A Cross-Case Analysis of Strategies Used by Novice Elementary School Principals to Understand School Culture

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A Cross-Case Analysis of Strategies Used by Novice Elementary School Principals to Understand School Culture

by

Shane Silpe

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership
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DEDICATION

To my best friend, life-long adventure buddy and future-wife, Stephanie, whose love, support, patience, and belief in me helped make this goal a reality. You are my favorite and I love you.
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My success is built on the investment from the family, friends, mentors, and colleagues who have challenged me to be better and do better.

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ABSTRACT

Many have identified the principalship as a “sink or swim” role (Rooney, 2000, p. 77) in which new leaders address a multitude of tasks daily (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 433) with feelings of being ultimately responsible (Swen, 2019, p. 5). Preparing principals through induction programs, internships, mentors, coursework, and exposure, are just some of the many ways that we currently prepare beginning principals for their new role. “Challenges for novice school leaders evolve as information is managed differently and as societal and regulatory expectations change” (Beam, Claxton, & Smith, 2016, p. 145). Given this on-going negotiation, novice principals must actively engage in meaning-making and critical reflection of their broad range of experiences. This research dives into this transitional development, as it relates to school culture and the means through which novice elementary school principals come to understand it.

Building on decades of research focused on the work of the principal and how that work can become maximized for efficiency and effectiveness, this dissertation situates the novice principal as a learner within the realities of the school organization’s culture. The identity of a novice principal is mutually defined with multiple factors, including, but not limited to, the people, place, time, and dynamic cultural process of their placement (Rogoff et al., 1995, p. 45). It was the intent of this research to learn how novice principals approach learning about school culture at a site where they have never worked before.
Utilizing a cross-case study design, grounded in a social constructivist lens, three principals including a first-year principal, second-year principal and third-year principal participated in two rounds of interviews. The first interview included a set of elements of culture developed by Wagner (1998) that looked at \textit{what} these novice principals knew about the culture at their sites. The second round of interviews looked at these same questions, but probed for \textit{how} they learned about each component respectively. Interviews were transcribed, coded based on the framework developed by Wildy and Clark (2008b) which includes \textit{place, people, system}, and \textit{self}. Subthemes were also identified, and data were compared across cases and within each case.

Results include the acknowledgment that novice principals utilize a variety of approaches to learn about school culture. A majority of these approaches include informal learning such as previous experiences, exposure due to an active presence, and situational learning within the context of place and time. Trial and error, as well as on the job learning, were highly prevalent across interview responses, as well as the identified approaches of observations, purposeful communication, asking questions, listening attentively, and seeking to understand. It is important to continue to build our understanding of how novice principals approach their learning of school culture. Insight into \textit{how, when, and why} novice principals engage in this learning holds potential for informing and improving school culture, principal preparation, and the development of novice principals in their early years in the position.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

In Michael Abrashoff’s book, *It’s Your Ship: Management Techniques from the Best Damn Ship in the Navy* (2012), he highlights the importance of the ability of leaders to identify the cultural elements, especially the norms, of a new work site. This has resonated with me, specifically with its application to educational leadership. In his book, Abrashoff asks a simple question - “Why is it done this way?” - to understand the rationale for various procedures, methods and norms that characterized the culture of the “organization” he commanded - the USS *Benfold*, his first sea command.

When principals are new to the position, they already deal with a multitude of tasks; looking at how this transition and acclimation occurs may be valuable in supporting aspiring principals (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 433). When principals are new to their schools, they utilize approaches to identify the cultural elements of their site, just as Abrashoff did. We know that novice principals require support in order to become successful (Lochmiller, 2014, p. 59). The issue is that we know *what* novice principals need to know, but we don’t know *how* they should acquire these skills and the knowledge necessary to be successful school leaders (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 305; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, p. 481). It is the intention of this research to identify the approaches that principals are using to identify and understand these cultural
components, in order to provide insight for aspiring leaders and current beginning principals.

**Background of the Study**

Novice principals are “positioned at the apex of a school’s organizational pyramid” (Northfield, 2014, p. 414) and are required to lead, while still establishing themselves as credible, trustworthy and qualified (p. 410). The novice principal’s role is complex, and often times even poorly defined, while also being extremely isolating (Swen, 2019, 3), yet, the expectation is that these individuals still build their identity as a leader and drive a school forward. While doing this, they also have to fit into the organization and understand that organization. To be a leader means “utilizing social influences process to organize, direct, and motivate the actions of others (p. 433). To do this, however, one must understand that organization. This process of understanding is part of the socialization process that novice principals undergo (Crow, 2007, p. 69). If the learning of culture is inaccurate, there is the possibility of preventing or, at least, inhibiting the ability to impact and lead the school effectively (Daresh, 1986, p. 168). Therefore, having a finger on the pulse of the culture of a school as a newly appointed leader matters and thus needs to be understood, and even more so, prepared for.

Much of the research on newly appointed principals focuses on three themes, including key challenges, induction programs, and practices utilized for leading and managing (Galdames et al., 2018, p. 322), but there has been minimal research on the process, methods, and strategies that these beginning principals use to grapple with cultural understandings (Spillane, Harris, Jones & Mertz, 2015, p. 1068) before
implementation of such practices. Since principals have such a large impact on student achievement, and their roles rely on so many skills, continuing to seek to better understand their role is imperative (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 728). Being the leader of the school organization comes with multiple challenges. This research will be approached from the perspective of school leadership being important. Though there are a multitude of leadership styles, for the purposes of this study, those leadership styles will not be discussed, but will be accepted as influential and important in the role of novice principals.

Pre-placement training is offered, if not mandatory, in many places, but ultimately on-the-job learning seems to provide the most meaningful growth. Many school systems are finding their new principals are lacking the needed skills and competencies to be successful (Crawford, 2012, p. 279). “The early phase of school leadership marks the beginning of building relationships and developing trust with staff members while also navigating issues related to power” (Northfield, 2013, p. 173); thus, this formative time must be purposefully, yet delicately executed. At its current status, many school leaders reflect on their transition as “doing 1,000 things at the same time without having the feeling that they have a good grip on what to do” (Karstanje & Webber, 2018, p. 742). The context to which a new leader transitions is believed to impact their actions and thus effectiveness (Hallinger, 2005, p. 235). How they are socialized can substantially impact their success, as the school responds based on the trust and authentic relationships that the principal develops (Petzko, 2008, p. 229). This research will be grounded in the literature currently in the field regarding novice principals and the
approaches they use to learn and understand school culture, which has been identified as a crucial component of building capacity successfully (Harvey, 1991, p. 28).

