleared, they must

complete the clear credential within five years. After completing the clear

credential they become a full fledged administrator. At this point administrators

are often exhausted from going to school at night and on the weekends while

working full time and trying to maintain the balance of their personal life for years

on end. After having made it this far with all of the personal sacrifice, all of the

money invested, why leave the profession? Seeking to find an answer to this

question among others, this research aims to provide insight as to what the

principalship will actually be and provide information that academic preparation

does not.

Research Questions

The main research questions I addressed were as follows: What

challenges did I face in the principalship, and how did I choose to respond to

those challenges? What happened on the job? How did I spend my time each

week, and how did I determine my priorities? What obstacles did I encounter in

attempting to create a positive environment and an organization centered around

student learning and wellbeing? How did I continue to believe in the worthiness

of being a principal? What did I do on a daily basis, in spite of continually dealing

with problems and difficulties, to keep believing in the goodness of people and find joy in my work?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to understand the intricacies of the principalship. Using these methodologies I intend to be self-reflective and give critical insight that no one other than a practitioner would have. Additionally, I intend to promote reflection within the reader. Outsiders should understand what the principalship is about so they can support what is good about it, helping children, and make changes where they are needed, perhaps in the preparatory programs. We can benefit from thinking about the lives of others in terms of their experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 1996).

This study uses self-reflection and narrative inquiry to detail how I faced challenges. I tell my story that includes grappling with discouragement, enjoying victories, learning, and resolution. My path included many different situations that I was not prepared to face, even though I was a veteran teacher and trained administrator. An example would be dealing with an advocate at a meeting between educators and parents, or supporting a teacher who was not meeting instructional expectations. It could also be instructing and motivating a troubled student. I reflect on how I dealt with these events and situations and how I felt about them in hopes of opening a window of understanding. The study aims to not only tell real daily occurrences but to inspire other principals to use this

narrative writing to support their own journey as a roadmap for finding effective leadership and rewarding life experiences.

I hope to shed some light on the challenges administrators face. By answering these questions, I intended to share some of the challenges I faced and how I overcame them in the first five years of being an administrator. That personal narrative and insight is what I intended to contribute to help other administrators.

<div align="center">Rationale</div>

Demands of the principalship place extreme pressure on the administrator to be skilled and well-versed in multiple areas of organizational and instructional leadership. It is quite difficult to find principals with the required leadership skills (Roza, 2003). Principals are no longer just managers, they are expected to serve as instructional leaders to help teachers support student academic performance (Hancock et. al., 2006). In addition to monitoring teaching and learning quality and managing the school staff, principals must also meet ever-more-exacting accountability standards (Doyle & Locke, 2014, p. 9). There are several additional factors, including insufficient gain or personal benefit, which may prevent teachers from becoming administrators (Hancock et. al, 2006, p. 91). Finding aspiring principals who have the skills to lead in the current school environment we face is difficult (Tran & Bon, 2016). Research on improving principal leadership will contribute to theory and practice.

Introduction

There is a demand for highly qualified principals across the United States (Cooner, 2008). According to Ingersoll (2003), close to a third of teachers will change schools or leave the profession each year. That potentially removes a great deal of the principal applicant pool. Teachers may not be pursuing the role of principal because they see it as an insurmountable job (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

The Principalship

In the midst of this research study I realized that the principalship is a subculture which few understand. It is a high stress, high pressure, demanding, and very lonely job. There is also a trailblazing aspect. It is rewarding to help children and mentor staff, effecting positive change one person at a time. It is the unicorn of jobs as there are few in the principalship compared to other professions. It is my hope this autoethnography provides pertinent information regarding the principalship to help future administrators succeed.

What is Autoethnography?

Within qualitative research, autoethnography is defined as qualitative research where the author utilizes self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings (Ellis, 2004).

I am a principal and am passionate about the worthiness of this service. An autoethnography seemed to be the best way to share pertinent and firsthand accounting of what the principalship is like. This insight may be able to inform others. The entanglements of reality and one's experiences create their truth and autoethnography is that form of writing (Reed-Danahay, 1997). The goal is ultimately, even if in a small way, to help current and future administrators to reduce the high rate of principals leaving the profession.

In the ethnography by Harry Wolcott, *The Man in the Principal's Office*, 1973, the ethnographer followed a principal for a year and documented his daily work. The ethnography was extremely detailed but lacked the reflection of thought on part of the administrator. Additionally, this research was done almost 40 years ago. The demands on today's principals are even more daunting. I wanted to use this autoethnography to share those insights and provide feedback that was not present in Wolcott (1973).

Theoretical Framework

The principalship is a form of middle management. You have the district telling you what it wants and needs from your school, and you also have the teachers and parents at the school site telling you what they feel the school needs. The job of the principal is to keep the students safe and to help them learn the curriculum the state feels is appropriate. There is much more to this role that will be discussed in chapter four. Oftentimes the thoughts of the factions involved do not align. There are also times where practices are outdated and

should be revised. For example, we have students sitting in a desk and chair with no padding for six hours a day, minus recess and lunch. Many teachers still expect them to sit quietly and learn. Many adults would have difficulty doing the same thing, yet we expect this of children. For this reason self-reflection theory and critical theory will be used in part to help explore and explain the principalship.

There is a metacognitive process that is called self-reflection which is the main part of self-reflection theory (Davies et al., 2013). The process of self reflection is utilized when one reflects upon experiences and learning that took place (Davies et al., 2013). Self-reflection is key to one building capacity in the role of the principalship. Reflecting on this process also lends itself to sharing ideas and experiences so others can understand them, which is the purpose of this study.

Horkheimer's (1993) definition of critical theory has three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time. It must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation (Horkheimer, 1993). Critical theory "has as its object human beings as producers of their own historical form of life" (Horkheimer 1993, p. 21).

I utilized autoethnography primarily and informed that methodology using narrative inquiry. In narrative inquiry, the researcher is able to share and identify what someone was thinking and feeling when something occurred. Utilizing

narrative inquiry gives a great depth of understanding to the reader, especially if they have never worked in education.

Narrative inquiry, or narrative research, used along with another primary research methodology is growing in acceptance and practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Examples include research in disciplines such as nursing, medicine, therapy in health fields, social work, counseling, psychotherapy, and teaching (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Utilizing autoethnography and narrative inquiry helped me to share my insights. Autoethnographers use writing to share their innermost ideas (Ellis, 2004). According to Ellis (2004), "autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot" (p. xix). This form of writing allows the reader to understand situations in greater depth due to the personal narrative provided by the writer. In addition to a story being told the author is able to share insights that would not otherwise be known. This helps to create a deeper level of understanding for the reader.

I also used narrative inquiry to help the reader reach a greater depth of understanding and knowledge. If I tell you there were two fights at school today, that is quantitative but lacks the depth I desire to share. If I say that in one of two fights at school today a 200 pound sixth grader fought a 100 pound eighth grader, it helps to paint a picture and create a deeper level of understanding with the reader. Utilizing narrative inquiry in this way helps to "provoke identification,

feelings, emotions, and dialogue" (Maréchal, 2010, p. 45). In order to create that deeper level of understanding I have chosen to utilize autoethnography and narrative inquiry.

Furthermore, autoethnography and narrative inquiry are being used in qualitative research because these styles are able to inform the reader and provide them with a greater depth of understanding. As Richardson (2000) articulated, "I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about a topic...form and content are inseparable" (p. 923).

This autoethnography is a way to share ideas and insights that otherwise might not see the light of day. It is a literary time capsule for future scholars who will likely face similar challenges.

I think about the complexities of preparation for other professions such as medicine or the military. They have years of training and direct supervision by others. Within reason, they know exactly what is expected of them. They have additional refreshers such as conferences or annual trainings to refresh ideas and skills. My experience is that the opposite is true of the principalship because the requirements of job are ever changing and growing. Once in the principalship, the responsibility lies with the principal to keep up with changes in research and best practices for the school site to be successful.

<center>Limitations of the Study</center>

The limitations of the study are that the viewpoints expressed are my own. It may be difficult to generalize all of my personal experiences across the entire

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administrative profession. I see the principalship as a construct of my own reality and experiences. Although I do not claim to have all the answers, I hope this insight is beneficial to future administrators.

Summary

This study shares my personal experiences and ideas regarding the principalship. Narrative inquiry and autoethnography are the means I chose to present my experiences. This allowed me to share personal reflections and give insights that the reader would not otherwise be privy to or have knowledge of.

Chapters One through Three, while utilizing autoethnography, were written in a traditional manner with the abstract, introduction, problem statement, and literature review included. Chapters Four and Five inform the reader by including structures of autoethnography and narrative inquiry. In Chapter Five I am able to share my ideas regarding my findings and future research studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The principal does deal with discipline, but they do so much more. The Wallace Report (The Wallace Foundation, 2013) included five key responsibilities for the principalship. The first key responsibility is to shape a vision of academic success for all students based on high standards. Secondly, the principal must create a hospitable climate for education in which safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail. The third responsibility The Wallace Foundation (2013) shared was cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision. The fourth is improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn their utmost (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Lastly, the principal must manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The following duties fall into these five categories.

Principals have varied and changing responsibilities. They are professional development planners and presenters. They train and support new teachers as well as veteran teachers. They create the budget and select programs for their school to use. They provide technical support to teachers who need help. They review report cards and attend parent teacher conferences. They attend Student Study Teams (SSTs) and Individualized Educational Plan

(IEP) meetings. They create the master schedule. They plan and run fire and emergency drills. They plan and run back-to-school night and open house. They attend many after-school committees and functions. They make sure the school is safe. They train campus staff and make sure they know where they are supposed to be. They field parent complaints and try their best to resolve them. They resolve disputes among staff. They review student test scores and come up with strategies to help support teachers and students. They do evaluations of staff and teachers to help encourage them to be the best they can be (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

This autoethnography helps to share what the principalship is really like through firsthand stories and reflections. As a principal you need to be good at prioritizing tasks quickly. There are many days when you do not touch anything you intended to do that was on your calendar. You still need to get everything done in addition to new tasks that present themselves. Through this work I hope to prepare administrators for their role.

Academic Professional Development

Current research regarding the efficacy of academic professional development for school administrators does not appear to answer the question of why administrators are leaving the profession. Current research does support the premise that academic preparation does not train administrators for all that is expected of them. Dethloff (2005) suggests academic training may leave administrators unprepared for their administrative roles. Based on current

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research (Dethloff, 2005; The Wallace Foundation, 2007; Viadero, 2009), many principals leave the profession after only three years due to a lack of preparation. Roughly half of beginning principals remain in the same job five years later (Viadero, 2009). As mentioned previously, it would be beneficial if principal administrators in training could follow a seasoned and successful administrator to learn the craft.

In the Wallace Foundation Report (2007) they shared that mentoring currently in place is similar to a "buddy system … delivered by well-meaning but inadequately trained mentors and connected only weakly to district needs" (p. 24). The Wallace Foundation Report (2007) also shared, "administrative professional development to help improve the skills of principals in a given area is often based on whims, fads, opportunism and ideology instead of research" (p. 24).

Because effective mentoring may be difficult to attain, the next best thing appears to be an autoethnography. Autoethnography offers real stories from the field and allows the reader to be part of the reflection process. The use of autoethnography for this work is intended to increase understanding of what the principal really does. It is not sitting in the office all day waiting for the next student referred for discipline, as the famous painting by Norman Rockwell (1953) might lead you to believe.

In this autoethnography I will include a brief history of the principalship, a review of the theoretical framework used, the skills principals need, why

principals may choose to leave the profession, and what might be done to change that.

Professional Development Post Graduate School

In an article by Guskey (2003) he reviewed thirteen lists that noted the characteristics of effective professional development. These were taken from such sources as the U. S. Department of Education and the American Federation of Teachers. Guskey (2003) found no commonalities between the lists. This suggests that we are unsure what effective professional development for educators includes. More research is needed in order to find out just what effective professional development for these groups entails. The lists were supposed to be research based, but Guskey (2003) found that 11 of the 13 research studies did not include a close look at student learning or teacher instructional practices. Instead, the studies relied on teacher surveys to gather information. Guskey (2003) argued that additional information is needed to verify the effectiveness of the professional development.

According to Guskey (2003) the two research studies that did take a look at student outcomes were the National Institute for Science Education and the Educational Testing Service. Guskey (2003) shared that researchers in these studies were able to link specific items with student outcomes. One theme that was present in all of the lists was teacher knowledge (Guskey, 2003). Students learned better when teachers had specific knowledge in specific content areas,

and they focused on math and science (Guskey, 2003). Guskey (2003) shared that it remained to be seen whether the same was true for Language Arts and Social Studies.

Guskey (2003) shared that it was beneficial for teachers to spend time working with their colleagues as long as there was a set purpose and it was meaningful. Finally, the professional development should meet the targeted needs of the school site as each site has different needs (Guskey, 2003).

Guskey (2003) concluded that it could be difficult to create one set list that had set and specific professional development (standards) as professional development needs could vary greatly. He shared that lists could be created, but it was not likely that one master list would serve all needs.

History of the Principalship

Varcoe (2015) studied how the principalship has changed from the beginning of formalized schooling to the present time. The researcher shared that up until the Civil War, principals had the freedom to run schools the way they saw fit (Varcoe, 2015). The position has continued to increase in demands and now includes the pressures of high stakes testing (Varcoe,2015). When the position was initially created, principals were able to develop their own vision, and they were not required to complete any formal principal professional development through the university (Varcoe, 2015). Principals could determine what was most important for their school, their students, and their community (Varcoe, 2015). Today, administrators in California who are serving in their

various roles are required to complete the preliminary and clear administrative

credential programs (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2020).

Varcoe (2015) shared that administrators did not initially require specialized

instruction for the principalship. Currently, administrators need four years of

training (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2020). This training is

a formal professional development program required by the state and provided

by universities for a fee (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing,

2020).

Additionally, Lieberman (1990) shared that current programs were

bureaucratic and focused on procedures. It would be more useful to focus on

moving towards a professional mode to help prepare leadership (Lieberman,

1990).

What Should Professional Development Entail for School Administrators?

Principals are key in creating and maintaining high performing schools.

There is limited research on what specific abilities and skills a principal must

develop in order to be seen as a successful school administrator. It is difficult

to create a professional development program for school administrators

without the knowledge of what needs to be taught and how to examine its

efficacy (Grissom & Harrington, 2010).

Grissom and Harrington (2010) used the *Schools and Staffing Survey*

and the *Administrator Professional Development* to determine what

professional development and training school administrators received and

whether or not the administrators were seen as effective by their teachers. The study found that there was a negative correlation between university professional development and principal effectiveness (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). Having an advanced degree and years of teaching did not equate to being a successful principal. "Principals who engage in university course taking are rated about 3 percent of a standard deviation lower on the effectiveness scale than principals who do not" (Grissom & Harrington, 2010, p. 600). Grissom and Harrington (2010) shared that there seemed to be a positive correlation between principal effectiveness and those who participated in mentoring.

Theoretical Framework

I chose to write an autoethnography for several reasons, including informing future administrators using a personal narrative. Ellis (2004) shared that autoethnography is a form of qualitative research where the author utilizes self-reflection to share personal experience and connect their story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

In reviewing articles for this study, I came across an ethnography by Wolcott (1973) entitled *The Man in the Principal's Office*. It was very interesting to hear what a principal went through on a daily basis more than 40 years ago. It was a literary time capsule if you will, but I wondered how that principal felt about the decisions he had made each day. I would have loved to know his inner thoughts and reasoning for all the decisions he made. Why did he call two girls

out of class to question them about wearing pants? Was wearing pants culturally unacceptable at the time? That is my guess, but it would have been better to hear it directly from him. I was also curious as to whether or not he agreed with the cultural norm he was enforcing, or was he just placating the parents he served? I decided to use autoethnography so I could share those inner thoughts and reflections with the reader, to answer questions I wish I could ask Wolcott's (1973) principal.

There were three main theoretical frameworks that were utilized in this autoethnography. The first was a metacognitive process called self-reflection which is the main part of self-reflection theory (Davies et al., 2013; Wolcott, 1973). This is a key process to utilize when building capacity an administrative role. In self reflection, the administrator reflects upon experiences and the learning that occurred (Davies et al., 2013). For the purpose of this study, the metacognitive process of self-reflection was utilized each week as I journaled what I experienced and learned from each week. This was done in order to share my thoughts and experiences to help others form a deeper understanding of the principalship from a firsthand account.

Critical theory was also utilized for this study. Horkheimer (1993) shared that critical theory explains what is wrong with the current social reality and how it can be changed with practical goals for social transformation. Throughout this study my goal was to share what could be improved regarding the principalship and provide ideas on how best to do so.