**Statement of the Problem**

In the recent past, school districts have become far more structured in their development of school leaders, developing pipelines, mentorships, formal training programs, and levels of support in practice. Based on preliminary research, there is a significant amount of work that has been done with school principals and the challenges they face (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 432). However, minimal attention has focused on the beginning principal and the methods used to overcome common challenges including, more specifically, the approach to learning the culture at the new school site (Hart, 1991, p. 68; Petzko, 2008, p. 225). It is important to note that there were minimal disagreements in perspectives on novice principals and school culture across the literature reviewed; however, some identified issues and sources of problems they faced when assuming their role. Other novice principals presented more solutions-based perspectives. Additionally, some literature focused on the preparation of novices while others focused on the transition, and the remainder focused on the on-going negotiations of culture, identity, and organizational understanding. Ultimately, “culture influences everything that happens in schools” (Wagner, 2006, p. 42), yet there is a lack of understanding on how novice principals can determine the status of that culture and ultimately understand it (p. 42).

**Purpose of the Study**

“Both leadership and organizational culture can positively and significantly affect the operation of learning organizations” (Chang & Lee, 2017, p. 155). Thus, leaders
have an implied power that can ultimately improve the success and achievement of organizational outcomes (Chang & Lee, 2017, p. 160). Principals who have a history of being more influential in impacting school culture have been found to be more transformational than transactional (Lee & Li, 2015, p. 4). However, this line of research is more related to their means of implementing school culture change, rather than how they came to understand that culture. Since there is such a connection between culture and leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p. 113; Langston, McClain, Stewart, & Walseth, 1998, p. 3), it is important to look at this relationship. This may be due to the idea that cultural norms are implicit and often taken for granted and are, therefore, challenging to identify (Wildy & Clarke, 2012, p. 71). It may also be due to the claim that school cultures are ‘weak’ (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, p. 25). It may also be rooted in the perspective that there is a presence of multiple sub-cultures and therefore the possibility of multiple meanings within a school (p. 5), making it difficult to identify a single, overarching culture. I believe there is a gap in our understanding of how novice principals identify and understand cultural norms when placed at a new school site. Although preparation programs for aspiring principals have both increased and improved, developing novice principals’ skills in understanding pre-existing cultural norms is a challenge and is rarely discussed (Langston et al., 1998, p. 4).

A translated Chinese proverb positions the importance of culture well, stating “it takes ten years to nurture a tree, but it may take up to one hundred to educate a man” (Lee & Li, 2015, p. 3) which offers insight into how fragile culture can be and how time plays a crucial factor in understanding, supporting, and building it. Simply, culture has the capacity to limit the possible effect that a principal can have (Harvey, 1991, p. 20).
To ensure culture does not limit potential positive impact, novice principals should maintain dialogue with all school participants, resist using their position of power, apply strategies of principled negotiation, collaborate collegially, and share a commitment to learning and understanding (Harvey, 1991, p. 32). Ultimately, leaders are responsible to shape the defined reality, meanings, beliefs, and expectations of their school staff (Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman & Simieou, 2010, p. 4; Hart, 1993, p. 67). Therefore, learning the culture they are impacting matters (Chang & Lee, 2007, p. 156). Being a novice principal is no easy task and brings great challenges (García-Garduño, Slater, & López-Gorosave, 2011, p. 103), but it also comes with great potential. Culture, after all, was present in the school before the new principal arrived and will be there after he or she is gone (Deal & Peterson, 1990). We need quality educational leaders that can meet and overcome these challenges (Bengtson, 2013, p. 143).

The purpose of this study is to identify the approaches that novice principals use to identify and understand the culture at their school site.

**Research Question**

Of particular interest to me are the experiences of novice elementary school principals, stepping into new leadership roles in new schools. This process of participation in cultural meaning making, while being a novice, offers a unique opportunity for supporting aspiring leaders. The following question will guide this research: What approaches are used by novice principals to understand school culture?

This question will guide the identification of literature for review as well as act as a focusing point for instrument identification, research design and conceptual framework.
development. In order to frame who novice principals are, the unique conditions and culture that impact them, this question will facilitate the framing of this research. “To devise appropriate change strategies, on arrival at a new school, the principal needs to understand the culture” (Galdames, Montecinos, Camps, Adumada, & Leiva, 2018, p. 321). Therefore, the first stage of changing school culture is understanding school culture.

**Definition of Terms**

**Case:** “a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context” (Yin, 2003, p. 13)

**Culture:** “the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning” (Wildy & Clarke, 2012, p. 65).

**Method:** a particular procedure for accomplishing or approaching something, especially a systematic or established one (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.).

**Novice:** when one is new to or inexperienced in a job or situation (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.).

**Strategy:** a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.).

**Research Design Overview**

As defined by Yin, design is “the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research question and, ultimately, to its conclusion” (2002, p. 13).
This study will be a cross-case analysis, using semi-structured interviews to gain perspective on the lived experiences of three to six novice elementary school principals. The interviews will occur in two separate stages. In stage one, participants were asked 21 questions that are based on the school culture assessment adapted by Wagner and O’Phelan (1998). During this first interview, participants will identify various elements of culture in their school. These interviews were then transcribed and shared with the participants respectively, as a method of member checking, as well as providing the opportunity for reflection. In stage two, a second interview was conducted that expands on each of these 21 questions, asking participants to describe how they learned about their schools’ cultures (i.e., approaches and experiences they had in which they came to understand each specific aspect of their school culture) with a few supplemental questions aligned to the identified framework. Through this scaffolding data collection and analysis, there is potential for a rich set of outcomes to be identified.

**Significance of the Study**

Novice principals are faced with common issues including a multitude of tasks, isolationism, feelings of ultimate responsibility, local, state, and district demands and much more. All of these factors are deeply rooted in the appropriate interpersonal professional abilities of said principal (Cowie & Crawford, 2006, p. 682). These same interpersonal skills traverse into identifying culture since it situates the novice principal as a factor in the on-going negotiation of culture and therefore the understanding of it. In order to be successful with implementing change, the current culture must be understood. This learning process and the means that novice principals use to understand school culture matter, and thus hold tremendous value for multiple
educational stakeholders including preparation programs, districts, mentors, and aspiring school administrators. As we continue to develop preparatory programs, and as novice principals continue to improve their own skills, the results from this research may add to the field of what we know about novice principals and their critical stage of transition and learning of the cultural context in which they are situated.

“The experience of being a leader arises from a complex interplay of personal ideologies, relationships with staff (and significant others), and the demands of the school situation” (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 735) and ultimately these experiences dictate the way in which a novice principal will act and implement best practices. Relationship building has been identified as essential for improving school culture, and the first-year processes come from building those relationships to first learn about the culture that exists (Gentilucci, Denti & Guaglioneone, 2013, p. 81). In order to inform the preparation of aspiring leaders, as well as strengthen the impact of current novices, it is important to learn from the experiences and lived histories of others currently going through the learning process. From this insight, aspiring principals will develop a functional knowledge of the approaches that they can use to better understand the cultures at their respective future school sites. This will offer insight into how they come to understand school culture more specifically.

**Conceptual Framework**

Individuals are interdependent and occupy roles that are dynamic and rely on the ongoing negotiation of context (Rogoff et al., 1995, p. 54). John Dewey states “the living creature is a part of the world…making itself secure in its precarious dependences only as it intellectually identifies itself with the changes about it…shapes its own activities
accordingly” (Dewey, 1916, p. 393). This ongoing negotiation of meaning helps justify the qualitative case study strategy in which the person, place, and time all impact the approaches utilized by the novice principal. This highly contextual study therefore may be limited in its transferability of findings. However, the approaches and critical reflection by participants hold potential in building a foundation for aspiring principals to think about coming to understand a school’s culture.

Grounding this research in a framework that has been supported by notable researchers in the field is important. Therefore, after an in-depth review of the literature, I will be using a framework developed by Wildy and Clarke (2008; 2010) which is based on the reflection of beginning principals. From this perspective, four focal points were identified which include place, people, system, and self. This “framework is grounded in the conditions of the school as a complex workplace” (Wildy & Clarke, 2010, p. 14) and is therefore fundamentally descriptive by nature. By being descriptive, the context and specific methods of response will be analyzed inductively and thoroughly. Therefore, it is the intention of this work to seek to understand the novice principal and the approaches used to understand culture (Murphy & Hallinger, 1987, p. 250). This will offer further insight into how principals come to understand school culture.

“Having the knowledge and understanding of place means that school leaders are able to read the complexities of their context, especially the people, the problems, and issues, as well as the culture of the school and community…” (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 13). Within this focus, being contextually literate and aware of the circumstances and situation of placement has value. Due to this analysis of context, understanding of place must be understood from an insider perspective (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 555). This
helps justify the decision to use interviews as the primary data collection method. For novice principals, context of place holds even more influence since it includes components of social, economic, political, and geographic factors (Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, p. 481).

“Having the knowledge, understanding, and skill to deal with people means that school leaders are able to handle a range of complex interactions on a day-to-day basis with diverse constituent groups…” (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 13). Within this category, there is a focus on more than knowledge of managing people, but rather the skill to navigate situations related to human capital. This skill requires confidence, determination, and political sophistication; all of which are rooted in interpersonal skills (Cowie & Crawford, 2008, p. 682; Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 730). These skills reflect elements of self-awareness, strength in fostering relationships, and communication savviness. Whether this be trust-building, intentional communication, actionable response, or creating buy-in and working with stakeholders and faculty, this skill often is connected with elements of emotional investment (Northfield, 2014, p. 423).

“Having the knowledge, understanding and skill to deal with the education authority, or system as it tends to be termed…means that school leaders are able to navigate their way through complex…regulations, policies and protocols” (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, pp. 13-14). Within this domain, the novice principal must exhibit organizational sophistication. Learning and understanding the organization and system that it exhibits include the navigation and understanding of the key values and practices (Harvey, 1991, p. 5) within the education system broadly as well as at the specific placement sit. More specifically, this can include the shared ideas, customs and
traditions, assumptions, and philosophies, as well as the behaviors and thoughts of all those included (Langston et al., 1998, p. 6).

“Looking after the self means having the personal resilience for the job…novice principals face the challenge of their new appointment in terms of the cost to their confidence, self-efficacy, and ability to manage multiple and competing pressures” (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 14). The fourth category of self includes the need for new principals to have both leadership and managerial skills, in order to address the multitude of responsibilities that are embedded in their role (Northfield, 2014, p. 420). How novice principals situate themselves and build their foundation will determine much of what happens within their organization and this who they are and how they identify themselves deserves attention. This includes their mindset, values, reputation, focus, and much more.

This conceptual lens will facilitate the analysis of data just as it has shaped the selection of aligned texts (Hallinger, 2013, p. 132). Aligning to the research question, this perspective has also impacted the interconnections of review as well as the interpretation of such work. “The focal points of the framework with their emphasis on people, context and self may be attributed to the understanding that organisations and more specifically schools are socially constructed” (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 14). Because of this social construct, these novice principals are also influencing the organization that they are learning about. Clarke and Wildy’s framework was specifically designed to consider ‘what is’ as opposed to ‘what ought to be’ (2010, p. 14) which aligns to the purpose of this research. Each of these four components, place, people, system,
and self will be used to thematically code transcriptions as well as will support the identification of the interview protocol.

It is important to note that Bolman and Deal presented a similar conceptual framework (2017). Rooted in experience outside of education but transcending into education specific texts, Bolman and Deal’s framework presents an alternative to place as structure. From their perspective, “organizations…need different structures in order to be effective in their unique environment” (2017, p. xii). Replacing people, Bolman and Deal use the term relations and relationships citing the need for organizations to collaborate with multiple stakeholders (2017, p. 96). Instead of system, the focus is on politics and how this “political frame views organizations as roiling arenas, hosting ongoing contests arising from individual and group interests” (2017, p. 184). Lastly, replacing self, Bolman and Deal present the frame of symbolism in which this “frame focuses on how myth and symbols help humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live. Meaning, belief, and faith are its central concerns” (2017, p. 236). Though this framework, composed of structure, relations and relationships, politics, and symbolism, will not be used specifically, the ideas presented in their work help support and validate the framework being used by Clarke and Wildy.

Researcher Positionality

As the researcher I bring my own bias to this study. This positionality is due to my own lived experiences, my identity, and my paradigm. These factors thus determine how I see the world, and therefore how I interact with the participants and the data. As an administrator myself, working towards the principalship, I am specifically attracted to the way by which we prepare our school-based leaders. During my 2\textsuperscript{nd} year teaching
and 3rd year teaching, I had the opportunity to work under the direction of two different novice principals respectively. Recognizing their struggles to identify and understand the culture at their sites was of particular interest to me. I have worked in a variety of capacities in elementary schools, including teaching students in grades PreK to 5th, and now in an administrative assistant principal role.