Narrative inquiry was also used and is defined as "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Rather than just a statement of one event, narrative inquiry is the sharing of many occurrences over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This helps the reader to reach a deeper understanding of the experiences being shared. It also shows the reader how life is being experienced. For this study, narrative inquiry helps the reader to better understand the realities of the principalship today.

What Do Administrators Need to Know?

As aforementioned, what principals need to learn and the skills they need to develop are not well defined. According to the University Council for Education Administration (Young & Kochan, 2004), programs need to be revamped and changed in many areas to allow administrators to work and learn together through the practice entitled leadership for learning.

Another study had similar findings. "Administrators do not have high quality, research based training. Their pre-training does not connect to their jobs as Administrators" (Association of California School Administrators [ACSA], 2006, p. 27). Grogan and Andrews (2002) also shared that the knowledge and skills needed to be successful school administrators were impossible to attain in the current university credential program setting. Grogan and Andrews (2002) looked at the principalship and the position of the superintendent from their conception to the present day. Grogan and Andrews

(2002) also reviewed an exhaustive list of the current research on the subject and found it extremely difficult for university programs to prepare administrators for the job. Grogan and Andrews (2002) suggested that the use of a closely monitored cohort with opportunities for real life school site experiences would be more successful in preparing administrators. Grogan and Andrews (2002) based their findings on the evaluations of potential employers and scores participants received on a performance assessment called the *School Leaders Licensure Consortium*. Being able to deal with real life situations on the job and at the school setting with live feedback simply cannot compare with the traditional classroom setting at the university level, no matter how rigorous it may be (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). The training administrators receive is simply not connected to the knowledge base they will need in order to be successful in their jobs (Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

Desimone (2009) focused on what may be defined as professional development and how teachers learn. Desimone (2009) wanted to find the best way to improve schools and found promising outcomes from teacher training. Desimone (2009) looked at all the applicable research and used it to create a conceptual framework with which to evaluate professional development. There are many ways to train a teacher, but Desimone (2009) wanted to know what avenues were researched based and which were the most effective. The United States spends $18 billion on professional development each year, but we should be sure it is money that is well spent

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(Horn & Goldstein, 2018). Desimone (2009) found there were some identifiable elements that must be present in a professional development program for school administrators to be successful. Desimone (2009) proposed we should using a framework to measure professional development. Inclusion of these elements in administrative preparation courses would give the administrator a better chance of having the knowledge needed to improve student achievement (Desimone, 2009).

DuFour (2002) shared that the principal must serve as the instructional leader of the school. When he started as a principal, DuFour (2002) spent many hours on the evaluation process where he would observe teachers and give feedback, but he felt he was not making enough gains with the traditional method. DuFour (2002) recommended a shift from focusing on teaching, to teachers focusing on learning. It is increasingly important for administrators to have the skills and knowledge needed to train and support teachers in improving their practices and student test scores (DuFour, 2002). An effective administrator must be able to review and share data with teachers so they can target areas and set expectations for student academic performance (DuFour, 2002).

Principals need to support teachers by promoting collaboration in place of teacher isolation (DuFour, 2002). The principal can help to facilitate this by sharing parameters for this change and providing time for the collaboration (DuFour, 2002).

Reichstetter (2006) shared a collaborative strategy by which a team meets with the administrator to review assessment data, identify target students, set goals, and create a plan to meet those goals through interventions.

In addition to what content or skills they need to teach, there is very little research on what makes an effective professional development program. Simkins et al. (2009) was curious as to what effect a blended approach that utilized an in-school component would have on administrators. Simkins et al. (2009) wondered if the approach would have a positive effect on programs focusing on leadership development. This is not the first mention of the coaching model as an effective strategy (ACSA, 2006). It is beneficial to have a knowledgeable current or former administrator you can learn from and who will help guide you through issues as they arise at the school site (ACSA, 2006).

Also, our future principals need to be ethical in their decision making (Eide et al., 2016). This must be addressed as future principals need to be trained so they can make the best decisions for their students and school sites. Eide et al. (2016) shared that principals must be of good character and have a high standard of integrity so they can make the best decisions for the community they serve. Eide et al. (2016) shared that it is important to foster ethical leadership in order to create ethical practices at the site. This is extremely difficult to do as there is little research available regarding the

creation of ethical site based leadership (Eide et al., 2016). Eide et al. (2016) followed a short term, web based ethical leadership training program and then surveyed participants regarding their experiences. Eide et al. (2016) learned that the majority of the participants found the program helpful. The participants appreciated the coaching portion of the model and felt less lonely on the job and more supported to handle work situations (Eide et al., 2016).

Guiding Administrators

Wilson and Xue (2013) contributed a new framework for the education of school administrators. Researchers were asked to identify what professional development would do the best job of preparing future administrators for their roles at the school site (Wilson & Xue, 2013). This study looked at 10 school site administrators and asked if, despite the large investment of time and money to prepare for their role, the school site administrators' preparation was effective (Wilson & Xue, 2013). In order to study how to improve the skills of school administrators, Wilson and Xue (2013) focused on the opportunities these administrators had, if the opportunities met the needs of the administrators, and how opportunities might be enhanced. Wilson and Xue (2013) reviewed key documents and conducted interviews with the administrators. Wilson and Xue (2013) found three types of learning opportunities: (a) formal learning, (b) informal learning, and (c) systemic-conceptual factors. Wilson and Xue (2013) found a disconnect between the opportunities for learning and what the

administrators actually needed to know. This caused the administrators to become frustrated with the training (Wilson& Xue, 2013).

Galbo (1998) shared that it is important to know how to ensure principals and school administrators are prepared to lead their schools. To do that, it is important to know what professional development administrators will need so they have the proper skills in place for their jobs (Galbo, 1998).

Tilford (2010) shared that there are a large number of universities that participate in Professional Development School (PDS) collaborations. Tilford (2010) looked at the phenomenon of principal leadership within one PDS. Three principals participated in this study. Tilford (2010) interviewed administrators and found it is important for the administrators to have buy-in to the school goals if they are going to be successful. Tilford (2010) also found that past experiences of principals helped to form their leadership style. The roles these principals played at each site varied. Tilford (2010) suggested this school model may be the model of future schools. It is important to have well trained administrators and leaders at these schools to ensure their success (Tilford, 2010). This might be done through professional learning or a partnership with the school itself (Tilford, 2010). In order for that to occur the current system would need to be overhauled to allow such dramatic changes (Tilford, 2010).

Guskey (2002) believed that in order for a program to be effective and sustainable it needed to become second nature. To make sure it does

become second nature, the participant needs support and someone to ensure it is occurring on a regular basis (Guskey, 2002). Penuel et al. (2007) also shared that if a school district has set goals they intend to meet, they must provide professional development that has meaning for the participants. Professional development also needs to be succinct and rational (Penuel et al., 2007). Delivering professional development according to these guidelines will have a better chance of meeting the district's set goals (Penuel et al., 2007). Penuel et al. (2007) looked at how to best implement professional development for the Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) program, which focuses on Science and Mathematics. Penuel et al. (2007) looked at more than 450 teachers who received GLOBE professional development over a 2 year period. These teachers completed surveys, and Penuel et al. (2007) found that it was beneficial to focus on the student inquiry of the participants in the professional development program.

A model consistent with the recommendations of Penuel et al. (2007) is the ACSA Leadership Coaching model (ALC). In ALC, a coach is selected for each participant who has an educational tenure similar to that of the participant (ACSA, 2020). The participant generally works with that coach for 40 hours of onsite leadership coaching and 20 hours of individualized professional development (ACSA, 2020). The participant will also target professional learning that will enhance their knowledge base while they are on the job (ACSA, 2020). This long term, steady support reinforces the administrator's role at their school

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site, making a coaching model relevant, timely, and ongoing (Penuel et al.,

2007). Exceptional professional development must be continued and supported

by devoting a significant amount of time to it in the long term (Garet et al., 2001).

Effective Principals

Part of being an effective principal means helping to improve student

academic achievement and classroom instruction (Herrmann et al., 2019). The

Institute of Education Sciences took a close look at an elementary professional

development program that was intended to help improve principal leadership

(Herrmann et al., 2019). This program focused on observing teachers and

providing feedback regarding classroom instruction (Herrmann et al., 2019). This

professional development lasted more than two years and spanned nearly 200

hours, half of which included individualized coaching (Herrmann et al., 2019).

The researchers found that the professional development suggests improving

principal instructional leadership may help to improve student achievement

(Herrmann et al., 2019).

Day et al. (2016) employed a mixed methods national study over the

course of 3 years. Day et al. (2016) looked at 20 primary and secondary schools

in England. Day et al. (2016) also looked at national assessment results and

used surveys to attain the input of principals and key staff members. Finally, Day

et al. (2016) looked at case studies from 20 elementary and secondary schools.

Day et al. (2016) found that successful principal leaders were able to use

a mixed style of transformational leadership and instructional leadership.

Transformational leadership examined several items including the vision of the school and focused on teacher development and the school organization itself (Day et al., 2016). Transformational leadership was more likely to impact teachers directly. Instructional leadership focused on goal setting, curriculum planning, and teacher evaluation and was more likely to have a direct impact on students (Day et al., 2016). Day et al. (2016) reported that the mix of both leadership styles was the most effective style.

Day et al. (2016) found that principals were able to change the school using instructional and transformational leadership techniques. Over time, the principal was able to make changes, but it was not just the principals' leadership style that helped to accomplish this (Day et al., 2016). It was more important for a principal to see what needed to be changed at the school (Day et al., 2016). The principal needed to be able to share their ideas about what needed to be changed and encourage teacher buy-in (Day et al., 2016).

In order to effect lasting change at the school site the principal needs to work with the staff and within the current school culture Day et al. (2016). This lasting change was seen to be slow, incremental, and deliberate over time (Day et al., 2016).

Day et al. (2016) also surveyed teachers and key staff members in six specific categories: (a) leadership practice, (b) leaders' internal states, (c) leadership distribution, (d) leadership influence, (e) school conditions, and (f) classroom conditions. Day et al. (2016) found that effective leaders had schools

where there were high standards set for student academic performance. Both principals and teachers were seen as monitoring student academic data to help raise standards (Day et al., 2016). Effective leaders also utilized instructional leadership strategies to set expectations for the school (Day et al., 2016).

Davis et al. (2005) reviewed case studies from eight principal pre-programs and inservice programs in five different states. The researchers also followed graduates once they were hired as leaders in their schools and surveyed the teachers who worked for them (Davis et al., 2005).

In preparation for their study, Davis et al. (2005) reviewed the literature and found that effective leaders trained and helped teachers to be effective in the classroom. Effective leaders had strong organizational practices and found the most effective programs were those that were research based, focused on curriculum, were based on real life experiences, provided mentors, and also had students work in a cohort setting (Davis et al., 2005). Finally, Davis et al. (2005) recommended additional research to determine what institutions need to focus on in these principal preparatory programs.

Davis et al. (2005) suggested additional research should also be done to observe how programs are run, overseen, and financed. They also stated California has a shortage of highly qualified principals willing to work in underserved schools (Davis et al., 2005).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) reviewed and synthesized relevant research on educational leadership. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) focused on five principles

of strong educational leaders. They shared that leadership at the school site is essential for having a successful school (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). It is also important that principals are educational leaders due to high stakes state testing and renewed systems of accountability (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Without strong leadership schools today are likely to fail. This is due in part to changes in the state standards, advances in technology, and constantly changing student populations (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). These are just some of the many challenges educational leaders face in the school setting today (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) surmised strong school leaders need to create and enforce a shared purpose, set specific goals, and make sure everyone is focused on student learning. At the same time a strong leader needs to be supportive of the teachers at their school site. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) highlighted that the leadership practices of strong leaders include setting directions incorporating the mission and vision of the school. A strong school leader also needs to be able to communicate well and have high expectations for the students and the teachers.

A strong educational leader should also be strong at developing people and the organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). They can develop people by working with teachers individually to support them (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). They will also be able to provide an appropriate model for their teachers and provide information to help teachers see what practices are stronger than what

they currently have in place (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). To do well in schools today, students need quality instruction, good curriculum, and strong school leadership (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Why Administrators Leave

Cushing and Kerrins (2004) took a close look at data including information shared from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. They used this information along with survey data and interviews that documented administrator concerns. They found the high stress, low pay, lack of support, and high demands are some of the reasons principals retire, or leave the profession early. This creates a need for new principals which is not being filled (Cushing & Kerrins, 2004). "It is the job rather than preparation programs that are keeping potential candidates from applying for administrative positions" (Cushing, et al., 2003, p. 16). They suggested, "If the job description and support systems do not change, the problem of too few applicants for principal vacancies is likely to persist" (Cushing & Kerrins, 2004, p. 19).

Cushing and Kerrins (2004) also found that although many potential principals obtained an administrative credential, there was a shortage of highly qualified principal applicants in California. Cushing and Kerrins (2004) shared many districts claim low numbers of qualified candidates in the applicant pool. Cushing and Kerrins (2004) argued this may be due to the 2002 passing of Senate Bill 1655 which allowed people to simply pass a test rather than complete

all the required coursework and fieldwork required to receive a Level I

Administrative Credential.

Cushing and Kerrins (2004) suggested that offering a test to streamline

the credentialing process for administrators was a mistake. Cushing and Kerrins

(2004) argued it would have been better to improve pay, create a realistic job

description, and provide support systems for the administrator. This would

arguably have helped to draw qualified applicants and keep them in their jobs.

Sutcher et al. (2018) gathered information from a study done by the Learning

Policy Institute, the Association of California School Administrators, and the

American Institutes of Research. Interviews were conducted with administrators

including superintendents, conducted focus groups, and looked at current

California data (Sutcher et al., 2018). Sutcher et al. (2018) also surveyed 450

California principals via an online survey. Sutcher et al. (2018) found that

administrative applicants were not highly qualified. Hiring managers who were

surveyed said they are looking to hire applicants who had emotional intelligence,

a clear vision for improving a school, and who focused on instructional leadership

(Sutcher et al., 2018). Arguably these are not things an applicant would learn

simply by taking and passing a test.

Stine (2002) traced the history of the Administrative Credential program

back to the 1960s. Senate bills, credentialing programs organizations, and

requirements were reviewed over the years. Stine (2002) shared the current

focus on education was to implement strong, quality leadership. It has also been

to improve student achievement through quality leadership. These are great goals; however, according to Stine (2002), politicians who wanted to seem like they were saving education attempted to privatize the Administrative Credential program. In doing so they may have streamlined the process of attaining the Administrative Credential, but compromised the value of the preparatory programs in the process (Stine, 2002).

Stine (2002) further argued that the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing needs to set clear standards and expectations for these programs to ensure our administrators are well prepared for their jobs. Stine (2002) also suggested trying not to fast track credential programs as the shortened timeline could negatively affect the quality of the administrators produced from such programs.

Stine (2002) also shared that most new principals start out at low performing schools who struggle with poverty. Stine (2002) found approximately one quarter of principals leave the profession each year and the same is true of school superintendents. It is hard to make lasting change and steady improvement when there is a huge turnover of the population every few years (Stine, 2002).

The research article by Dell'Olio et al. (2014) reviewed the results of a survey completed by the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration (CAPEA). Dell'Olio et al. (2014) found it would be beneficial to incorporate training in cultural proficiency in all Administrative Credential

programs. Dell'Olio et al. (2014) argued this is important because of the increasing diversity of the student body. Schools are striving for equity in education and that cannot be done without cultural proficiency training for the incoming administrators (Dell'Olio et al., 2014).

Summary

The principalship has become a highly specialized field that has changed drastically from the time of its inception around the time of the US Civil War in the 1860s. As the principalship has changed, it is important for those in charge of mentoring and training future principals to have insights into the demands of the principalship so they are able to support future administrators. Because many administrators will be retiring in upcoming years it is important for future administrators to be fully and well trained so they are able to obtain these positions that are important for teachers and students they will serve (Cushing & Kerrins, 2004). I hope this autoethnography will help to provide some of the needed insight to future administrators and those who support them.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to share the research methodology selected for this study and to explain how it was utilized in order to answer the research questions. This is a phenomenological study with autoethnography as the chosen research methodology.

Autoethnography is a method of research that utilizes personal experiences of the researcher as data (Ellis, 2004). This data is used to describe, analyze and understand cultural experience (Ellis, 2004). It is a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context (Ellis, 2004).

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research that takes a close look at personal experiences to help understand cultural experience (Ellis, 2004). In order to better understand the qualitative research methodology selected it is important to establish the history of autoethnography.

History of Autoethnography

According to Adams, Ellis, and Jones, the term *autoethnography* first appeared in 1975 when a researcher named Heider used it to describe the practice of cultural members giving an account of the culture (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017). The term was also used by Goldschmidt (1977) who called ethnographies, self-ethnography because they reflected self representations of observations and personal beliefs. Although authors were using portions of

autoethnography such as personal narrative or storytelling, they may not have been calling it autoethnography (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017). Autoethnography continued to increase in popularity in the 1990's.

Today you will find autoethnography present in many research areas. According to Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015), autoethnography is a legitimate research method used in multiple disciplines including business, communication, education, nursing, psychology, nursing, psychology, and social work (p. 18).

Autoethnography is also utilized in higher education. One example is how mentoring can improve leadership development (Chang et al., 2014). Another example describes what it is like to teach in higher education (Pillay et al., 2016). Although other methodologies could have been utilized, autoethnography provided insight that would not otherwise be available to the reader. The same is true for this research study on the principalship.

Ethnography versus Autoethnography

Other forms of research were considered when creating this study such as a quantitative design or other forms of qualitative designs such as ethnography. I could have used ethnography, which is a description of the culture and the interpretation of the data that is produced (Hammersley, 2015).

When utilizing ethnography you are taking a close look at the culture and notating exactly what it is you are observing over time. The purpose of ethnography is to observe without trying to explain it or place it within a framework (Preece et al., 2015). I felt it was important to be able to share

thoughts and ideas in order to create a deeper understanding for the reader. That would not have been possible with the use of ethnography.

According to Ellis (2004), autoethnography includes emotion and introspection using dialogue and characterization. This research method uses the sharing of internal thought in order to increase understanding. It seemed that autoethnography was an important tool to utilize in order to promote comprehension and knowledge.

Autoethnography entails the scientist utilizing narrative analysis pertaining to themselves and relating it to a phenomenon (McIlveen, 2008). Using the method of autoethnography helps the reader to create meaning and increase understanding.

It was important to research the principalship utilizing autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and self-reflection. If one was to take a traditional approach of researching the principalship utilizing ethnography alone, they would not be able to share the big picture. It is possible to quantify the number occurrences of a given phenomena in a year, but that would not provide depth of understanding. For example, telling you that there were seven fights over the course of the year gives you specific data, but there is so much additional information that could enhance understanding if key details were shared. Key information might include: what caused the fight, how did the students react, how did the teachers react, how did the parents react, reflecting on the fights, how did I feel? Providing this information provides a much richer understanding for the reader regarding what

the principalship is really like. If you have not been a principal yourself it would be difficult to share these experiences using another research method. To use any other methodology would be to leave information out, thus inhibiting understanding due to lack of ability to share key details with the reader. That is the reasoning behind the selection of autoethnography as a research methodology for this study.

Analytic and Evocative Autoethnography

There are two main forms of autoethnography. One is analytic autoethnography, and the other is evocative autoethnography. Analytical autoethnography is considered to be more traditional, focusing on realist and ethnographic traditions (Gergen, 2018).

Anderson (2006) used the term *analytic autoethnography* to refer to research in which the researcher is: "A full member in the research group or setting, visible as such a member, and committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (p. 373). Analytic autoethnography is seen as being more traditional and using more academic jargon (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 79).

According to Bochner and Ellis (2016), evocative autoethnography is more in line with what is being used widely today in autoethnography. It is defined as a process that shares a story and connects with the reader (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

In evocative ethnography there is not an attempt to confine understanding of the subject matter, instead using discussion that allows for different ideas,

memories, and emotions (Gergen, 2018). I chose evocative ethnography to enable me to share experiences in a narrative form.

<u>Criticism of Autoethnography</u>

From the time when the postmodern research movement recognized a need for more ways to obtain sociological understandings, the methodology of autoethnography has been questioned (Agger, 1990). On one hand there was a call for personalized research showing how the ethnographer interacts with the culture, and at the same time there was opposition to the use of self as the only source of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Sparkes, 2000). Accordingly, autoethnographies have been criticized for being too self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999).

Despite criticism, researchers have found there does seem to be a place for research which links the personal, with the cultural, through personal narrative. Sparkes (2002) found that autoethnography encouraged empathy and connection beyond the self and contributed to sociological understandings. In ethnography, the subjectivity of the researcher is seen as a resource for understanding the problematic world they are investigating, as something to capitalize on rather than exorcise (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Garrett and Hodkinson (1999) called not for elimination and disregard of autoethnography, but rather the creation of constructive criteria for improving the methodology. Some scholars have suggested that the criteria used to evaluate autoethnography should not necessarily be the same as traditional criteria used

to evaluate other qualitative research investigations (Sparkes, 2000). Traditional criteria for evaluating research methodologies do not take into consideration a focus on research and practice rather than research alone. In this study, autoethnography is used equally to add to the body of research and enlighten best practices in real time.

When someone who is doing the daily work of being a principal recounts detailed daily happenings in the form of autoethnography, it brings problems of practice to the center of the research study. Despite the risk of narcissism, autoethnography is a way of telling one person's story of day-to-day conflict management, managerial functions, child-to-adult relationship understanding, and professional development concerns of those for whom one is responsible. Furthermore, this analysis cannot help but confront dominant views of leadership often developed by members of the business community or higher education scholars (Tierny, 1998). Their views are based on their research focus or theory rather than actual boots-on-the-ground understanding of what the principal actually encounters (Tierny, 1998).

Researchers would be well advised to be persistent in their autoethnographic intentions and be prepared to face rejection and critiques of their chosen genre. Resilience and conviction are required to pursue the methodology of autoethnography.

Qualitative Research

The principalship has gone through many changes over the course of the last 30 years. Each year there are more demands and responsibilities placed on the principal. The principal is expected to be the instructional leader, vision and mission creator, counselor, schedule maker, disciplinarian, and the list goes on. I have utilized autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and self-reflection in order to share the daily experiences and thoughts of one elementary school principal.

In autoethnography there is an intricate web with many connections that you are trying to share and explain to make meaning for your reader. It is an avenue with which the researcher is able to share pertinent, complex details the reader would otherwise not have access to. I hope those who read this regarding the principalship will find it relevant and supportive.

In her book on autoethnography, Ellis (2004) shared that in anthropology, autoethnography is the preferred research method, but it is difficult to find support using the process in other academic areas. This is interesting because most people enjoy a good documentary, and that is how I see autoethnography. It is taking personal experiences and sharing them with others to promote understanding.

Autoethnography was the preferred research methodology as it is difficult for someone to understand the inner workings of the principalship without the personal insights that are present in autoethnography but not in other research methods.

Research Design and Methods

This study is a qualitative analysis research model. Data was collected, coded, and reviewed for meaning and significance. Qualitative research is a type of research that focuses on "understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach" (Jackson et. al., 2007, p. 21).

In autoethnographic writing the researcher first looks at social and cultural aspects, and then they look "within themselves, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations" (Ellis, 2004. p. 739).

Autoethnography is a type of research writing that reviews human experiences to understand them within the cultural experience (Ellis, 2004). When researching these relationships, autoethnography connects sociocultural exploration and personal narrative (Holman Jones, 2007).

Autoethnography is similar to an autobiography because it is sharing a personal life story with many different elements. It is also similar to ethnography because it is sharing observed details from specific daily events. Autoethnography shares specific details, but it also includes personal ideas and feelings occurring during daily events. These are thoughts and feelings you would not otherwise be able to understand or in some cases even notice.

I read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry,* by Mildred D. Taylor, which is historical fiction set in the days just after the emancipation of slaves. I studied slavery in school and I had a general understanding of it. When I read this book, I

read about the children hiding from the clan, wondering if they were going to burn their house down with them still in it. It was not a historical personal account, but it gave me understanding and insights I would never have otherwise known or understood. It helped me to understand their fear for their lives on a daily basis, which was something I had not fully understood before. I knew the facts, but I had no idea about their feelings. The parents feared for the lives of their children when they did something as simple as going to town to get supplies. This book gave me a deeper understanding of what I already had a general sense of. With this autoethnography I hope to do the same thing for the reader that this book did for me. I hope to provide insights that readers would not otherwise know or understand.

Ellis is a researcher who became interested in autoethnography as a type of research after her brother died suddenly on his way to visit her in a plane crash at the same time her husband was dying. She was able to share what she was thinking and feeling to help others to have a better understanding of what they were going through (Ellis, 2004).

Through autoethnography the writer is sharing a personal and meaningful experience with the reader. They are trying to share their experience by opening a window of understanding into those experiences. Through this methodology the writer is able to share their story, all the while hoping to make an impact and help others. They seek to create meaning for those reading their experience which is how I am utilizing autoethnography.

Triangulation

According to Patton (1999), triangulation is the, "credibility, competence,

and perceived trustworthiness of the qualitative researcher; and the philosophical

beliefs of evaluation users about such paradigm-based preferences as objectivity

versus subjectivity, truth versus perspective, and generalizations versus

extrapolations" (p. 1189). Patton (1999) shared that triangulation requires you to

review multiple data sources in order to understand what has occurred. Carter

et.al. (2014) shared that in qualitative research, triangulation is seen as a way to

test validity.

Denzin (2017), stated there are four basic types of triangulation. The first

is *Data Triangulation* which involves time, space, and persons (Denzin, 2017).

The second is *Investigator Triangulation*, which involves multiple researchers in

an investigation (Denzin, 2017). The third type is *Theory Triangulation*, which

involves using more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the

phenomenon (Denzin, 2017). The fourth and final shared by Denzin (2017) is

Methodological Triangulation, which involves using more than one method to

gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents.

This research fell under the first, *Data Triangulation*, which involves time, space,

and persons. In order to triangulate the data, I used three data sources. The first

was the collection of data related to social and political context. Secondly, I

collected several key artifacts and made daily observations. I also utilized a daily

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journal and weekly reflection journal. The process with which information was collected and shared is further explained in the following sections.

Allen-Collinson (2013) shared that in autoethnography, even though it has been able to stand the test of other forms of qualitative research, some view the self focus of autoethnography with suspicion and skepticism. They have difficulty with the autoethnographer being a key component within the research. Autoethnography is an important way to share personal experiences on structural and cultural levels (Allen-Collinson, 2013). Within autoethnography you are looking from a sociological, socio-cultural lens but you shift to a personal view in relation to the cultural, political, and social context (Allen-Collinson, 2013). You are required to go back and forth between each lens to share the complete picture.

Daily Journal and Weekly Reflections

I began collecting data at the end of each day in an online journal. I included the basic facts of the day so they could be recalled later. So much occurs in a single day it might be difficult to recall all that had occurred without this journal. To give detailed reflections I maintained a reflective journal. This was utilized in order to share more specifics regarding what occurred, my thoughts, and conclusions regarding occurrences. I did my best to state facts and withhold any opinions. Over time, possible headings began to emerge such as behavior issues, fighting, and child abuse.

This was repeated throughout the week, and at the end of each week I shared my thoughts regarding the weekly occurrences in a reflective journal. The reflective journal included my ideas and opinions regarding key things that occurred. The reflection was usually completed during the weekend when I had some time to really reflect on the week.

Artifacts

There were several key artifacts that were collected for this study. Artifacts collected included my 12 month work calendar, 55 meeting agendas, 15 memos, and numerous notes. These artifacts were utilized to help recall the order in which things occurred and how they came to resolution. These artifacts were used to help recreate the weekly timeline and to fill in key details that might otherwise have been missed or forgotten.

Political and Social Context

It is important to include the political and social context that education is forced to reside within. This data provided, when placed within the political and social context, helps to triangulate the data. It does so by giving the reader understanding of the background or context that has had a strong effect on K-12 education.

To create this understanding, I begin by reviewing ballot propositions that impacted education. Some key propositions that have had an impact on education in the state of California are Proposition 13, Proposition 30, Proposition 55, and Proposition 98. The first to be reviewed is Proposition 13.

According to Rancano (2018), prior to 1978 the state provided a base amount of funding for all schools and local school districts. Generally, local property taxes provided about 60% of what the school needed while the state provided about 30%. In 1978 voters changed the local control system that had been in place for over 100 years to a school system controlled by state policymakers. With the passing of Proposition 13, the state became responsible for making decisions about student education, evaluation, and school funding. In 1977, California spent about $1,000 per student above the national average. Currently, California spends about 15% below the national average per pupil. According to Willis et al. (2018), "before Proposition 13 passed, California's per-student spending on 'current instruction' was the 7th-highest in the nation. By the 2010-11 school year, it had fallen to 38th, at $10,051 per student" (p. 5).

According to Ed100 (2017), in 1988 school construction was not growing with the population, and difficult cuts were being made each year. Proposition 98 amended the California constitution and required a larger portion of the state budget to be spent on K-12 education as well as community colleges. This did not increase state taxes but ensured base educational funding. According to Ed100 (2017), Proposition 30 increased income tax on those earning over $250,000 per year. Proposition 55 subsequently extended the Proposition 30 income tax until 2030 (Ed100, 2017).

School funding is currently provided utilizing a Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Beginning in 2014, each local educational agency (LEA) was

required to create a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). The LCAP is a three-year plan created by the LEA that shares what they plan to do to meet their local needs with their selected services and programs. The LEA gets information from stakeholders, and they use that information to set goals. Key focus areas are English learners, foster youth, and low-income students (California Department of Education, 2020).

<u>High Stakes Testing</u>

According to Nichols and Berliner (2007), high stakes testing was a result of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It was well intentioned and meant to focus on helping students to improve academically. As a result, students would leave school being able to read and do basic math. From these tests emerged a notable gap between middle class students and poor students. The Commission on Excellence in Education wrote, *A Nation at Risk,* in 1983. In it they outlined how the United States was falling behind.

In 2001, ESEA was reauthorized via the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB did not improve education by improving testing scores as intended; instead, the outcome of its implementation was an increased dropout rate (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Nichols and Berliner (2007) further explain that the reason testing was considered high stakes was because a teacher could be reassigned or fired due to low tests scores or lack of academic gains.

According to Noceda (2011), NCLB created the state's Academic Performance Index (API), and the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The API

growth model rated schools on a scale of 200-1000 and was meant to get all students to proficiency by 2013. Each year the goals for each school increased. Noceda (2011) shared the AYP federal benchmarks required improved proficiency, especially in significant subgroups, on English and math tests. Even if one subgroup did not meet proficiency while other subgroups did, the school would not be seen as having met their required growth (Noceda, 2011) and the school would go into Program Improvement. To get out of Program Improvement, the school would need to meet all federal benchmarks for two consecutive years (Noceda, 2011).

API and AYP scores were published and utilized to rank schools. Parents had the opportunity to transfer their student to a school with a higher API, receive tutoring, or attend summer school. Additionally, schools that did not make growth could be fined. According to Noceda (2011), all schools were anticipated to be in Program Improvement status by 2014.

According to the California Department of Education (2020), a new act was passed in 2015 called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). It reauthorized ESEA but allowed states to create a multiple measure accountability system which was intended to provide flexibility to states in creating such systems. In 2017, a new state accountability system that replaced the AYP was started. It had an online monitoring tool called the California School Dashboard which monitored the new multiple measures accountability system (California Department of Education, 2020).

<u>Coronavirus and Technology</u>

Around March of 2020, a virus called Covid-19, also known as the coronavirus, hit our area and other areas around the world. Little did we know it was going to be a pandemic. In just two days' time we had to move from an all in-person school setting to an all online setting. We called this new online model distance learning, and it was quite an interesting process. I write about it more in-depth in chapter four but suffice it to say, some found it quite challenging.

Teachers are supposed to be utilizing technology every day to help prepare their students, but some teachers had been teaching for thirty years and were reluctant to let go of older, more comfortable practices. Teachers who were accustomed to using paperwork packets rather than technology were suddenly catapulted into the 21st century as far as technology was concerned. They were required to run their entire teaching program online, almost overnight. Additionally, we were able to see the difference between the haves and the have-nots, which might otherwise not have been evident. Some students did not have any access to a computer while in other families each student had their own laptop. Originally, we were told we would be off for two weeks for student safety, then three. At the time of this writing, it is several months later, and district leaders are still debating whether we will be able to go back to school in person in the fall of 2020.

Responsibilities of the Principal

The responsibilities of the principal have changed dramatically over time. In the early 19th century principals did not have set expectations or guidelines (Watts, 2015). Principals relied on community approval and they were able to set their own vision for the schools (Watts, 2015).

According to the Wallace Foundation (2009), principals used to be building managers but today are expected to increase student academic achievement. Principals can change schools into professional learning communities to improve teaching and student learning (The Wallace Foundation, 2009). It is difficult for the principal to provide professional development because they spend up to 75% of their time on management (The Wallace Foundation, 2009). Principals need time to review data, set goals, train staff, and provide regular support to help raise student academic performance (The Wallace Foundation, 2009).

According to West et al. (2010), the role of the principal has changed dramatically over time. They reported that the median number of hours a principal works is 65 hours per week. One of the principals they interviewed spoke of how difficult the principalship is today. She shared there is no way to know how difficult it is until you have the job and are "responsible for 500 little lives, you can't know the toll it takes on your body" (West et al., 2010, p. 248). The principal shared about how a parent made a threat against the school, how she had to investigate students being intimate in the bathroom, telling a teacher

they are not allowed to tape a student to a chair, and counseling a teacher who had just had a miscarriage (West et al., 2010).