Since beginning my dissertation proposal, I have assumed an assistant principal position at a site that I have never worked at before. This transition happened in November of 2018 and therefore months after school began. This delay in transition presents unique challenges, but places even more pressure on quickly learning about “the ways things are done here.” I therefore experiment daily using my own approaches to come to understand the culture at this elementary school. My own experience in transition, socialization, and organizational cultural learning positions me in a similar perspective to my participants, that of a learner. During the course of my interviews, I will identify myself and my similar situation, as a means to identify with the participant, but in an effort to keep the focus on my participants, it will be made clear that my intention is to learn about them and their experiences. By identifying myself in a similar context, there is a possibility of being more relatable with my participants. This may impact outcomes of interviews, hopefully positively as participants may feel a situational affinity with the interviewer.

Throughout my scholarly pursuit of educational leadership journey, I was constantly attracted to what culture is, how organizations are impacted by culture, and more specifically how the organizational leader interacts with that culture. This interest led me to pursuing cognates within my coursework that viewed organizations from the
business perspective. These experiences have sculpted my perspective and will thus impact my research.

Assumptions

Since this study will be collecting data from participants, there is an accepted assumption that the novice principals being interviewed have knowledge about the topics of novice principals as well as school culture. Just as with any qualitative study that incorporates interviews, respondents may not be 100% truthful for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, being uncomfortable, political rationales, issues of power, concerns of vulnerability and more. However, the perspectives that participants provide will be assumed to be true and accurate.

Delimitations

For the purposes of this research, I will not include how novice principals change the culture of their school since I believe this is a separate set of skills compared to identifying and understanding the culture. I will also only be looking at novice principals in one specific district for ease of access as well as to keep consistent the impact of culture at the district level. Though there are a multitude of factors affecting culture in schools, by keeping the district consistent, there is one more variable that will be common and consistent. Additionally, I will not be looking at middle schools, high schools, or K-8 schools, only elementary schools. The way in which schools operate at different grade levels can also impact culture, and I therefore wanted to remove that factor as well. I will also only be looking at schools that have been open for a minimum of one year. Schools that have just opened are still building their culture and therefore the principal aids in the creation of it more so than coming to understand it.
Importance of the Study

Understanding the means by which novice principals come to understand the culture at their schools has huge potential in not only bettering the practice through critical self-reflection of the participants but also for providing a toolbox of approaches for aspiring and beginning principals looking to improve their practice. By conducting interviews with three principals who are in their first three years at their school sites, this research will develop an understanding of how culture is learned and understood. “Culture influences everything that happens in school” (Wagner & O’Phelan, 1999, p. 5); therefore, understanding how novice principals approach such an influential piece of their new role deserves the attention that has often been overlooked (Wagner, 2006, p. 41; Wagner & O’Phelan, 1998, p. 3).

Chapter Summary

The means by which novice principals transition into their new role includes a multitude of factors that have the ability to define the identify of that individual. Identifying and understanding the culture at their new site is a large factor in this identity and thus deserves attention. In order to better understand the approaches that novice elementary school principals use as a means to understand school culture, a cross-case analysis study will be conducted, using a two-stage interview process. Approaching the analysis of how novice principals come to understand the culture at their new work site will be rooted in the conceptual lens presented by Clarke and Wildy (2010). Within this lens, school culture can be categorized into four key elements which include place, people, system, and self (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 13). By identifying the approaches that novice principals use to understand school culture, we are able to
support the preparation and development of aspiring leaders. In Chapter 2, this work will be situated within the literature currently available related to novice principals and how novice principals interact with school culture.
CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

The ongoing negotiation of school culture and meaning making carried out by novice principals is a process that has not been researched very much. Looking specifically at the how of this meaning making process, with specific approaches, has the ability to better prepare aspiring principals. This omission offers the opportunity to fill a void. However, there are multiple sources that discuss school culture, novice principals, and points of reference on culture and leadership from the business world.

Review Strategy

“Reviews of research play a crucial role in the advancement of knowledge by highlighting milestones of progress along particular lines of inquiry” (Hallinger, 2013, p. 127). Therefore, with the exception of any identified landmark resources, my focus was on literature produced in the last 15 years. Traditionally, literature is used from a smaller timeframe, but given the uniqueness and specificity of learning school culture, the window for available references was broadened.

Literature available was delimited based on a few components. The University of South Florida Libraries general keyword search was used including a variety of databases, such as: Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, SAGE, and Web of Science. Searches included the following keywords: leadership and organizational culture, principal leadership and school culture, and
novice, beginning and new principals. Cross-referencing resources within selected sources found resulted in additional searches by author or source.

While reading, texts were annotated based on themes which emerged from the reading while being recorded on a separate tracking form. As themes were collected, they were sorted and each consecutive text with the same theme was then added to the tracking form. A method similar to coding was then utilized to sort the identified themes into groups which later became the sections for this review (Saldaña, 2015, pp. 9-10). Within this search, gaps and pockets of research were identified (Hallinger, 2013, p. 127) since the omissions in current literature relating to organizational culture and novice principals carry potential for this work. Counter arguments were also sought after with the intention of presenting contrasting perspectives as well as updated findings from specific authors.

I was particularly alert for cases that describe the experiences of new principals, principals transitioning to new schools, and principals’ experiences with learning about school culture. Though few articles were noted in the specific field of new principals’ approaches to learning culture, there was still a substantial amount of literature that included components of the two pieces, with two key pieces being directly related (Harvey, 1991; Langston et al., 1998). After identifying an initial set of texts, commonly referenced texts and authors were then identified and added as part of the review. One example of this was the commonly referenced text by Walker and Qian (2006) in which the common struggles of beginning principals were identified and elaborated on with how the struggling tasks are managed in different schools.
The literature that was reviewed and synthesized was based on empirical findings and then the implications of those findings, as they related to novice principals and school culture. The identified literature was “evaluated, analyzed, and synthesized” (Hallinger, 2013, p. 130) based on what was explicitly and implicitly stated as well as what was omitted given the focus of this work. This research will be situated within the literature aligned to the guiding questions and the purpose of this study. By critiquing the work of others, I am able to identify gaps, omissions, and factors that I will consider when developing my own research design. Within this framing, I am also able to ensure that my work has the potential in contributing to the field of novice principals and organizational culture.