Rousmaniere (2013) shared that in American public schools, the principal is a complex and a contradictory educational leader because they are the administrator of educational policy, building manager, someone who advocates for school change, and one who protects bureaucratic stability (Rousmaniere, 2013). The principal is the employer, supervisor, figurehead, and inspirational leader who also identifies with the role of a classroom teacher (Rousmaniere, 2013). The principal links a large bureaucratic system and daily experiences of adults and children, while being responsible for student learning even though they are not in the classroom (Rousmaniere, 2013).

The principal does all of this in addition to being the instructional leader of the school, providing professional development, reviewing data, setting goals, supporting teachers, involving the community, and the list goes on. This is definitely a change from the inception of the principal role in the early 19th century.

School Safety and Guns

According to an article in K12 Academics (n.d.), the earliest reported school shooting in the United States was in 1764 when four Lenape American Indians entered a schoolhouse near Pennsylvania, killing the schoolmaster and approximately ten children. There were additional recordings of shooting throughout the 1800s. There were also attacks also using stabbing and stones.

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The first reported mass school shooting was in 1891 when a 70-year-old man fired a shotgun into a group of students on a playground. There were few mass shootings reported from 1900 through the 1930s. The most violent occurrences during that time were arson or explosions. Between 2000 and 2010, there were 147 deaths resulting from school shootings in the United States (K12 Academics, 2020).

Prior to 1990 there were penalties in place for anyone, aside from one authorized and licensed, who possessed or discharged a firearm in a public elementary or secondary school zone (Senate Bill 2070). The Gun Free School Zones Act of 1990 amended this code (Senate Bill 2070). The Gun Free School Zones Act of 1994 encouraged states who received funds for education from the federal government to introduce zero tolerance laws (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.). Columbine occurred in 1999, after the act was in place, and it brought gun violence to light. Some argue that campuses where teachers and officers have weapons are the safest schools. Others advocate for no guns to be allowed on campuses at all.

Much has been done to try and improve safety at schools such as implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to help students to deal with their feelings before they escalate the level of violence. There has also been a push for additional mental health support for students who need it and increased training so teachers can identify those who may need support. Some schools have hired full time school resource officers, who are usually police assigned to a

school site, in an effort to further help deter violence during the school day. Many argue having them at school is a wise expenditure in the school budget.

Many sites have adopted school wide SEL curriculum that provide weekly lessons to help students at all grade levels to understand their emotions. Students learn how to do things like deep breathing to deal with anger and who to speak to when they are sad so they can get help.

The school resource officer, social emotional learning, and the increase of mental health services are all measures intended to support students at the school site. These measures are intended to help students, but have been put in place in hopes of preventing even one more negative outcome at the school site. School should be a peaceful place where students learn academic skills and social skills so they can be successful and prepare for the path they choose in life. No student should have to go to school worrying about whether or not they are safe at school. School should help foster a love for lifelong learning, never dread or despair.

Setting

The setting in which this research occurred was at the elementary school level, specifically, the Pre-K through 6th grade levels in three Southern California public schools. The first school had more than 800 pupils, the vast majority of whom were on free and reduced lunch. We held individual educational plans (IEPs), at times in Spanish, and many of my students were only second generation from other countries, including Mexico. The majority of families would

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be considered very low socioeconomic status. Although the parents were of humble means you had the sense that they loved and valued their children. Another school had approximately 600 students and few students were on free and reduced lunch. The school would be considered to be in a more affluent area and many parents seemed to have high expectations. Yet another school had approximately 400 students, and over 80% of students were on free and reduced lunch. The parents seemed to be down to earth.

Research Sample

As this is an autoethnography, the research sample consists of one local elementary school principal. Officially I spent four years in academic preparation in order to receive my administrative credential, including the preliminary and clear credentials. However, in order to complete any credential, a four-year college degree is required. Most administrators have been teachers, which also requires the completion of a teaching credential. That generally requires two additional years of academic preparation. Most principals have four years of college, their teaching credential, and their administrative credential. That is usually about 10 years of academic preparation. I have been a Special Day Class (SDC) teacher, Resource Specialist (RSP) teacher, and general education teacher. I am currently serving as an elementary school administrator.

For this writing I primarily reviewed journals and writing used by Ellis in her autoethnography training books to help me to understand how to write in a way that shared specific ideas (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Previously my writing was

more scientific, direct, and to the point. This writing goes in depth and helps to paint a better picture for the reader as a result of this additional reading.

Data Collection

Data was collected over the course of an academic school year officially, and from the memories of 20 years. Data will be reviewed to create meaning.

This autoethnography includes observed details, thoughts, and ideas. It is self reflective utilizing a personal journal to share firsthand accounts of experiences in a school setting at times and thoughts shared after the fact and including personal insights. Utilizing a self reflective journal allows one to make "experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research design, data generation, analysis, and interpretation process" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 703).

As mentioned previously, I also utilized the metacognitive process of self-reflection as it is utilized in self-reflection theory. I reflected upon the experiences I had daily and shared what learning took place (Davies et al., 2013). This was done through journaling where I shared what occurred and the thoughts I had regarding the experiences. Through this process, learning occurred, and I was able to build capacity as an administrator as I gained additional knowledge and skills in order to hone my craft. In doing so I also gained a better understanding of what transpired. With the added layer of narrative inquiry, I was able to share my thoughts and feelings to increase the understanding of my reader.

Coding the Data

I began collecting data when I became an administrator for the purpose of documenting instances in case I might need to refer to them. So many activities occur throughout the year that it would be very difficult to remember specific dates and details without such records. I added another layer by collecting data at the close of each day in an online journal. This was a statement of facts only and was void of any opinions. I documented the major occurrences and added headings such as health, behavior issues, fighting, child abuse, staff, and the like. I would write down what happened each day, and then at the end of the week I pondered and shared my thoughts regarding the weekly occurrences in a reflective journal. This reflective journal included my opinions and ideas regarding important instances. I doubt anyone but a sitting principal would understand what a principal goes through in a day. Many people think it is the easiest job on campus, and I hope to dispel that belief. This reflection was generally done on Friday evening or Saturday morning when I had some time to do deep thinking.

In addition to the journaling I collected my work calendar, meeting agendas, memos, and notes. These additional artifacts helped me to remember the order of occurrences and how things were resolved. For example, when there is a fight on campus it takes time to interview all parties involved to get to the truth, then you provide restorative justice, set consequences, and contact

parents. In all it is a two-day process for one event. All the while, the rest of the school keeps running and more items need to be addressed.

There is an ebb and flow in the school year. At the beginning of the year it is planning the year, meeting new students, setting expectations. By around October the students are no longer trying to impress their teachers, and behaviors start to hit and need to be addressed on an individual basis. By January the principal needs to help the teachers, students, and the parents get through the year and make it successful at that. Additionally there is quarterly testing and progress reporting which puts stress on teachers. When they are stressed their classes do not seem to run as smoothly and more behaviors tend to be noticed. Then comes the stress of state testing and the energy of spring. Through it all, the principal helps to add positive "grease" to the gears of the school site to help it run smoothly. By June everyone is happy again and ready for the well-deserved summer vacation.

Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) shared that the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection. I collected data throughout the week and then reflected on it each weekend. I analyzed and color coded the observed data and reflections in two different colors. I collected the data each day and created headings within each week. The headings were given titles such as fighting, behavior, intentionally soiling self. Over time the greater theme of student discipline emerged. Those items were all coded and shared under that

thematic heading. This was a natural way to code the data into themes. It will also help to share deeper meaning and enhance understanding with the reader.

Bryne (2001) shared that thematic analysis is a coding process for information in qualitative research. The process of thematic coding is likened to sorting buttons, in that you select ways in which to identify the buttons and place them into categories (Bryne, 2001). This is the same way the researcher decides how to identify themes within their research (Bryne, 2001).

The purpose of the study is to help people understand the role of the principal and what it entails. This thematic analysis will help guide the reader through the daily experiences of the principalship. This allows the reader and author to share in a recorded experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

I also reviewed my research questions as I was creating the themes. This helped in the reflection process and assisted me in providing possible answers. The research questions were: What challenges did I face in the principalship, and how did I choose to respond to those challenges? What happened on the job? How did I spend my time each week, and how did I determine my priorities? What obstacles did I encounter in attempting to create a positive environment and an organization centered around student learning and wellbeing?

The data was collected, coded, and put into categories. The data was scrutinized to find meaning. This data was shared within this dissertation. For this qualitative study the research data is considered to be trustworthy. The data is also considered to be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

Validity, Relatability, and Generalizability

There was no difficulty with the internal validity of this research as it has only one independent variable. The independent variable is the opinions of the administrator, which were shared and recorded.

In qualitative research validity can be measured by the "appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data" (Leung, 2015, p. 324). The researcher needs to determine if the research questions are valid for the desired outcome, if the methodology, sampling, and data analysis are appropriate, and if the results and conclusions are valid (Leung, 2015). The research questions selected for this study are hopefully those that will lead to answers that are important in helping future principals to have a positive impact on their schools. The research method selected was autoethnography, with narrative inquiry and self-reflection theory, and seem to be the most thorough way to attain these answers.

The thoughts that are shared in this autoethnography are my own self reflections based on my created meaning and experiences. These experiences are similar to those of others in the field in my geographical region though they may or may not be transferable depending upon the population within a given school site. For example, at an inner-city school the daily occurrences may be different from that of a rural school. However, for the majority of schools this information is expected to be generalizable. If the autoethnography is able to shed light on unfamiliar cultural processes it is considered to be generalizable (Ellis et al. 2011).

Within quantitative research the results need to be replicable for each subsequent study. In qualitative research it is much more difficult to replicate a particular study. Leung shares that, "The essence of reliability for qualitative research lies with consistency" (Leung, 2015, p. 324). Leung goes on to explain that as you take data from the original sources, "researchers must verify their accuracy in terms of form and context with constant comparison, either alone or with peers, a form of triangulation" (Leung, 2015, p. 324). In order to test reliability, and to triangulate my data, my research will be shared with fellow principals to see if it is a reliable representation of the principalship.

Positionality Statement

The purpose of my study was to provide insight into the principalship to help support future administrators. It will also hopefully provide insight to help those in academia strengthen professional development programs at the university level for administrators and educators. I want the reader to be able to understand what the principalship entails so they know how to prepare their students. Some professors at the university level have never been administrators, so it is hoped it will provide insights. I also would like potential administrators to know what they will be facing so they can be prepared and can be successful.

I have two master's degrees and three credentials. I highly value education but having been through the system for many years, I can see where

changes and updates could be very beneficial. My hope is that my writing will be meaningful, beneficial, and relatively easy to utilize.

I approach the work of being a principal and the writing in this dissertation with at least a degree of understanding of many of the people I serve. I am a second-generation immigrant on both my maternal and paternal sides of the family. I empathize with the struggle of immigrants as I heard about my grandparents and the struggles they had in getting to the United States, learning the system, and acclimating to a new way of life. They had to overcome a language barrier. One of my uncles came to the United Stated as a sixth grader and was put into first grade because he did not know English well enough. Knowing this background and hearing about these experiences helps me to interact and be sensitive to similar struggles of students, parents, and educators.

My mother worked as a retail clerk and supported her three children on her own. She picked up any extra hours that she could to ensure we had what we needed. Because of this I am sensitive to students who have financial needs and try to help connect them with services. My parents were also divorced so I am also sensitive to students who may be living with dual families.

I continue to value and appreciate the educational system we have in place. I am leaning towards being a postmodernist because I appreciate the system we currently utilize but I am also able to see where it could benefit from being updated. I also believe that as long as the focus is the success of our students, this can look different in each classroom, school, and district. I am open

to the idea of structuring the educational environment and learning around the needs of the population and then individual students.

Additionally, I was born in the geographical area that I will be studying so I potentially understand the population of students present in the classrooms where the teachers will be educating the students. I believe this will provide additional critical insight other researchers would not otherwise access.

I completed the Level I Administrative Credential through the university system which included in person coursework and a fieldwork component. When I went to complete my level II credential, they were not offering it at the university near me, so I also experienced the Level II Clear Credential that included a coaching component.

I also completed the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Principal Academy which is a 70-hour professional development program for administrators that covers the course of a school year. It was generally one Friday evening and all-day Saturday, once each month. I found it to be very beneficial as it included many real-life scenarios from experts in the field, such as the Director of Human Resources and the experiences of veteran administrators. We were able to ask them questions after their presentations.

Overall, I know my experiences have shaped me into the person I am and they influence my thoughts and beliefs. I also know I am logical and able to see things from different points of view and appreciate differences. I hope this will lead to meaningful research that can be used to help others and further the field.

Summary

This autoethnography was created in order to provide a deeper insight into the principalship. The process of sharing the information was done through autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and self-reflection. The data is being presented so that the reader is able to attain a deeper understanding of the principalship. There is no daily checklist or simple definition that can explain the job. If the simple daily observations of the principalship were enough, then an ethnography would be the preferred method. The nuances and deeper happenings would be missed as they were in the ethnography by Wolcott (1973). Using autoethnography, all that was experienced externally and internally was shared. Being able to self-reflect and share specific thoughts while providing background information helps to develop a bigger picture. This process of narrative inquiry and reflection was necessary to help the reader create meaning and understanding of the principalship.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

What is the Principalship

For me the principalship includes being a counselor to the students, teachers and parents. At times I was dealing with parents who were fighting because they were going through a divorce and the children were caught in the middle. I ended up having to counsel the parents on how to be there for their children in the given situation. Other students who were being neglected or abused, and I referred them to CPS and counseling to help them get over traumas. I encountered students with parents in jail or parents who have died, and I had to find a way to help students deal with the feelings they were experiencing. I had to be a counselor to the teachers when they had difficult parents. Perhaps they had a parent blaming them for their child always being sick because allegedly their classroom is filthy even though you have been in the classroom yourself and it is spotless. Other parents argue about grades when in fact their child will not turn in the work. They will not study for the test because they think they will get a poor grade. They blame it on the teacher. Some parents believe there is nothing wrong or no fault in their child. They blame everything on the teacher. There are also times when teachers do not get along with other teachers in the grade level. Their style or philosophy of teaching differs, and I had to help them come to a mutual understanding. Being in the principalship I

have to wear multiple hats. I placed Band-Aids on injuries, helped children find lost items, and work through feelings. It helps children academically when you make sure their needs are met. At the same time, I was balancing the school budget, making sure the custodians were cleaning, and making sure students were supervised to ensure safety.

I believe it is imperative that those who are making critical decisions about education listen to those in the trenches to help make the best decisions for students. As I delve deeper into specific instances, this personal narrative gives you an overview of the lives of those in education.

Themes

While writing this chapter I used my reflective journal to review experiences and details. As I wrote there were strands of thoughts or ideas that matched. I color coded them and moved them around within the paper until there were certain themes that emerged included behavior, attendance, trauma, and family involvement. The one area that had the most content was behavior which has been broken into several subcategories. The examples provided are real and included to increase understanding and edification of future practitioners. There are no names used, and grades, gender, and other identifiers have been removed or changed to protect identities. The events are not in chronological order but are over the course of my time as an administrator. I will start by sharing what it is like to move to a new school.

Going to a New School

When you become a principal, you are generally going to be moving to a new school. When I went to my new site, I needed to get to know everyone, as you would at any new place, but this was different. I was entering the school as an outsider. Each school has its own school culture and vibe. I had to learn this culture along with the climate as it shaped how I dealt with problems that arose throughout the year.

In order to get to know everyone, I met with the teachers and staff individually. This was generally difficult to do as there are only a few days available each year where students are not present, and trainings are usually set on those days. One of my veteran principal friends shared that there are the same characters at every site, and I have found that to be true! You have the kind and helpful teacher who will do anything you need to help the school, you have the union person who is making sure you follow the rules (don't go over minutes at the staff meeting), you have someone who is always sharing their opinion and it can be difficult to make them happy. It has nothing to do with you, so I tried not to take it personally. You have the time taker who just wants to chat. I gave them that time to chat because that is what they needed. You have the "techie" person who is a hard worker and helpful but does not talk much. You have the beloved teacher whom everyone reveres. You have the person who has been there for years, is generally positive, and knows the practices of the school. I took time to identify them and met with them first so I could learn important

background that helped me create my plan for the school. People like sameness so I did not go changing things straight off. I wanted to be respectful of my new school culture, even if what they were doing was severely outdated, for a time at least. I had to give them an opportunity to get to know me and to gain their trust and respect. That takes time and going through difficult situations over the course of the year helped foster that trust.

Agenda

Everyone seems to have their own agenda, and that can be difficult at the beginning of the year when you are trying to get to know everyone. Some wanted to meet with me to be sure I was not going to make them change the practices or curriculum they have been using for 20 years. They did not know it, but I had already looked at the test data and knew they were my strongest teacher, test result wise, and I had no intention of interfering with their practices. I got the sense this is what they were getting at as they talked around the issue. I could not just come out and say that until they shared first. If I did, I would run the risk of offending them and having them complaining to their team. The last thing I wanted was my first impression to the rest of the new team to be a negative one. I definitely wanted to choose my battles wisely, and this was not a battle I was interested in.

Making Changes

It is extremely difficult to make any changes at a new school site. Even if the majority of the teachers say they want a change, and you make the change, if

it turns out poorly, I would be the one blamed. I was reviewing the recess schedule because I was concerned about supervision coverage during recesses. I also noticed the instructional minutes were off and needed to be fixed. I created three possible options and shared them with the leadership team. They were supposed to take it back to their teammates, discuss, and then bring back their recommendation. All grade levels said they did so when we returned and voted on the three possible schedules; one being the current schedule with added minutes to correct the issue, and two others. Ninety percent of the team voted on one schedule, which we put in place. It turned out to be a mistake, as the grade level leaders had not discussed it with their teams. They were complaining that they would no longer be eating lunch with their friends as they had the last several years. They did not appreciate the students would have more supervision, access to more equipment during recess, and that we corrected an error that could have forced us to provide summer school. They also did not appreciate the fact their teammates had made the change without their input, as their teammates had not shared the changes with them. I was surprised that I had put all of this time and effort into making this decision as a team, the correct way, and it was perceived I made a change without input. It was quite upsetting as I had followed the procedures I had learned and still ended up with unhappy teachers. Dependent upon the urgency of the change, I highly suggest principals consider waiting until their second year at a new site to make such big changes. In hindsight I would have added the required minutes to the current schedule and

then made bigger changes the following year. I also learned to share the leadership meeting notes with the whole staff. In this way everyone would know what was supposed to be discussed at their meetings and decided upon as a grade level team.

<u>Letting Things Go</u>

We were holding attendance meetings at the school site, and a family had missed another attendance meeting. They had missed over 60 days of school. The resource officer did a home visit to make sure the family was ok. The parent was very upset about the visit, and they called the school to complain. The resource officer had just sat down in my office when the call came through. As I was telling the parent I had them on speaker with the officer they cut me off to cuss me out. I was hurt by what they said. I was following policy and was actually not the one that requested the home visit. I shook it off but these things happen each week, and this was a mild occurrence.

As a principal I need to let a lot go. At the end of the day I know I need to enjoy my family and my life, so being able to compartmentalize is important. When I was going through my administrative credential program I had a very wise professor. She shared a story of a high school principal who was always at work, stressed all the time, and did not care for herself. She was diagnosed with, "a gut full of cancer." That was a terrifying story to hear all those years ago, and I try to remember the story when I am dealing with the stresses of the day. I had another professor who was a retired superintendent of over 20 years who shared

things were going swimmingly, and then he had a heart attack. He is ok now, but he suggested we focus on self-care. I learned from them it is important to find ways to compartmentalize and manage stress. I try to deep breathe through problems, focus on the positive, and try to remember that this is only temporary. People will intentionally insult you and belittle you to your face. You have to remain calm and not respond in the same manner. I try to meet them with logic and positivity. I find this resets them and sometimes they even leave appreciative of what I have done for their student. It is also important to find balance as you can work a 12-hour day and then work more once you get home. I complete a full day's work and make sure to address all I need to for the day, but when I get home I cherish my family, walk the dogs, read a book, or exercise. I know I need to put the oxygen mask on first so I can be there for the many others I support and serve.

There are good days and there are rough days. I feel like a warrior going to an emotional battle each day, not knowing what exactly is in store. Being yelled at and called an f-ing b- by a parent who is angry at something else and taking it out on you. I take it with a grain of salt and try not to let it get to me. I try to consider what else they may be dealing with and why I am the target. I want to address them to clarify and provide support, if they do not hang up on me first. "I understand that you are upset, what can I do to help?"

<u>Words Mean Things</u>

When I was a teacher I noticed that one of my students had lesions on his arms. I asked him about them and he said he had them for a while. I said it looked like ringworm, and I showed him what it looked like in the dictionary. This was before the internet, and I read him the definition and causes. I sent him to the nurse to get her input and help for the student. He went home, and his parents fed his pet rat to another of his pets because they thought that was where the ringworm came from. That is when I learned I needed to be very careful about how to share information because people can take things the wrong way. They did not realize it was from the student making contact with ringworm and not cleaning their hands before scratching their arms. I felt terrible for the pet, and I felt responsible even though all I did was share information from the dictionary. On a separate occasion I shared with a parent that their student had an altercation, which by definition is just a loud argument. They asked why they had not been called. I explained what I meant when I used that word and they calmed down. I thought this was a common term and that they would understand what it meant. I share this because it is important to be careful in how you say things as people may take actions based on your words or they may take things you say the wrong way.

Behavior

There are behavioral concerns each and every day at the school site. We are teaching students how to interact appropriately with other students, adults,

and the world around them. Some students come to school well equipped for every situation. Other students have minimal training in regards to how to behave at school. For some students it is appropriate to jump on the sofa and others would not dream of doing so. Some students love to sit and read while others could not care less about books. They have zero interest in reading. This can become a problem when you have silent reading time built into each school day.

Student Discipline

"We caught a student vaping in the bathroom."

"I'll be right there."

By the time I got there, two of the students had run away and the third was with school staff. I took that student to the office and I asked them to write down what had happened. This is very important as a tool to get to the truth, but it is also helpful if they choose to change what they said later.

Calling the first parent: "Hello ___, everything is fine with ___, I just wanted to share that today _____."

"Well, what happened to the other students? Did they get suspended?"

"I am unable to share specifics with you about any student other than your own child, but I can share that we take this very seriously and we have consequences for students who break school rules. We also have drug and alcohol counseling to help students should they need that support."

Calling the second parent: "Hello ___, everything is fine with ___, I just wanted to share that today _____."

"I can't believe this, I will be right there."

Once the parent got to school the student changed their story three times while the parent was questioning them. Once I showed the item to the parent, they identified it as being theirs and that it had CBD oil in it.

At that point it took the situation to another level. I thought this was tobacco. Now knowing it is CBD… Is that mind altering for students? Did the parent leave it in a place the student could access it? That is another issue to address entirely. Needless to say it was a long 40 minutes.

Calling the third parent: "Hello ___, everything is fine with ___, I just wanted to share that today _____."

"Thank you so much! I am so sorry they did this."

What a great response from a parent! It takes cooperation between the school and parents, and I am doing my part alerting them to a problem and addressing it for the safety of their students and the other students at the school site. I was thankful for that parent for understanding I was sharing important information regarding their student and appreciating the plan to help the student.

Similar instances happen at least weekly, and they can take the whole day to sort out. While I was working to resolve this situation, others were occurring on the playground and in the classroom. I had deadlines to meet so on this day all the other paperwork I had to do needed to be done at home. Hopefully I do not have class work to complete as well.

Getting to know and understand the parents helps in understanding and assisting the student. The child who is bold, in my experience, usually has at least one bold parent. The student who talks back usually has a parent who speaks without much consideration. I sometimes interact with parents who seem to have mental illness as they might be talking to themselves loudly or to someone else who is not there. I try to first observe the parent to see what they are going to do and give them an opportunity to share what they are thinking and feeling. I can get a sense of where they are coming from and try to mold my responses to match the personality of the person. For example, parents who are friendly and calm can usually have information shared with them directly.

<u>Slapping</u>

It was the end of the day and I had just come into the office from afterschool duty. I heard an adult voice say, "I want to see the principal, RIGHT NOW!"

Secretary: This is the principal (Motioning to me).

"Hello, I am the principal, what I can I help you with?"

The parent began sharing what had happened just a few minutes prior. They said another student hit their child. It took time but I calmed the parent down by listening to what they had to say and then letting them know I would investigate what had happened and call them the following day to update them.

The next day I called the students who were involved into my office separately. I had them write down what happened from their point of view. After

speaking to both students separately it turned out that one student had taken a game they played to a new level that the other student was not ready for. I utilized restorative justice strategies, and the students left my office as friends again. I spoke to both parents about what had happened separately. Neither was happy as one felt the student should not have had a consequence for a childhood game. The other parent wanted the student suspended. The students did have consequences, but they were appropriate to the situation given they were friends, they had both hit one another before, and there was no ill intent.

Students Making Threats

Students get upset and they say things they have heard from older siblings, the movies, and other students. Unfortunately, there are things you are just unable to say. When a student threatens to harm the school or a teacher, it is a complex problem. People are genuinely concerned something bad might happen to them or their students. The principal needs to do everything possible to keep their staff safe from any threat; fire, earthquake, gas leak, angry parent, school shooting, and countless other unforeseen circumstances. The principal generally does this by taking a look at the school closely and creating a safety plan. They take the safety plan and review it with their leadership team. If it looks like a good plan they present it to their school site council. It sits in a nice booklet, and the challenge is to be sure everyone knows what to do in the event of an emergency. That is why we run drills, so in the event of a real emergency it is hoped that the staff and students will do as was practiced during the drill.

There was a student in the second grade who said they were going to burn down the school and then they ran out of the classroom. When they calmed down I was able to get them to come into the office with me. I spoke with them and I found out they did not intend to harm the school. Another student saw them do something embarrassing in class and that student was making fun of them. Their response was to make that threat and run away. I called the counselor to provide support, and the student received consequences. My thought process was they made a mistake and needed a consequence, but they also needed help and training to prevent this from happening again.

To the student: "Everyone has people say things to them they do not like so next time when someone says something you do not like, try to ____." "It is ok to get upset, next time remember to try ____ instead."

The student was very receptive and went home content. I called the parent to let them know what had happened. They complained I should have called them sooner as the teacher had messaged them right when the incident occurred. They do not know all the background work that goes into getting the student calmed down, off of the playground, and into the office, getting the counselor to come provide support, speaking to the student. I tried to explain this process to the parent but instead of listening they said something rude and rushed off the phone. I then updated the teacher regarding what happened after school and they still wanted them suspended. Once I explained everything to

them they softened a bit, but they still would have preferred a harsher punishment.

I asked for input from a veteran and beloved principal as to what they did regarding discipline. They shared that they would tell the students to pick a punishment. If it were up to that principal they would select a very harsh punishment, so the student should choose wisely. I see how that might prevent a repeat visit. That would not be utilized today, and it is just not my style. I want the student to respect and trust me to help them. I think respect and trust is better than fear.

One very young student was brought to the office because they threatened to kill another student. I questioned the student to try and find out why he would say such a thing to his classmate. They said the other student was staring at them and tapping them repeatedly. The student did not know what the statement meant as they had heard it from a movie. I called the parent of that student regarding what had occurred, and the student received consequences. I called the parent of the other student to let them know what had happened. Luckily that student did not know what it meant either. One student left knowing not to intentionally bother their friends, especially in class. The other student learned not to repeat things they heard on movies.

Additional behaviors encountered included: A student bringing a pocket knife to school, a student bringing a yard stake to school, a student bringing a camping knife to school, students throwing rocks at each other, throwing a ball at

the face of another student, putting hand sanitizer in another students hair, theft, accusing someone of rape (luckily they did not know what the word really meant, but that was terrifying), a student swallowing a quarter, a student running into a car with their bike at high speed, graffiti in the bathroom, stealing the urinal cake, discharging the fire extinguisher, a student climbing a fence and leaving campus. These are a few of the behavioral highlights.

Runaway Student

We had a student who would get upset and run out of the classroom frequently. Initially they would be hiding between buildings. Then they started climbing things, throwing rocks, breaking sticks, and hiding behind trees. This started to happen more frequently so instead of just talking via telephone, I contacted parent and asked them to come in for a meeting. When the parent got to the school they tried to talk to their child. The child ran away and the parent had to bring them back in an approved restraining hold. If I did this type of hold I would have to do a special report, but you could sense with this parent it was a regular occurrence. Having witnessed things firsthand it made it a lot easier for the parent to agree to get supports in place for the student.

In this particular instance I was thankful to get the support from a counselor. The counselor obtained a radio from the front office so when a student ran out of the classroom they could assist in locating and monitoring the student. When a student runs it is part of the principal's job to be sure they are safe first and foremost, then deescalate them, and then provide any needed intervention.

Oftentimes these students have emotional concerns they are working through. Others may have mental health concerns, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, or Emotional Disturbance. In my opinion, many of the behaviors could be trauma induced. Perhaps had they not experienced or witnessed trauma, such as being abused at their foster home, they would not have these emotional outbursts over something that to others seems insignificant. Students get upset and they do not usually understand how to deal with their strong emotions. We need to teach students what to do when they are upset so there is less of a chance they will escalate to such an extent in the first place.

<u>Student Soiling Self</u>

I met with parents of a student who repeatedly soiled themself intentionally to show when they were upset or to get out of work. It was determined this was the function of the behavior based on input from the school psychologist and occupational therapist, with permission from the parent. The parent was frustrated with the school, and it took over an hour for parents to come with a change of clothes. The student had urinated on themselves and was hiding under a table in the office.

Prior to this incident, while in class, feces dropped from their pants and they said it did not belong to them. The student spent over half an hour in the bathroom to clean up. They left a pile of dirty toilet tissue on the floor in the bathroom. I had met twice previously with the parent who said the student was fine at home. They had agreed to send wipes to school, but they must have used

them all as the nurse could not locate them. This was the second time in the same day the student had soiled themselves, so we were without a change of clothes.

When the parent arrived the parent said to the student, "You reek of cat piss." The student was now under the table in my office and urinating on my tablecloth which they pulled to the ground. The smell was extremely potent. After discussion the parent seemed to understand this was a problem, and we were not just exaggerating. I was hopeful the parent would now be willing to work with us to address the issue. We were going to continue to help in any way we could at the school. The custodian was still in the process of disinfecting the bathroom the student just used.

<u>Fighting</u>

Three students were walking home when a student approached them and was trying to push a student down and choked him. The student responded by pushing the other student down and stepping on his back. The parent of the first student called and reported what happened. I investigated, and no one but those involved had seen what happened. When I spoke to each student separately it turned out that it was friends who were playing rough. I explained this to the parent who has called to report the incident. She said the student had been a bully for years.

Bullying used to have a pretty clear and general meaning to most people. Today the term seems to be open to interpretation. Bullying used to mean

pervasive, selected, and ongoing negative behavior towards a select or selected students. Now when students get into one altercation, parents accuse the other party of being a bully.

At the beginning of the year we have assemblies to train the students about being kind to others, what a bully is, how not to be a bully, and how to report bullying. We even have an anonymous box for students to use to report bullying. Students generally have a clear understanding of what bullying is after the assemblies and they use the word correctly.

<center>Attendance</center>

Schools used to have a set budget to work with, but in an effort to improve attendance, the state has tied school funding to an attendance formula called Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Many schools plan their budget using a 95 percent attendance projection. When the attendance rate drops below by even one percent it can mean a significant loss, for example, more than $100,000 taken away from the district. There are formulas used to staff a school such as a 24:1 average ratio in primary classes. Once numbers go too high you need to open a new class to add a teacher. If you have significant attendance loss you may need to look at reduction of personnel. That could be detrimental because in reality you do have the same number of students but they are not going to school. To help inform parents, and hopefully improve attendance, we cover this information at the beginning of the year.

When a student misses 10 percent of the school year they are referred for a School Attendance Review Team (SART) meeting. This happens quite a bit in the lower grades, especially kindergarten. Some parents treat kindergarten as a drop in program. The students come to school when it is convenient for the parent but if they have something to do, the student will just not attend for the day or a few days. I can help improve this situation by reminding parents why attendance is so important. Their student might miss content that is covered and then feel lost when they return. We also have the rare student who missed weeks of school at a time. I call the parent and they usually explain the struggle they are going through. One example of an issue a family may be dealing with is a nasty divorce. The parent might share they no longer live in the home and it is a great distance to make it to school, so the other parent has physical custody. I then call the other parent and they will not return my calls. The teacher and I are both concerned for the welfare of the student. I try to be helpful and hold off but I am going to have to have an attendance meeting or do a home visit. I would prefer to help the family without getting outside parties involved as that usually makes it a bigger problem and causes hard feelings with the school. The parent I am able to contact says we are calling the correct number. I will call a few more times, but this student needs to be at school. I worry that the student might be homeless. I wish the parent would just call me back. The district has called me to ask about the situation as attendance is tied to funding, so they want to be sure we are addressing the issue. Anyone with chronic absenteeism is supposed to meet with

the attendance team at the school and create a SART contract. In this case the parents did not show up for their meeting. We will continue to try and work with this family to get the student to school. School is usually a good place for students to be because it is safe, they get two meals a day, and it can help them to not fall behind academically.