**Organization of the Review**

The review begins by navigating literature related to the pre-service preparation of novice principals and how their preparation can influence their transition context. The common challenges are then discussed, as many of the trials and tribulations are shared by most novices. This foundation is followed by looking at experiential learning of school culture, individual sense-making, and finally collaborative interactions. Not all authors shared the same beliefs about these topics, so various counter-arguments are embedded to show the various perspectives present. Based on this thorough review of the related literature, a methodological approach will be elaborated on in Chapter 3, paving the way for the means of data gathering and analysis, validating this work. From the findings, it is the hope that various approaches, and ways of cultural meaning making will be identified and shared for aspiring novice leaders preparing for their new role.
The approaches by which novice principals come to understand school culture is not exclusive amongst other strategies utilized at the start of novices’ careers but does require specific attention when discussing this pivotal transition. School culture will be discussed based on the framework presented by Clarke & Wildy (2010) which situates school culture within four focal points including place, people, system, and self. Additionally, experienced principals will only be discussed in comparison with new principals, as the intention is to focus on principals that are new to their position as well as new to the school site. A literature review was conducted in order to better understand the work and findings currently available. Additionally, though the focus was on United States, many other countries were identified and discussed from around the world, including but not limited to Australia, Japan, and United Kingdom.

**Novice Principals**

Preparing novice principals prior to their appointment is the first step in the administrative journey. Many districts implement mentorships, induction, and trainings to support these individuals which not only prepare them for a smooth transition, but also serve as a method of decreasing attrition rates (Simieou, Decman, Grigsby, & Schumacher, 2010, p. 7). Novice principals often undergo a process referred to as “reality shock” as they go through a critical period of “entry and encounter” (Spillane & Lee, 2014, pp. 433-434). During this crucial transition, new principals experience a change in relationships, and they face many common obstacles such as professional isolation, dealing with the remnant culture, comparisons to their predecessors, resistant staff, budget management issues, as well as the need to address a multitude of circumstances that arise on a daily basis (Spillane & Lee, 2014, pp. 435-436).
For the purpose of this review, *novice principals* will refer to individuals who are new to the role of the principalship. Becoming a principal for the first time is an exciting time that is exhilarating, inspiring, as well as a notable accomplishment. At the same time complex and difficult challenges come with this new role (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). One must learn a role and the work of that role in a context, culture, and circumstances with which one might be unfamiliar. This learning process is of particular interest to me, as I believe it can impact a novice principal’s success in leadership.

According to Weindeling, principals go through seven stages of development and transition through principalship (as cited in Bush, Bell, Bolam, Glatter, & Ribbons, 1999, pp. 90-101). These stages are presented in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Prior to headship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Entry and encounter</td>
<td>First months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Taking hold</td>
<td>Three to 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reshaping</td>
<td>Second year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Refinement</td>
<td>Years three to four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Consolidation</td>
<td>Years five to seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Plateau</td>
<td>Years eight and onwards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these stages, there is different learning that happens at different points in the transition to principalship. Through these stages of development, principals are expected to learn and act quickly, as their first months on the job are extremely formative, and thus essential to their success (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 431; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 338). Therefore, approaching this delicate time, novice principals should be prepared for as much as possible.
Pre-Service Preparation

Before principals assume their positions, there are a variety of backgrounds from which they can come and that can therefore impact the way they carry out their new role. This can include transition from an assistant principal position, teacher leader, teacher, or other situations. These factors do not exist within a vacuum but rather are connected to both internal and external forces (Crow & Whiteman, 2016, p. 123).

Regardless of the specific context from which this transition originates, preparing new principals and supporting their on-going development is imperative for their success and the school’s success (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987, p. 55; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008, p. 9). Because of this influence, there has been a great deal of attention given to how schools go about attracting, screening, recruiting, and developing future leaders, as well as the resources that are provided for such efforts (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 432).

Since school principals are the front-line leaders and managers of their sites, systems of support and preparation must be effective in setting them up for success (Hess & Kelly, 2007, p. 2; Karstanje & Webber, 2008, p. 741). This preparation has been tasked to school districts, university-based programs and to alternative pathways. For the purposes of this review, I have adopted the definition of preparation as “the period from initial exploration of a principal’s position by the candidate to the point of taking up the appointment” (Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, p. 469). Multiple researchers have confirmed the importance of such training and support systems (Simieou et al., 2010, p. 2), with some states going as far as mandating the implementation of principal preparation programs through state statute as in Texas, California, Illinois, South
Carolina, and Indiana (Hallinger, & Wimpelberg, 1992, p. 10; Simeieou et al., 2010, p. 2). Hess and Kelly (2007) clearly articulate why this is so important:

School leadership is the key to school improvement. School principals are the front-line managers, the small business executives, the team leaders charged with leading their faculty to new levels of effectiveness. In this new era of educational accountability, where school leaders are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results and use data to drive decisions, the skill and knowledge of principals matter more than ever. (p. 2)

Since 2009, principal preparation programs have expanded with an increased understanding of preparation curriculum, pedagogy for developing strong leaders, and improved avenues for implementation of rigorous internships (Crow & Whiteman, 2016, p. 137). Still, there seems to be a mismatch between the importance of preparing these leaders and the actual programs that are providing such knowledge and skills.

This misalignment traversed the research as an issue, pointing to multiple sources of the problem, while providing few solutions. The expected intention of these programs, for example, is to equip principals with the skills to address school-specific challenges, related to standards-based instructional support, as well as the overall attainment of academic achievement for all students (Sorenson, 2005, p. 62). “More than ever, it is paramount for school districts to respond to these challenges by preparing their leaders and providing support for leadership and school success” (Simieou et al., 2010, p. 1). Unfortunately, that paramount need is unmatched with quality options for aspiring principals. “The majority of educational administration programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country’s leading
universities” (Hess & Kelly, 2007, p. 3). This same perspective was also noted in Art Levine’s text, *Educating School Leaders*, in which he stated that there has become a major concern in regard to the quality of the programs as a majority of them “range from inadequate to appalling and that many university-based programs are engaged in a counterproductive race to the bottom in which they compete for students by lowering admission standards, water down coursework and offering faster and less demanding degrees” (as cited in Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone, 2008, p. 690; Petzko, 2008, p. 224). This downward spiral transcended most of the texts included, as it seems to be rampant across the country and therefore highly prevalent in the literature. Considering the deeply complex organizational context and difficult task of being a school leader, the need for better preparing the individuals entering this role is understandable (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 9). Accepting that these programs are doing a poor job at preparing aspiring principals to be successful is unacceptable. Though there has been a call to change in the recent past, little evidence has been produced that shows any value added (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003, p. 469; Crow & Whiteman, 2016, p. 121; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 28).