Student Supports

A student was misbehaving in class, mostly off task and disrupting their classmates. We got the counselor involved and it turned out the student was hearing voices and that is why they were talking out in class. They were talking to someone who was not there. The teacher had no way of knowing this and was punishing the student to no avail. We found out when the counselor did an intake assessment for possible services. Had they not been referred for counseling this behavior would have continued and they would have continued to be punished for perceived bad choices. Thankfully we were able to get the student help. Training is so important to help the teacher identify such concerns.

I have a third grader who has a vision issue that causes struggles in the classroom. We had a 1 ½ hour SST meeting for them. When the meeting was concluded we had a great plan in place for the student including full psycho educational testing, counseling, and going to another class to be a mentor during recess. The next day the student never made it to the mentor's room at recess, and they ended up getting in a lot of trouble. It can be difficult when the team has a plan in place to help a student but it is not followed.

There are times as a principal I needed to suspend a student, but I wanted to make sure it was for the right reason. If a student brings a green, transparent water squinter gun to school and they do not point it at anyone or threaten anyone, I needed to consider if that was a suspendable offense. I knew I would need to suspend every future student who did the same thing as it sets precedence. I also wanted students to know I meant business so the thought of being suspended might deter negative behaviors. Others may feel strongly that this is a suspendable offence. I knew I would need to deal with that backlash as well if I chose not to suspend the student. I did not want teachers to think I was soft on discipline, and I did not want parents to think it is not a safe school. Especially in this time of declining enrollment I did not want to lose a family to a private school because they heard a student brought a gun to school and nothing was done about it. I needed to thoroughly investigate first to find out the intent of the student. Was the student was pointing it at anyone or threatening anyone? If so that may be a suspension but it also depends on the age. If they are a first grader showing off a new toy and mimicking a movie that is different that a large sixth grader with a violent history who intends to back up the threat. It is difficult to delve out punishment because you want to be fair, make sure that the punishment fits the crime. Some children are just trying to show off or make friends because they do not have any. The best thing to do is to investigate thoroughly and consider all variables when making decisions. I wanted to be sure

it was a decision that sat well with my conscience and was doing right by the students.

Twenty years ago students were encouraged to bring similar squirt guns to school on water play day. I also remember when a trip to the principal was to be avoided and feared. My school even had a paddle on the wall, though they never used it. What was the difference at that time? Did we know the boundaries? Did the adults take things more in stride? I am not quite sure but I can tell you that the majority of parents at that time would be mortified if their child was in the principal's office. Today some parents overtly argue with the findings of the principal in front of the student.

<u>Trauma</u>

We had a young student who was molested and the parent brought me the report with all the details. I could not read beyond the first page. I told them we, the school, would be there to help in any way we could. The student could do independent study or half days for a time until they got their emotions settled. The student did not want to speak about what happened with the counselor. My heart went out to the student. Although we were not able to fix the problem we did provide counseling services for the student. I also arranged for the teacher to be lenient with and compassionate with grades for a time while the student was trying to work through the emotions. I would like to say it was only one student that this happened to, but it was not.

We also had students experience deaths in the family including one who witnessed a grandparent die. We got counseling in place for those students. How is a student supposed to focus and get work done with such heavy emotions to deal with? I also ask myself what else can we be doing to help these students? Counseling helps tremendously, but it only does so much. I try to help sensitize my teachers utilizing beginning of the year training and Social Emotional Learning curriculum. Students deal with emotions in different ways. Some students deal with grief utilizing humor or anger. Training the teachers may help so instead of students getting in trouble, they can be more sensitive to their needs and help the students through whatever it is that student is dealing with.

We had a student who found their parent had committed suicide. I immediately called the counselor to get the student into counseling. I also called the remaining parent to offer support. I met with them in person and they were in tears and it was terrible to be helpless. The poor student is struggling with the loss. I am asking the teacher to be lenient with accommodating work and grades at this difficult time.

My heart goes out to all of these students. I do not bring it up when I see them and I let them bring it up if they want to. If not, I offer support behind the scenes by asking teachers to be extra compassionate to this student for this reason. Asking teachers to consider giving extra time, grading on a curve, excusing them from missed work. Most teachers are helpful but some do not know how to change the rules for one student. They think it is not fair to the other

students. I would like to give them an A in all subjects for the semester. That seems fair. It is helpful when you are working with teachers who are trauma informed but this is a new concept to some.

Student Study Team

A student might be referred to the Student Study Team (SST) if they are having attendance issues, behavioral issues, but oftentimes it is due to a lack of academic progress. SST is not just a place to refer students who you want tested, although that can be the outcome eventually. It is rare to have a student referred for academic testing at their first SST meeting.

When a student has been struggling in the classroom, the SST meets to provide input and suggestions to help the student. If the suggested strategies do not help, the SST may refer the student for a psychoeducational evaluation. If they qualify based on the evaluation, they may receive special education services.

We had a student who was having difficulties in the classroom. They were off task, and the teacher reported they never did any work or homework. They were constantly misbehaving in the classroom and disrupting others. I suggested we hold an SST meeting to discuss how best to help this student. In the meeting it was revealed by the parent that the student had heath issues, vision issues, and processing issues. This poor student was not intentionally misbehaving; instead, they could not attend to paperwork based on their conditions. They could not see to read and comprehend the papers. Luckily, we were able to get

services in place for the student such as free glasses, counseling, and academic intervention. I was so thankful we had the meeting and were able to help this student. I was also upset that it had taken this long to find out what the student needed and to get them appropriate support. I wished the parent had let the school know years earlier, before they got behind. I wish the teacher had not just been ignoring the classroom behaviors. I wish the teacher would have been giving the student recess instead of making them stay in for missed work. I learned from this experience to require teachers to make contact with parents to get input regarding students who were struggling as early in the year as possible. That way we can help students sooner, get them on the right path, and prevent needless frustration.

Special Education

Special Education can be a lifesaver to students who are struggling and need support to get where they need to be academically or otherwise. They might need speech, occupational therapy, or academic support to name a few. There are many regulations regarding special education that must be provided although is not fully funded. This means we need to provide the best services we can with the means we have available. Some parents request a one to one aide for their students. In some cases that is appropriate, such as when a student is blind or visually impaired. It might be less effective or even detrimental for a student with a mild learning disability, but it is up to the IEP team to decide, and that includes the parent. Hopefully everyone is like-minded when it comes to

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accommodations, services and scheduling. There have been instances where a student had been fully tested by all appropriate specialists, and they were found to be in the average range. In other words, they did not qualify for special education services. The parents were extremely unhappy. In such cases it is good to remind parents of the general education services they will receive. For example, if they are struggling with reading perhaps, they can see the reading specialist or participate in leveled reading groups. If they are having a hard time with math perhaps, they can attend afterschool math intervention. It is helpful for parents to know you will do everything you can to help their students to be successful. We try to give them time to ask any questions and then follow up with them frequently to let them know how their student is doing specifically what growth their student is making with the interventions in place. If they are not making academic progress it is good documentation for possible future special education support.

Child Abuse

Administrators fall under the category of "mandated reporter," meaning we are required to report suspected child abuse. We undergo training each year to remind us of how to spot abuse. For example, just because a child has a bruise it does not necessarily mean abuse.

A student came to the office saying her head hurt. The student told the attendance clerk they could not remember what had happened. The attendance clerk alerted me to what the student had shared. I asked the student to speak

with me and they shared their parent had picked them up and thrown them in their room. The student had multiple visible bruises and finger mark bruises. They also had a lump on their head. The parent came to the school the next day and said Child Protective Services (CPS) was called and asked to be called first next time, in place of CPS.

Those who work at a school site are mandated reporters. That information is supposed to be held confidentially. The parent said the person who came to take the report shared it came from the school site. When this happens, you do your best to explain that teachers are mandated reporters.

"That is a big gash on your forehead! Do you need to go to the nurse for a bandage?"

Student: "No, it's fine. My parent hit me."

My stomach sank hearing those words. "Why did they hit you?"

Student: "They were mad at me so they hit me with a bat."

I could not believe what I was hearing and I knew then a report needed to be filed. Would the parent know who reported? Would they retaliate? Do the parents know we are mandated reporters? Are they going to take the kids away? Can I bear that if they do? What if the student is making it up? In this case a report was made and the family remained intact, and they received help.

These things happen all the time, at least weekly. Here is another example.

"What happened?"

Student: "My parent put a cigarette out on my back."

"Why did they do that?"

Student: "I wasn't listening."

What would you do in these cases? You try to only report when you feel abuse occurred. You have to trust your gut and usually you will get a sick to your stomach feeling when there is abuse.

There are other times when you might have someone, perhaps a substitute teacher, that wants to report something that may not be necessary.

"I think I need to do a report. He said his dad hit him with a ball".

"What were they doing when it happened?"

"They were playing baseball."

"Do you think it could have been accidental? Does the student seem upset about it?"

"I don't know but his dad hit him."

There are also divorce or custody cases where a parent will come in and they are trying to get the school to call to report on the other parent.

They have a lot of urgent cases to investigate so you want to make sure to refer a case that is legitimate. They can provide parents with parent training and supports. Sometimes the case worker lets you know they feel the student is being coached by a parent due to a custody battle.

Custody

There are times when parents who are battling over the custody of their child or children involve the school. It might be one parent trying to gain custody by making the other parent look bad. Sometimes one parent will attend all functions and say they do all of the homework with the student. You find out the other parent works long hours and wants to attend functions but cannot. I feel it is best to stay out of custody issues whenever possible. There are times when it is unavoidable such as student pick-up times. For example, one party will have the student from Thursday through Wednesday at 4pm. If school gets out at 2:30, and the other parent who should start their visit at 4pm tries to pick up the student, and the parent who has physical custody until 4pm says they are not able to go with the other parent. You ask when they will be arriving and they are at work until 5. You can see how this might be problematic. You might also have trouble if one parent feels the student needs special education services and the other parent does not. We have a drawer full of court orders that we have to abide by in the office. We have to alert each new teacher of the rules so they can also abide by the order. You need to be careful to look at the start and end dates of the orders to make sure you are following the most current order. Sometimes parents will bring you the order that has been replaced because it is the one that serves their interests. There are other times when a child is living with a grandparent and the parent is not involved, but the grandparent does not have educational rights.

Managing Staff

I am responsible for evaluating teachers and staff at the school site as most principals are. Evaluation periods depend on the union and can vary from district to district. Usually a probationary teacher is observed multiple times in the first two years and then become tenured. Once tenured, teachers may be evaluated every other year while others may be evaluated every five years, again depending on the contract. I received a list of who was to be evaluated for the current academic year. I looked at due dates and scheduled their final evaluation a month before it was due. This way if an unforeseen event arose, I would be able to remain in timeline. I have found it useful to review the personnel file of the employees up for review before the year begins. Most teachers and staff are hardworking and there for the students. You will glean what their strengths are from their reviews. This information may help you in building committees to capitalize on their strengths. Others might have concerns noted from previous evaluators that you need to be aware of. Ideally you will find ways to support and strengthen that teacher or employee because ultimately you are building the best team possible for your students. Investing time and resources in strengthening employees makes the whole school and district better.

Ideally I would have a pre-meeting with teachers to let them know they will be evaluated. I let them select the area, math or language arts, they want to be observed in first. Generally there are two observations and one evaluation for the teacher being observed. I ask teachers what two areas they want to focus on for

the year. I look for those things in observations and provide feedback. For

classified staff you just want to be out during recess or in the classrooms

frequently to observe them. If they are a classroom aide I find it is beneficial to

get input from the teacher they work with as well. This helps to give me the most

input for a thorough evaluation.

Supporting Families

Social Emotional Learning

We have adopted a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum, and each

teacher is required to do the lessons in their classroom on a weekly basis. The

lessons help teach the students how to deal with emotions like sadness and

anger, and how to interact with peers. I have to trust the teachers are providing

students the SEL lessons as they have been asked to, and hope the students

actually use the strategies. Ideally teachers practice the strategies in the

classroom, and the students can help remind one another of the lessons at

recess.

Counseling

With budget cuts many schools were forced to make the difficult decision

of cutting programs such as counseling. When schools can provide counseling it

is a vital services for families, especially if they do not have healthcare and are

unable to provide services for their students on their own. The counseling

services I have observed are play therapy, where the student and the counselor

play a board game and talk about what is troubling the student. I have also seen group counseling where students with similar concerns meet with the counselor to work on a specific problem or strategy to practice for the week. I have seen a counselor turn the life of a student around for the better simply by providing a safe place for them to go and read at recess. When possible, counseling is a great resource for our students. It can help them to stay out of trouble on the playground which means more time in class and improved emotional state. We are also hopeful if students know where to go to get help, they can lead happier lives and hopefully prevent acting out in a negative way. It can help them to focus on schoolwork which improves academic performance and with interactions with their families.

Having counseling services at the school site is such a valuable resource. Some students seem to act out because of social or emotional difficulties they are experiencing. They may be seen as aggressive on the playground and then you find out the only meal they eat each day is the free lunch they receive at school. Other students are living out of a van in the cold. They are not showered each day because they have no shower. Their clothes are not clean because they do not have access to a washing machine. They are unable to do homework because they are unable to see the workbook in the darkness of their van. Then they come to school and are made fun of for being dirty. Their teacher is upset with them because they never do their homework. Now their aggression on the playground makes sense. When I refer students for counseling it helps them to

unpack their feelings. They can talk through and process what they are feeling. The counselor can provide them with ideas and tools to deal with anger or difficult emotions they may be experiencing. Another great thing the counselor can do is they can refer families for services such as free food, or even a place to live. Some parents are fearful that if they give permission for their child to see a counselor their children will be taken away. We have to reassure the parents we are there to help them with their situation, whatever it might be. Good counselors can be great resources to the students and the school.

<u>The Nurse's Office</u>

We have a district nurse that we share with multiple school sites due to budget restrictions. We also have a part time health technician who is invaluable in helping our students, especially those with diabetes. They monitor insulin levels and in case of an emergency have been trained in the proper procedures to help the student until the paramedics arrive. It is also imperative the staff is trained in recognizing signs of diabetes as some students have not been diagnosed yet. They could be seen as being lethargic or lazy when in reality they may be experiencing symptoms of health concerns. There are other health concerns that mimic this as well. Ideally, the better trained staff is, the better off the students will be. We can identify student health needs and get supports in place.

We had a student who complained frequently of feeling ill and would go to the nurses' office, but there was never anything wrong with them. The health

technician informed me of the situation. I brought the student into my office and asked what has been going on in their life. The first day they did not share anything. I asked them to come back to my office if they were feeling ill, after the nurse was able to assess them. On the third visit the student shared that two family members had died within a few months of each other, and they were having a hard time with it. After we talked for a while I asked if it would be ok if I introduced them to our school counselor who has a lot of experience helping students in this area. We were able to get the student into counseling which really helped them improve as they no longer had the presumably psycho somatic symptoms and they improved academically. There were many additional interesting occurrences that came through the nurse's office.

It was early one morning and a student was carried into the office by a parent who said they had just been hit by a car. I asked the parent to put the student in the nurses' office and called 911. After getting off the phone with 911, I called the parent on speakerphone with the student. I let them know what had happened and that the ambulance was on its way. I was worried that the student may have a head injury, be bleeding internally or have some internal injury. In the collision the student's shoes had flown off, and the student was lightly bleeding. The Fire Department was the first to arrive and then Highway Patrol. They assessed the student, and the parent arrived shortly thereafter. They said the student was fine and was going to be released to the parent. The parent assured me they were going to follow up with the doctor. School was not opening for

another 30 minutes, and I knew when this adrenaline surge was over I was going to be exhausted. I was just thankful the student was going to be ok.

Other instances included: A student punching another student in their face, left a mark and swelled, all because they took their seat on the bus. A student being bit by bed bugs and thinking it might be chicken pox. Parents were divorced and blaming one another. Also, students were playing tag when one tripped the other. Then the one that had been tripped hit the other student. The student had a red eye and skinned knee. Yet another student came in to the office with a stomachache. It turns out they had spit on the floor and cut their shirt. They came in from recess complaining that a student had choked them. In speaking to the other student, it turned out the first student was the one doing the choking. Parent was contacted, and the student was referred for counseling. Student came in because they had been hit in the private parts by another student. Student hit staff member in the private parts intentionally.

Injuries on Campus

I try to walk the campus each week to make sure there are no possible tort liabilities. I walk around the campus and let the maintenance or the custodian know of anything that might be dangerous or need to be repaired. I have the custodian place cones on uneven concrete until it can be shaved down. If equipment is broken I might close that part of the playground until it can be repaired. I also make sure we have adequate coverage to provide proper student

supervision. I make sure student supervision is placed strategically on campus to monitor students and not standing together. This is a result of training staff at the beginning of the year and frequent monitoring of the playground. Whenever there is a staff injury on campus it is important to ask if they need medical attention. If they do not want to go directly to the doctor you may have them call the company nurse. That is the term we use for the nurse that gives the employee medical advice. They will advise them of necessary next steps such as an office visit or x-rays. I also want to be sure they fill out the appropriate paperwork and send it off right away. This may be different for each district so check with risk management regarding the procedures at your site.

Family Involvement

When having special events at the school site it is imperative to inform parents in a timely manner so they can arrange their schedule and be available to attend. I ask teachers to place it in their newsletters and messages home. I try to ensure families have an opportunity to attend special school functions.

I also feel it is important to try and have a connection with school families. I keep them informed throughout the year, but it is also good to have in person activities for them to attend. Most parents are very interested in attending Back to School Night. This is a great night as parents come to meet the teachers, see the classroom, and ask the teacher questions. The teachers usually go over the curriculum they will be covering for the year. They also go over their discipline plan and how they will be communicating with parents. Because it is early in the

year, the school is sparkling clean with freshly polished floors and clean windows. This is a great time to showcase the school site to parents. Similarly, at the end of the year we have open house. That is when parents can come through the classrooms and see all of the special projects and artwork their students completed throughout the year.

The Halloween parade is also a really fun time of the year where students are allowed to dress up. Some students put a lot of time and energy into their costumes. You have your superheroes, princesses, but it is always fun to see students who made their own costume such as a cupcake, or character from a book like Sherlock Holmes. Parents and community members are able to attend this fun, community building event.

Awards assemblies are also a great time to have parents, grandparents, and guardians come to the school site to see their students recognized for their achievements. Giving awards to students allows parents to come to the school and enjoy seeing their student awarded. It might be for perfect attendance, strong scores on state tests, good grades, good behavior, and kindness shown to another on the playground. Giving out these awards allows the students to stand out for a moment and to be proud of what they have done.

We usually have an annual activity that is a give back for the students and their families. There are fundraisers for various things throughout the year, such as science camp, but this evening usually is a break-even event which is why it is

considered a give back. A lot of time and effort are put into the event simply to allow families and community members to enjoy it.

Assemblies are different from awards assemblies usually because they are planned for enjoyment or educating students. There is no pressure on the students or teachers to walk across the stage or speak well. Instead everyone is there to enjoy something fun or interesting being presented. Some assembly examples are a traveling theater, science demonstration, art, or storyteller.

Picture day is also a fun day when the majority of students come to school in their best outfit with their hair styled or coifed. I have experienced that students are less likely to have difficulties on the playground on this day, perhaps because they want to look good for their pictures. I love picture day because the majority of the students are so happy and proud. There are, however, a few who look disheveled and you know they forgot about picture day completely. You want to help them but there is not much you can do. Maybe they don't like having their picture taken. Perhaps they cannot afford to purchase pictures so they prefer to skip it. Maybe they had beautiful portraits taken by a professional photographer. Whatever the case, it is difficult for the student because they stand out.

<div align="center">Decision Making</div>

The principalship is one of the loneliest jobs because in many cases there is no one on campus in a similar position. There is no one to discuss things with because you need someone who is confidential and will not give you a biased opinion. The majority of the decisions will make someone

unhappy. It is important that your decisions can be upheld and supported by the district. Making the right choice is not always popular. You need to do what you say you are going to do and if you make a mistake, explain what happened.

There was a teacher on campus who was going through a bad custody battle, and their ex had gone to the in-laws and shot up their house. The police were looking for them and I was told this person was likely headed to my school site next. I put the campus on lockdown and told all of the teachers via the intercom to check their email for an important message from me. I gave them a quick email letting them know to remain in their classrooms, and I shared as much information as I had with them. Luckily the police were able to apprehend the person before they made it to campus.

Throughout the process I felt fearful but I knew I had to put that aside and focus logically on how to keep my staff safe. I thought about what needed to be done rather than what could happen. I was levelheaded throughout, but when I went home I was exhausted. I took a shower, put on my pajamas and tried to relax with a TV show. I was unable to give all the details to my family which is often the case. I must protect the privacy of others, so journaling is a good choice. I can get everything out of my mind and on paper. It is therapeutic to be able to share those experiences even though no one will ever read it. My family did not have an understanding of what had occurred.

"Is everything ok?"

"Yes, just had a rough day today."

"Want to talk about it?"

"I was concerned there might be a big problem but it turned out to be nothing, and I am drained from the whole experience."

For me it is important to have a good support system in place. It might be family or a trusted friend that you can share and bounce ideas off of. It could be walking the dogs or reading a book. You need to be able to decompress from a stressful day, otherwise it can eat away at you.

On another occasion there was a bank robber on foot in the area. We had another lockdown situation where students had to go to the nearest room from the playground or wherever they had been on campus. Teachers and staff were not supposed to let anyone in or out for any reason for safety purposes. Again I utilized the intercom system and email to keep teachers updated. I wondered if the suspect had a gun and whether or not he would try to use a classroom as a hiding place. The walls were brick so I was more worried about a student who may have been in the restroom when the lockdown was called. Teachers were trained to not let in a late student just in case it was a pretext used by the suspect to gain entry to the classroom. What a terrible choice to have to make. I hoped the back robber had passed our school and that we were safe. What if we were not? The entire ordeal was a little over an hour, and luckily they apprehended the suspect without incident. I was glad we had practiced and were prepared with lockdown drills.

There were two other instances where lockdowns were needed. The first was a large swarm of bees on the playground. In this instance the bees were just resting until they continued on their journey. We used it as a teachable moment as we need to help the bees survive. We can do this while at the same time protecting the students. After the initial lockdown we were able to assess the bees were not a threat to the students as long as they remained off the playground. They had indoor recess as they do on rainy days. Another instance was when there was a large coyote walking around campus. In both cases, for safety the students were brought inside until the bees and coyote had wandered off. In each of these instances a short memo was sent home to let parents know what had occurred.

Some staff members were very appreciative of the safety measures, and others were not happy with the decision. Most likely they were not pleased with their lunch being adjusted. In each case it is the job of the administrator to make the best decision for the safety of the school and the staff.

Hurtful Words

It was surprising how many times people yell at me, call me names, say something rude, or threaten me. This is almost a weekly occurrence. When it happened the first time I was not ready for it. They are going to the union, to the district office. You are too mean, too soft, you have no compassion, no backbone, you are racist, you are communist. These are just outrageous

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statements, and the people making the statements feel they can say whatever they want due to your position. After all, you work for them and they pay your salary. Over time I have realized that some people attack because they feel helpless, as if they have no power. They are trying to make you hurt because they themselves are angry or hurt. Someone is mad at a decision you made or that they perceive you made, and they threaten you. Some people have trust issues with authority figures. Some may have had a bad experience with someone who looks like you. At first it hurts, but over time it rolls right off. The bottom line is to try not to take it personally. Many have been incredibly rude only to bring me flowers or a Christmas present. This happens because I do not hold their behavior against them, and I forgive and move on. I am there for the student and it is not the student's fault their parent acted this way. I think they realize that I am not the bad guy and they feel remorseful over time. I am there to help their child.

Research Questions

Question One

What challenges did I face in the principalship, and how did I choose to respond to those challenges?

These stories include some of the challenges I faced and how I responded to each situation. Please see the section titled "Themes" for specific examples. I generally faced challenges each day in order of importance. Some items are more time sensitive and others can be tackled the following day. I faced students

with behavioral issues, trauma, health concerns, upset parents, and teachers who were unfamiliar with technology, to name a few. Each and every situation is different, but the best way to begin is to listen. If you give someone a chance to share what they are thinking and feeling, it can lighten their emotions. If they come in angry about something and you listen to them, validate their feelings on the matter, and come to a resolution, even if they do not agree they will appreciate being heard. In regard to other situations it is important to provide services or get help for the family. If you do not have a solution you can reach out to see what other resources are available for your families. You are constantly looking for solutions for students.

Questions Two

What happened on the job?

I could fill volumes with what happened on the job. Specific stories have been chronicled in the proceeding pages. These include students with behavioral concerns on the playground, experiencing loss, angry parents, health concerns, and fun activities. It is a very busy job on most days. There were days when so many things came up so quickly that it was hard to list them all in the daily journal at the close of the day. I have had days when my secretary and third-party comment separately, unsolicited, on how busy my day was. That is when you know it was a busy day. There were also days when I was able to visit all the classrooms and observe recesses and return to the office without one call to

return. Those are the very enjoyable, connected days. Walking through and seeing all the happy and hardworking students really makes my day.

<u>Question Three</u>

How did I spend my time each week, and how did I determine my priorities?

I spent my time each week getting the required items done first and then prioritizing the rest of the work to be done. This could be challenging as there were times when everything was important. People are always the priority, so I would always start with helping my students and my staff. The report could wait until I got home. Generally speaking I set the schedule before the year even started. I planned my staff meetings, professional development, Student Study Team, IEP meetings, School Site Council, and the list goes on. Once I had the important events in place I was able to add the fun events for the year. This included Back to School Night and Family Fun Night. Then I added my student council events.

I also looked at state test scores to see how the school did overall in math and language arts. Right now they are asking us to focus on attendance and suspensions. They also track subgroups such as English Learners, Special Education Students, and Foster and Homeless students. I want to be sure the students in these subgroups receive the support they need to be successful.

Currently there is a color-coding system to show where your school is placed. The colors from best to worst are blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. I

want to be blue or green in all areas. If you do not make adequate growth, or do what is considered proficient in a category, your color goes into yellow, orange or red, which is not good. This system seems like a good way to monitor growth; however, it is flawed. There is no way to know how many suspensions you will have in a given year. If you have five suspensions and the following year you have six suspensions, even though it is still a low number of suspensions, your rating could go down and it can be seen as an area needing improvement.

<div align="center">Planning for the Year</div>

<u>Fall</u>

At the beginning of the year I was making sure all of the deliveries have arrived and that the teachers have all the materials they need. Then I was making sure all of the classrooms were clean and the school was ready to receive students. I was making sure the classes were balanced and that no changes happened over summer, such as students moving into the district or leaving it, which may require reshuffling students into different classrooms. I made sure the teachers had all the training and professional development in place for the new school year. This is especially true if there is new curriculum being implemented, a new assessment, or online tool.

<u>Winter</u>

This is a nice time of year as teachers and students were able to celebrate the holidays. This time right after rest and relaxation is generally a low stress

time of the year. Teachers and students seem to be rejuvenated from having the time off.

After one of these breaks, we learned that one of the staff members had a terminal illness and would not be back. This was terrible news for our staff member, and it was also a huge blow to staff morale. As the principal it was important to try and find a way to organically lift teachers' spirits. Gathering staff together to share a meal is one of the ways I showed I cared. There is no right answer, but this was a helpful start.

Spring

Generally at this time of year we are in the final stretch before state testing. Teachers are frantically reviewing key lessons and academic skills with their students. Testing happens this time of the year, and students and teachers are tired. While testing I need to be sure students have devices off, that they have had enough sleep, and they have had a good breakfast. I did not want a year of hard work to go down the drain because the student did not get enough sleep. I wanted the scores to reflect accurately. I was busy working to create a testing schedule for our students. There was a time when students needed to rotate through the computer lab one class at a time in order to get testing done. Now students are one to one with devices, which helps a great deal with test scheduling. Only grades four and up do state testing so it is good to block out dates on the calendar for state testing. I needed to be sure there was not an assembly scheduled, no parent volunteers, and I also needed to prevent calling

over the intercom during this time. Often I will plan to provide snacks for our students so they are not testing on an empty stomach if they forgot to have breakfast that day.

At this time of year I am making sure end of the year assemblies and field trips are scheduled and paid for, that permission slips are in, and that field trip lunches are ordered. I am making sure we put out seasonal toys and activities at recess to prevent boredom and fights. I am working with my staff to be vigilant about keeping students in sight. This is what we are usually doing, but the 2019-2020 year was much different from every other year. For Spring 2020 there was no formal testing, no field trips, and no events.

Distance Learning

In Spring 2020, after much speculation, we found out we were going to provide instruction virtually to our students. There were many meetings discussing what this would look like. Initially it was going to be two to three weeks, but later it became clear it was going to be through the end of the year.

All field trips and annual activities were cancelled. All orders for materials were put on hold. As of this writing in Summer 2020, we are not sure when we are going to be able to go back to school in person. In the meantime we need to provide instruction virtually. This is going to be a bit of a challenge as not all of the students have a device that can access the Internet, such as a computer, iPad, or tablet. We will make sure all of the students who need a device will get one, but some students do not have access to the Internet and will need a

hotspot. I need to find a way to check out a computer to students when no staff is on site. Even if I am able to get computers to all of my students, some teachers do not utilize computers with any regularity in their instruction.

I have been providing training to my teachers on what to do. Parents are worried as to how they are going to be able to continue to work each day and monitor their students as they complete schoolwork. Other parents have been laid off from their jobs as many are temporarily closed. They are not sure how they are going to be able to provide for their families. It seems to be a very stressful time for everyone.

Training Teachers for Distance Learning

There are many online applications and programs available to provide distance learning. Half of my staff has never used any of these platforms. I have provided several training sessions via video where I shared my screen. This is difficult as people learn at different speeds. Some already know the platform, and others barely check their email. The good part is that even my most veteran and anti-technology teachers are trying to learn and are being positive. I am very proud of them for being open to try new things. I know it is very hard to make such changes.

There were key platforms that were utilized during distance learning. On such platform was Google Classroom. Each teacher created a classroom in order to provide lessons to their students. Those teachers who were less technologically savvy partnered up with other teachers to create a grade level

classroom. This proved to be challenging as the perception was some teachers put in more work than others.

We usually have one staff meeting a month, but I increased this to twice a month to keep staff updated on the ever changing status. The state is going into a "hold harmless" mode which means students cannot get a lower grade than they had previously. They are trying to be considerate of people who may be dealing with ill family members and those who may not have access to a computer. Many teachers expressed as soon as this was announced the amount of participation in online learning and classes dropped significantly.

Because we were thrown into distance learning over a weekend, teachers' classes look very different. Some teachers are providing multiple lessons a day via Zoom or Google meets. Others are posting work online for students to complete in their own time. I suggested teachers post a schedule and limit online work to 10 hours a week as some students are sharing devices or may not have parents at home to help them complete the work. Some teachers may have underestimated the amount of time it would take to complete work as I did get parent complaints regarding the amount of homework that students had to do. This is something that happens during the school year as well. Teachers feel something will take a short time, such as 30 math problems, when in actuality it will take much longer for the students to complete. Some teachers want to give out packets of class work, which I discouraged as it causes all the parents to come to the school site to get the packets. That could potentially expose the

teachers, parents, and students. Additionally it costs gas money for families who may be out of work and not able to afford driving to the school each week. Some families do not have money for food, utilities, and rent due to the forced closing of businesses. If the business is closed, they cannot work, and they cannot get a paycheck. Most teachers are selfless and amazing, but a few do not always see the big picture. They do not consider how their practices affect others. When I explain it, the majority of teachers understand and are considerate of the families. We also have a weekly food distribution so our families do not have to go hungry. Free mental health services are also being provided for those in need.

There is also a question regarding the measurement of academic growth of students at this time. You are supposed to have multiple measures to see if students have made growth. This is because they might have had a bad day on one test and it is not a true measure of their ability. The test could also have unintentional biases for a given group and multiple measures helps to mitigate those concerns.

Summer

School is out now, the students and teachers are gone, and we have closed the year. I worked with my office staff to make sure all new purchase orders were complete so books and supplies were ordered for the next year. I checked my student numbers to makes sure I was appropriately staffed. I did not want to have too few teachers to start the year. I also did not want to have too many people working as the budget would not support it. I needed to determine

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what professional development would be most beneficial for teachers. I felt it should be integrated so principals can make sure teacher professional development is time well spent and edifying to enhance and inform their best practices.

<u>Question Four</u>

What obstacles did I encounter in attempting to create a positive environment and an organization centered around student learning, wellbeing, and what was my response?

One of the main obstacles I faced was defeatist, obstructive, and unenthusiastic attitudes. How do you combat that? I have tried to use growth mindset with all groups in order to change thinking.

Teacher: "Our test scores are so low, this group just can't do it."

I was able to counter this negative thought utilizing a growth mindset strategy. "They can't do it right now, but by the end of the year they will, with our help. We will be adding afterschool intervention and an in-school intervention teacher to focus on Math. We will look at the benchmark scores and we are going to focus on students who are almost to the next level."

I might have a good idea I want to try, but teachers may feel that what they have in place is fine. Why should they have to change? It could be a reading program or curriculum. It might also be a teaching practice. I know the research backs a given program or method, but teachers might not care because this has been working for them. I need to show them why this would be good for them

and their students. One way to do this is by asking for a teacher to pilot the program. They can report on how the implementation is going with their peers, and hopefully the other teachers will see the benefit and attempt to implement it for themselves.

<u>Question Five</u>

How did I continue to believe in the worthiness of being a principal?