The theory, skills, experiences, and perspectives that are used to support the training of principals, matter as they enter their new position. Feedback has been provided by many new principals who express frustration and concern for the fact they feel they do not fully understand the nature of the work they are required to do before assuming their new roles (Daresh & Playko, 1994, p. 36; Karstanje & Webber, 2018, p. 742). “Diploma mills” have been a factor in this reflection from ill-prepared novice principals (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 304). Unfortunately, very little of the literature
related to novice principals point to solutions-based discourse. This gap in research may be one of the issues behind the misalignment of preparation and practice. Wildy and Clarke (2008) do provide some suggestions on this topic as they argue that “leadership development programmes would benefit from including knowledge about social, economic, political and geographic features of school settings, how communities work and how principals can work effectively with community partners in their preparation programs for these aspiring leaders” (p. 481).

Additionally, providing training in the areas of both theoretical and practical skills was identified as a need, since many reflecting principals identified their need to “feel their way through” the early years of their principalship (Simieou et al., 2010, p. 2) and a sink or swim experience as it relates to socialization (Armstrong, 2012, p. 410; Rooney, 2000, p. 77). It appears that there has been minimal attention directed toward the skills that novices need to be successful (Petzko, 2008, p. 225) which include skills related to culture-building, financial management, legal knowledge, human resource management, impact of transition and succession, dealing with issues of isolationism, developing cultural competencies, as well as managing the multitude of tasks that principals face on a regular basis. A theoretical understanding of what being a principal means and how to lead an organization has value. Difficulties exist in the application of this theoretical training, when minimal practical leadership experiences are present and “knowing what works” doesn’t 100% align to the day to day operations (Beam, Claxton, & Smith, 2016, p. 156). To counteract this struggle, Clark and Wildy (2010, p. 10) believe that aspiring leaders should engage in a myriad of activities that they expect to transpire daily which allow them to translate their learned theory into practice, in a
meaningful way. Based on these ideas and claims, programs could have potential
growth opportunities in the avenues of teaching and training more technical skills such
as interpersonal skills including human-relational problem solving, relationship building,
effective communication, and styles of leaderships (Nelson et al., 2008, p. 697).

There are approximately 500 principal preparation programs presented in
formats such trainings, college courses, and orientations that are offered across the
country, with some being mandated by state statute. However, many of these programs
are doing a poor job at preparing our future leaders and are being coined “race to the
bottom” (Crow, 2006, p. 312; Petzko, 2008, p. 224) and principals feel ill-prepared when
entering their new role (Cowie & Crawford, 2008, p. 684). These preparation programs
primarily focus on the needed skills and knowledge to be successful, but often omit
many of the practical skills needed to be effective (Bengtson, Zepeda, & Parylo, 2013,
p. 144; Crow, 2006, p. 319). Many authors have pointed towards the need for pre-
service internships (Daresh & Playko, 1992, p. 6), mentors (Lockmiller, 2014, p. 60),
and on-going support once the principal transitions into the position. Ultimately, many
have decided that we know what beginning principals needed to know prior to entering
their position, but we struggle to know how beginning principals can acquire these skills
and knowledge before placement (Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, p. 481). One possible source
for this issue is the limited empirical work that exists linking credentialing program
elements with principal performance (Crow & Whiteman, 2016, p. 121; Davis & Darling-
Hammond, 2012, p. 28; Mentz, Webber, & van der Walt, 2010, p. 155) which identifies a
possible gap between research, preparation, and implementation. Referenced in the
landmark piece by Harvey (1991), “there is usually little treatment of the strategy
whereby the new principal will enter the school and establish a presence that has potential for educational leadership” (p. 6). Strategy provides opportunity for direction moving forward; these historically underperforming programs should better align their curriculum with what principals need (Crow & Whiteman, 2016, pp 127-128; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 26).

Novice principals must be equipped with needed competencies such as “setting organizational, team and individual goals, networking with outside groups, understanding and utilizing decision-making structures and team, organizational structures, position and relationships, and the external environment” (Mentz et al., 2010, p. 158). These factors, and many more, all contribute to the multitude of variables that impact the novice principal in a variety of ways (Armstrong, 2012, p. 405). Though it was not discussed in much of the literature, including the component of adult learning as a skill for aspiring principals holds potential in improving the complex work that school leadership requires (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 10). The perspective of a teacher does not prepare new leaders to tackle the multitude of challenges, nor the skills to work with adults in the same capacity as a principal does, and therefore preparation must look different and address the side of things related to managing and leading adults (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987, p. 55). Additionally, the environment in which novice principals operate will always be changing as the policy context, time, and place of their assignment changes (Crawford, 2012, p. 287). Therefore, novice principals must not only adapt themselves, but also their organization. To do so requires and understanding of the organization and the culture that occupies it.
Impact of Transition Context

“The first year of the appointment of a newly promoted principal is a critical moment, not only for the career of a promising educator, but also for the continuity of school operations” (Harvey, 1991, p. 5), and therefore the first year is a demanding career transition (Harvey, 1991, p. 6). This transition includes the passage through a variety of spatial and temporal boundaries and cultures that define identities, interactions, and much more (Armstrong, 2012, p. 399). Preparation for school-specific context was noted as being very important (Bengtson et al., 2013, p. 144), and since every school presents a different situation into which new principals enter, it is important to reflect on and plan for this context. This varying transitional landscape makes it difficult for preparation programs to prepare principals for their specific next steps, since there are so many possibilities. These varying conditions can include aspects of poverty, racial dynamics, community expectations, lingering legacy, school performance and much more (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 433). “Crossing over to the principal’s office represents a shift in perspective, expectations and work as the newcomer assumes a multifaceted job that spans instructional, managerial and political realms (Spillane, Harris, Jones & Mertz, 2015, p. 1069).

The work done by Armstrong (2012) articulates this transition which includes four phases (p. 405), of which the first three will be discussed as they focus specifically on the early stages of novice leadership. The first phase includes entry-exit, in which the aspiring leader plans for their new role, seeks exposure to leadership opportunities, begins to be socialized and develops his/her own competencies informally (pp. 406-408). The second phase includes immersion-emersion which begins when the novice
leader crosses over the administrative threshold during the first weeks of appointment. During this time, the appointee gains organizational perspective and begins the ‘sink or swim’ experience of being a novice (pp. 409-411). The third phase is disintegration-reintegration, which begins during the end of the first year and beginning of the second year for novice leaders. This phase “evolved out of the cumulative stresses of the transition and socialization passage” (p. 413). This phase includes the personal experience of change physically, cognitively, and emotionally based on experiential learning and critical reflection. Each one of these categorized stages signifies the ongoing negotiation of identity and relations with others during this critical time of transition.

One typical mistake novice principals make is applying previously used solutions in their new appointment, while lacking the appreciation of the unique context they are now in; therefore, they often struggle with successful implementation (Harvey, 1991, p. 14). It is possible, however, for programs to equip future leaders with the skills they need to identify and understand whatever circumstance they come across. One example of this preparation could include presenting scenarios that include these common mistakes, to allow aspiring leaders to identify, reflect, and develop an alternative plan given similar circumstances. Preparing first-year principals to address transition and succession issues may have incredible significance (Rooney, 2000, p. 77) since avoiding some common mistakes can strengthen the solid foundation that principals create for themselves and their schools. One specific example of this is represented in the work done by Spillane et al. (2015) in which some novice principals entered schools where the school’s legitimacy was under attack while others entered
schools where there was not threat. Being cognizant of this factor before assuming the role, allows for the incoming novice principal to proactively develop an action plan to “repair and rebuild their schools organisational legitimacy” while the group entering the alternative with no threat was only tasked with “maintaining legitimacy” (p. 1079).

Context of transition, matters.

The “making of a principal” is a delicate and long process that includes multiple critical components, including the socialization to the “community of practice and assumptions of a new role identity” as well as critical reflection (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003, p. 470; Crow, 2007, p. 52). “Socialization is the process through which an individual acquires the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to perform a social role effectively” (Merton, 1968). Engaging in the socialization process in transition while negotiating leadership and management tensions as well as developing trust, novice principals must be purposeful and deliberate while they lay the foundation for their future relations (Northfield, 2013, p. 158). It is important to note that it was identified that anticipatory socializing, which is the first stage of developing leaders, prior to their placement, has been rarely researched in the United States (Crow, 2006, p. 322). The context in which principals’ transition occurs plays a crucial role in how they negotiate their role and identity.

Similar to the work done by Spillane et al. (2015), Crow and Glascock (1995) present three mechanisms in the process of socialization that novice principals undergo. Similar to entry-exit, Crow and Glascock identify exploration as the stage in which aspiring leaders seize the idea of a leadership role and the beginning of gathering feedback and exposure (1995, p. 25). Instead of immersion-emersion, Crow and
Glascock identify the second stage as *giving up on previous role*, which includes leaving behind a previous identity, accepting the new norms of the role, and role conception (p. 25). And lastly, instead of *disintegration-reintegration*, Crow and Glascock identify the third mechanism as *adjusting self and new role to each other*, in which the novice principal develops new relationships, changes perspectives, and adjusts how he/she interacts with others (p. 25). All three of these stages present parallels that provide context for this crucial transition and socialization period.

Promotion from within a school site is not the focus of this work; however, presenting the dichotomy of internal transition versus external hire presents an opportunity to shed light on the potential struggle. “Outsider succession does indeed result in more organizational change than does insider succession” (Hart, 1993, p. 71); therefore, the individuals responsible for hiring new principals must consider what they want for the future of a school when filling this position. Promotion from within can potentially present dysfunction due to internal rivalry while hiring outsiders presents the advantage of being disconnected from the social systems of interest groups and cliques (p. 71). Though outside hires are experienced educators (such as teachers, coaches, assistant principals, lead teachers, etc.), they are still outsiders or aliens to a school (Harvey, 1991, p. 6) and must recognize their position while navigating their relationships and decisions. To present a counter-argument, Spillane and Lee (2014) posed the idea that when novices transition from their own school site into the principal role, their early years may be eased since they (should) know a considerable amount about the school and context. However, the authors did identify the Catch-22 of the struggle in shift of perspective from previous social circles (pp. 455-456). They did
suggest the solution for external candidates to combat this internal promotion advantage being remedied simply by providing adequate time and access to information (p. 456).

“Organizational socialization begins upon appointment and is specific to the education context” (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 334). During the socialization process of assuming a principal position at a new site, there is a typical learning experience of identifying “how things are done here” including the intricacies of the school and its members (Crow, 2006, p. 318; Crow, 2007, p. 52; Daresh, 1986, p. 172; Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 18). Just as the similar situation found in the aforementioned case of Michael Abrashoff, when the question is asked, “Why is it done this way?”, the response that novice principals often come across is “because we’ve always done it that way” (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 301). It is important to note that when a new individual assumes the principal position, “the organizational environment significantly influences the socialization process” (Bengtson et al., 2013, p. 144) and therefore shapes the leader and his/her behaviors (Hallinger, 2005, p. 235; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 334). With this collaborative and influential relationship in mind, novice principals at a new site undergo a set of stages of socialization which include learning, adjusting, and stabilizing (Bengtson et al., 2013, p. 145).

Though some of this socialization occurs prior to the school placement during the aforementioned anticipatory stage, Hallinger and Snidvongs (2008) state there is a gap in the socialization expectations of leadership preparation programs and the reality of the job, once they begin (p. 27). Armstrong noted that the traditional perspective on socialization is problematic since it portrays organizations as monolithic and the
individual being socialized as passive (2012, p. 403). He offers the counter-argument that this interaction is mutual and the engagement with one another (organization and self) occurs simultaneously as each accommodate each other. Additionally, both personal and organizational socialization require novice principals to contribute to their own learning (Crow, 2007, p. 63). This idea is found in other works when discussing the mutual meaning making of culture as well (Beam et al., 2016, p. 145; Crow, 2007, p. 53; Weick, Sutcliffe, Obstfeld, 2005). Spillane et al. (2015) did pose a counter argument to the idea of this multiple-party construction and suggest the perspective of the situation as being a product of the practice (p. 1071). Grounded in an emergent phenomenon, this idea claims the principal’s actions are defined by the experience and setting, as opposed to the creation of meaning from the participants.