Believing in the worthiness of being a principal is not difficult to do most of the time because children are amazing. They seem to be pure in their intentions and you usually know where students are coming from. I see over time that I am genuinely making a difference in student lives and that is worthy of my time and energy. I might be able to facilitate the beginning of a reading intervention program that helps students learn how to read. That is a life changing intervention that can help the student to be successful. A similar example is the implementation of social emotional curriculum. Helping the student to self-regulate so they stay out of trouble or in general education will also have a huge impact on a student. Facilitating or working to provide services that help the students for the better is the best feeling. Making that positive impact and seeing the student happy and smiling because they can read is deeply satisfying. I know I made a positive change in the life of those students. I might also be able to help parents or staff members through a difficult time by providing support or assistance in the way of time, space, or resources.

What did I do on a daily basis, in spite of continually dealing with problems and difficulties, to keep believing in the goodness of people and find joy in my work?

There are many joyful occasions at the school site that make the principalship joyful. There are afterschool events, Halloween, Christmas, Valentine' s Day, St. Patrick's Day, Crazy Hair and Sock Day, Sports Team Day. These are some of the fun times where teachers relax a bit and the students can focus on fun rather than academics. Each day I try to greet student as they enter school by telling them to have a good day or welcome to school. I try to start their day at school off on a positive note, especially if they seem to be sad or angry when they arrive. If that is the case I might try to see what the problem is. Sometimes they woke up late and they are not wearing socks, or they need breakfast. I try to make sure they have what they need. We can get them socks or food. Sometimes they are upset they forgot something like a big project or an instrument. I can bring them to the office so they can call to see if someone can bring it to school for them. It might also be at the end of an early out day when a parent forgot, and a student is scared they were left behind. We make sure to comfort them and let them know their parent will be arriving soon.

I believe people are generally good and if you look for it, you can find the good every day. The challenge is not to focus on the negativity that is at your desk. I need to look at the first grader learning to read or the shy student making

a friend. I need to keep reminding myself why it is I am there. I see it as a higher

calling that has a greater purpose. I am there to support the students and serve

the teachers. I share my knowledge and work with the team to create the best

outcome for the school and district. Part of the job is helping to convey that

message to others and making sure your team believes the same thing. It is not

sink or swim, we need to help these children. They all come to us at different

levels and with different needs. We must be sensitive to what is needed and put

supports in place to help them to be successful. One student may need a

refresher on a subject. Another academic intervention, another counseling, and

another motivation. You meet the student where they are and you help them to

grow. I liken it to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Kurt, n.d). I look to

see where someone is in their development and try to help stretch and enhance

their abilities. Ideally students learn from teachers, teachers from veteran

teachers and administrators, school site administrators from veteran

administrators. Sometimes we all learn from students.

Conclusion

I had planned on sharing memories so that the reader could learn from my

experiences. I have included stories I was able to share without revealing who I

was speaking about. Other stories had too many specific details that when

removed, the power of the story was removed. If you care about kids and want to

really have a positive impact in their lives, don't give up. There are days you will

want to. After a very rough day I have been tempted to change paths, but what stopped me was knowing I am making a difference. If I was not there, who would have noticed the student with the stomachache? Would they have chastised him for coming to the nurse so often, or would they have gotten him the counseling services as I did? That is what keeps me going. Please know you are making a difference and don't give up.

Different qualities within different people create effective principals. That is what makes defining what being an effective principal looks like so difficult. Principals are as different as their personalities. One of the basic similarities is you need to have all the practical knowledge to run the business side of the school but you also must have incredible empathy for your students. You need to be able to figure out what they need and what resources you need to put in place in order to help them. You need a great deal of patience when a parent who you have not met before comes into your office screaming and complaining about something that is beyond the control of the school. You need to be able to help a student or teacher going through a death in the family. You need to have the strength of a warrior to get through the daily battles while keeping a calm demeanor and remaining professional. You do it all for the children and to make a positive impact in the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

This study employed a qualitative research model. Data was collected,

coded, and reviewed for meaning and significance. What I have shared was

intended to give prospective administrators a quick view into the principalship. It

is hoped this glimpse into the principalship will help prospective administrators

know what they may face each day so they will be prepared. As a principal you

are a manager, planner, facilitator, implementer, trainer, encourager, complaint

department and conflict resolver. Sharing this information was intended to help

future administrators know what they will face and trainers may also utilize the

study to help prepare future administrators.

Problem

According to Viadero (2009), more than half of all administrators leave the

profession within five years. Data suggests that half of new principals are no

longer in the same job five years later, and some have left the principalship

altogether (Viadero, 2009). Given the years of education required to become a

principal, this made me wonder what exactly was causing this problem. This is a

problem because to have principals with experience running a school. New

principals need to be given time to learn and grow into seasoned administrators;

thus it is not helpful for a quarter of them to leave the profession each year. Why

are so many administrators leaving after just a short time? According to Dethloff

(2005), it is a challenge to be properly prepared for the role of principal in the 21st century if they are unable to understand both the demands and conditions surrounding the position. It is difficult to know exactly what the principalship entails until you have been in the position yourself or someone shares their experiences with you.

<div align="center">Purpose</div>

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to provide insight into the principalship to inform future administrators and the programs that prepare them. It is hoped that doing so may help reduce the number of principals that leave the profession each year. If future principals know more about what is expected on the job, the thought is they will be more prepared, better trained, and more successful. This research was intended to help the reader understand the complexities of the principalship, ideally to help future administrators and those who prepare them. Such persons might include a professor at a university, a teacher at a credentialing program, a fieldwork coordinator, or anyone who will be working to support and train administrators. This research was intended to contribute to both theory and practice.

By utilizing self-reflection theory, I gave insight that only a practitioner would have. I wanted the reader to know that the principalship is a worthwhile and meaningful career. I also wanted them to be prepared for the challenges they will face so that they will be successful and continue in the profession for the long term. Administrators are able to help children and families in need and train

teachers in best instructional practices. Administrators can also support students who are struggling academically and provide support to help them make it to grade level. Administrators can help to foster an appreciation of learning. Helping a student to learn to read or interact appropriately with their peers can have a positive impact on the rest of their lives. Few other professions can do that, which is one of the many things that make the principalship so worthwhile.

Research Design and Methods

This study is a phenomenological, qualitative research model. Data was collected, coded, and reviewed for meaning and significance. The theoretical frameworks utilized were autoethnography, narrative inquiry, and self-reflection theory. These were used to tell the story of one principal to provide insight that shares what the principalship entails.

Data was collected via a daily journal and a reflective journal. The daily journal contained notes from the week but as much as was possible was devoid of opinions. There was quite a bit that occurred each day, and it was good to collect what happened so I was able to reflect upon it at the end of the week. The reflective journal included notes regarding what I thought and felt about what had occurred. Themes emerged and have been included such as behavior issues, fighting, and child abuse.

Artifacts were also collected for the study. These included the 12 month work calendar, 55 meeting agendas, 15 memos, and numerous notes. Artifacts

were used to help recall key details and resolutions. These artifacts helped to

maintain the weekly timeline and fill in details that may have been forgotten.

Limitations and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to help inform administrative programs and

support future administrators. Delimitations were as follows: This research was

not intended to evaluate a given program, evaluate a given school, or evaluate a

given institution. Limitations of this study were as follows: There was only one

subject, and the viewpoints expressed are my own. It may be difficult to

generalize personal experiences shared across the entire administrative

profession. I see the principalship as a construct of my own reality and

experiences. Although I do not claim to have all the answers, I hope the insight

provided is beneficial to future administrators.

In completing this study I tried to be unbiased and impartial. This research

fell under the category of Data Triangulation, which involves time, space, and

persons. I used three data sources: Collection of data related to social and

political context, key artifacts and observations, and a daily journal and weekly

reflection journal. I utilized a peer debriefer to share ideas and conclusions with

to make sure my ideas were generalizable. I was careful in regards to

positionality, and every effort was made to not provide skewed conclusions. I

also did my best to remain objective so after writing I set it to the side for a time

before returning to it and reviewing it. This assisted subjectivity as it helped to

remove the layer of emotionality experienced when an occurrence is fresh in one's mind.

Findings

Principals have a multifaceted job that requires managerial skills, logic, and patience. It is difficult for principals to learn all they need to know from traditional classes and bookwork, even when they are following the set guidelines. There are many necessary skills that are acquired and developed on the job such as: conflict management, counseling, de-escalation and resolution techniques. When making decisions in the principalship, they must be student focused and ethical.

Twenty-five percent of principals leave the position each year, and many leave the principalship within five years, with some leaving the profession altogether. This is detrimental to schools as they need stability, long term goals, and plans to make those goals a reality. To assist schools to have the best outcomes it is important to train administrators so they can be successful for their school sites, students, and teachers.

Because it is such a stressful and taxing job, many veteran teachers who would be excellent principals shy away from the added responsibility. It would be a benefit to future administrators to help change that. Supporting administrators to ensure they are well trained and capable of taking care of the school is important. Well trained and supported administrators are more likely to be willing to continue this difficult but rewarding work.

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Whenever possible, a more personalized approach would be preferred. Principals would benefit from training via a coaching model or apprenticeship where they have support from a veteran principal who can help them with instances and difficulties as they occur. This on-the-job training would potentially reduce errors and lead to the administrator being more successful.

Research Questions

The main research questions I addressed were as follows: What challenges did I face in the principalship, and how did I choose to respond to those challenges? What happened on the job? How did I spend my time each week, and how did I determine my priorities? What obstacles did I encounter in attempting to create a positive environment and an organization centered around student learning and wellbeing, and what was my response? How did I continue to believe in the worthiness of being a principal? What did I do on a daily basis, in spite of continually dealing with problems and difficulties, to keep believing in the goodness of people and find joy in my work? These questions are answered in chapter 4.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several possible future research questions that could be considered. They are as follows: How can a coaching model be used to help support administrators? What are the components of a successful professional development program? What is currently missing or needs to be enhanced in the clear administrative credential program? What is the best delivery method for an

administrative program? How can colleges work together with professional

programs to create a mutually beneficial plan/program?

<u>I Wish I Could Have Done More</u>

When I first decided on my topic I discussed with my dissertation

committee chair the need to prepare administrators. I was well prepared from an

educational standpoint, but there was so much more to the job that is not taught

in the classroom. This is not a reflection on the hardworking professors training

administrators; it is simply the reality we face. My dissertation committee chair

and I shared ideas regarding what could be covered. I was looking forward to

getting all of the thoughts down on paper, but when I sat down to write I realized I

would not be able to tell the whole story. I kept a journal of the key occurrences,

and there was much I left out. If I did share, people might know the stories were

about them and that was not the point of the writing. The purpose was to prepare

future administrators and help those already in those roles. I shared as much as

possible, sharing the most impactful stories providing the most information, but I

do wish I could have shared more.

<u>Confidentiality</u>

I wanted to be able to share stories that were true to life while still

respecting the privacy of others. When in the principalship you know all about the

personal lives and experiences of others. You observe the behaviors and

discussions with parents, students, teachers, and staff in the role of

administrator. There is a great deal of confidential information that is shared with

and is available to you, and it is important that you not share it with others. When I was writing certain stories I needed to protect the individuals within the stories. That is why names, ages, and other details were not provided.

When I sent my draft to my dissertation committee chair, she was disappointed and she questioned why I left out the "most dramatic and traumatic" experiences we had discussed (B. Piller, personal communication, 2019). She mentioned I did not get close to covering what is really experienced by an administrator on a daily basis. I agreed with her and I was also a bit disappointed that this might not be as powerful a tool as we had previously hoped. After I explained my reasoning for leaving certain details and stories out I asked if she herself would have left them in. I gave her my reasoning, and after deliberation she agreed she too would have left the stories out.

Even though we had discussed leaving certain stories out I intended to share anything possible. I went back and added to stories as much additional information as possible. For example, when someone is going to have a baby you can tell them they will need diapers and formula. You can liken that to what your education prepares you for. You should also tell them they will need to operate on much less sleep, set a feeding schedule, and all about bathing, teething, and that is what I hope my chapter four will provide, some of those additional details in regards to being an administrator. With autoethnography you are able to translate information by reporting observed experiences (Hughes et al., 2012). I utilized autoethnography to translate experiences and provide

meaning. I had experiences on the job but without additional information these stories might not make sense to someone who is not an educational practitioner.

In further discussion regarding this chapter, my dissertation committee brought up the idea of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of experiences within this role (E. Murillo, personal communication, 2020) . Administrators have resources to support families and students they serve, but in doing so, they may be exposed to trauma (Matthews et al., 2018). I believe my dissertation committee was correct because as an administrator you take home lived experiences that remain with you in the days, weeks, and even months after they have occurred. Due to confidentiality you are unable to share these experiences with others. It takes time to decompress after you have been through such an experience, but you are often not afforded that opportunity as you must continue working. The next person needing help does not know what you have just been through, and they need your assistance now. You have to move through and continue working to make sure everything gets done and is running smoothly.

In further discussion with my dissertation committee chair, it was shared that the administrator witnesses many events and at times may be in the role of the victim. For example, they may be yelled at by strangers for something they had nothing to do with. Additionally they may be perceived as an aggressor because they make a decision that is not well received by a parent, such as a student suspension. Most administrators are trying to be peacemakers to help

the school run smoothly, though that is not always how they are perceived. Being in either role can be stressful and have a lasting effect on the person.

Unlike other industries where there is a set task within a scheduled time, the time structure in education is different. Education is focused on helping people, and in that you need to keep working and help the next person. You often take work home with you, and tasks and thoughts are seldom contained within the workday. There may be a student who went through something terrible and they told you all about it. Although you connected them with the counselor and services for their family, you carry that information with you. Being the witness and hearing about the experience can be traumatic. You also feel the responsibility of the need to follow up to make sure that student is ok which is an additional task further compiling the stress of the job. Factors that may contribute to principal turnover are the stressful and demanding responsibilities required of them (Friedman, 2002).

In other professions such as mental health, practitioners receive training in self care (Matthews et al., 2018). This seems to be important as it can help to keep the person dealing with the trauma healthy and well. Principals are usually not provided self-care training (Crawford et al., 2014). It is so important to take care of yourself and you can do so by walking the dogs, reading a book, spending time with family, or taking a nap. These simple things are part of self care and they help take your mind off the stressors of the day. You need to be

able to process the thoughts and emotions of the day to refocus and reduce the stress you have experienced.

I want to prepare future administrators for the experiences and trauma they are likely to face without betraying the trust of those within a given experience. For that reason, unfortunately I needed to leave many things out. I did my best to cover the breadth of what is experienced as an administrator. I tried to provide information that would help other administrators without sharing personal details from shared experiences. As my dissertation committee explained, it is important to tell the story but, "In autoethnography you should be an illuminator and not a traitor" (E. Murillo, personal communication, 2020). Through this research I wanted the reader to gain knowledge and understanding of what they would be facing as administrators. I did not want to harm anyone in the process. I wanted to shed light on what would be experienced so administrators would know what to expect. My dissertation committee also shared that autoethnography serves as a prop so the reader can bring themselves into the story and feel connected to the knowledge, emotions and experience that is shared (E. Murillo, personal communication, 2020). I wanted the reader to have details that would help them to understand what had occurred as if they themselves had been there to experience it. They could review the details of what had occurred and consider their responses so when they experience something similar they are not blindsided.

Even after all of this writing I still believe I have just scratched the surface of what being an administrator is truly like. I covered many of the most important things an administrator will be facing and needs to be aware of. Even so there is much more to cover so I suggest finding a strong mentor who can provide guidance and support along the way. I wish you all the best!

Chapter Summary

The findings of this research suggest future administrators would benefit from additional support during their training. Perhaps this support could come in the form of a coaching model, where the administrator could learn while they are on the job. They could receive real time help for difficult situations they may be facing. These situations do not occur chronologically as they do in a textbook. This would allow the new administrator to tap into years of knowledge and experience from their mentors they would not otherwise have. This should in turn help them to be more successful in their roles as school site administrators. This is similar to residents that make rounds with doctors. They can take their valuable book knowledge and apply it to real life situations, adding in the information and suggestions provided by the experts in their fields.

When you go into the principalship it is expected you will have everything you need to be successful. You have basic book knowledge, but practical knowledge is also necessary. Although it may be cost prohibitive, it would be helpful if a researcher could do a program plan evaluation to see what current practices are in place. They could review current practices to see what realistic

solutions could be put in place. For example, rather than attending one class a week future administrators could shadow a seated principal. This way they are connected with a mentor and can see problems and solutions in real time. This does not take additional time on the part of the student as they would have to attend class anyway. Similarly if the person is already an administrator perhaps they could do fieldwork so they do not have to miss work. These are some possible, realistic solutions to support potential principals and perhaps enhance current programs. We have some great perspective administrators entering their field and we should do whatever possible to prepare and retain them.

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