Two forms of socialization are occurring when novice principals take on their new role. The first form is professional socialization in which the individual gains knowledge as to what it means to be a leader in their specific role, including the application of personal experiences and formal learning. During this phase, aspiring leaders undergo preparation programs, experience principalship first-hand, reflect on observations, and learn from mentors and models (Crawford, 2012, p. 281; Crawford & Cowie, 2012, p. 180). Wildy and Clarke (2008) believe that there exists a great need for novice principals to engage in professional socialization (p. 480). The second form is organizational socialization in which the individual acquires knowledge, values, and behaviors that are necessary to the specific role that they are assuming (Crawford & Cowie, 2012, p. 180; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 334) which is commonly referred to as “learning the ropes” (Bengtson et al., 2013, p. 146; Crow, 2006, pp. 320-321;
Both forms of socializing occur in a multistage process that includes the three stages of encounter, adjustment, and stabilization in which novices “adjust to the expectations and responsibilities of their role and the idiosyncrasies of their school and district culture” (Armstrong, 2012, p. 400). Encounter occurs when the new leader is confronted by the multitude of tasks, often approached with optimism and discovery. Adjustment occurs when school culture is adapted to and role identification occurs. The final stage of stabilization occurs when insider status is achieved. Crow (2006) identifies the need to take a closer look at organizational socialization, as we prepare new principals, since he claims that this has historically been left to chance (p. 311). Crow later published an article with Whiteman that stresses the important of internships as another valuable tool to support socialization as well referencing the need for real-world practical leadership responsibility (Crow & Whiteman, 2016, p. 131) as a method to compensate for insufficient preparation programs. Another solutions-based next step was identified by Browne-Ferrigno (2003) to better develop and support these two forms of socialization:

The structure of a defined sequence where aspiring leaders are able to go step-by-step through a process that allows them to gradually become acclimated to the new role by ‘learning the ropes’ as they prepare for entry into the principalship not only allows the newcomers to develop certain skills and awareness, but also can create a comfort level about divesting their old professional identity for their new professional identity. (as cited in Bengtson et al., 2013, p. 158)
Traversing the literature, there were very few suggestions on how to improve the socialization of new principals, yet most identified the process of socializing as an important process. Working directly with school administrators in real settings during the personal socialization process, as well as increasing the collaborative relationship between universities and districts, were also identified as potential avenues of improvement (Crow, 2006, p. 317).

“Crossing over to the principal’s office represents a shift in perspective, expectations, and work as the newcomer assumes a multifaceted job that spans instructional, managerial and political realms (Spillane et al., 2015, p. 1069). School context such as student background, community type, organizational structure, school culture, resources, school size, labor features, and many other factors can bring about situations of constraint, opportunity, and impact on resources, which must be understood, if the principal wants to be an effective and successful leader (Hallinger, 2005, p. 234). Regardless of the circumstance, principals must be prepared to identify the context into which they are transitioning since principals that don’t understand are often met with resistance in much of what they do (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 436). Simply put, context matters and even more so for principals just starting (Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, p. 481), since this context has an effect on the type of instructional leadership that the principal should be implementing (Hallinger, 2005, p. 229; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008, p. 10). “School context and the circumstances of novices’ transitions to the principalship matter with respect to how they experience and negotiate among leadership” (Spillane et al., 2015, p. 1081). Beginning principals assume the role that their community, including their school, district, community, and university,
allows for (Crow 2005, p. 321; Spillane, 2013, p. 177). Included in this is how the novice principal learns to act, respond, communicate, and ultimately survive the dominant organizational norms (Armstrong, 2012, p 400). If context is ignored, there is a possibility of resistance from staff, as well as many other obstacles that can potentially make the transition into principalship very difficult (Northfield, 2013, p. 167). This negotiation of context and identity is on-going throughout a principal’s career.

Novice principals must engage in the ongoing negotiation of their role, as well as recognize the expectation from their faculty and staff. The perspectives and expectations from faculty and staff will have a large impact on the creation of the novice’s identity. From the start, new principals are expected to be knowledgeable and responsible for all school-related operations (Harvey, 1991, p. 6; Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 299); therefore, they must present themselves in this omniscient light if they want to avoid making waves (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 301). Navigating this space of common resistance can potentially define the success or failure of the new principal. Multiple texts have identified that novices meet a wall of resistance when assuming their position, such as staff members guarding their words and conversations when in the administrator’s presence (Eilers & Camacho, 2007, p. 620; Langston et al., 1998, p. 3; Rooney, 2000, p. 77). This relationship is grounded in resistance to changing the norms of a place and rationalized as the staff being comfortable with existing routines (Tooms, 2003, p. 533; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 328). Since the context and pre-existing circumstances of a school will always be unique, novice principals must be able to identify and understand the characteristics of their specific sites quickly.
We know that recruiting and retaining great principals has a massive impact on school performance and ultimately student performance. “Today more than ever, principals are called upon to be strong educational leaders” (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987, p. 55). Even 30+ years later, this philosophy still holds true. Building on this belief, just 8 years later, Crow and Glascock acknowledged the need to better understand the process by which individuals conceptualize their role during the transitional time of becoming a novice principal (1995, p. 22). Once again, this need still rings true today. Role conception is an important aspect of transitioning, as it transforms personal perspective societal, occupationally, organizationally, and individually (p. 23). Because of the organizational level within the educational hierarchy, the principal position comes with an increased access to power and authority which is accompanied by higher levels of responsibility, scrutiny, and accountability, as well as the norms and expectations of their new administrative reference group (Armstrong, 2012, pp. 398-399). As novices undergo this phase of role conception, social pressures and psychological need, new administrators eventually comply with the expectations of them from various influential stakeholders (p. 416).

**Common Challenges**

“The energy previously needed to climb to the position must be transformed quickly to balancing atop an equally tenuous surface – a spot requiring new knowledge, skills, and understanding” (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 297). When principals assume their position, they are very quickly immersed in a world of overwhelming responsibility filled with a multitude of tasks and new challenges, including dealing with internal and external realities of their school site (Langston et al., 1998, p. 3). When experienced
principals were asked to reflect on their first two to three years on the job, it was met with a resounding response as being the most difficult of times (García-Garduño et al., 2011, p. 102). Research has suggested that novice principals deal with these challenges differently than experienced principals, in the sense they often perceive these situations differently. One example of this difference is how they think about their strategies metacognitively after the fact, instead of proactively before or during the event, like their experienced peers (García-Garduño et al., 2011, p. 103; Petzko, 2008, p. 230). This, however, does change in time through their own growth and development.

New principals face a myriad of challenges on a daily basis (Crow, 2007, p. 56; Simieou et al., 2010, p. 2; Spillane et al., 2015, p. 1069) while they convert their theoretical learning into practical application. Additionally, they deal with issues of legacy, managing time and priorities, practice of style, managing a multitude of tasks including the school budget, addressing ineffective staff, and implementing government initiatives as well as managing interpersonal issues such as communication issues and low staff morale (García-Garduño et al., 2011, p. 101, Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 431). Additionally, they are expected to be instructional leaders, visionary leaders, and inspirational leaders that focus on student achievement, community relations, all while keeping abreast of the latest research trends and constantly changing laws and policies (Sorenson, 2005, p. 61). These challenges, and many more, have been found to be common across several countries and in a variety of settings (Beam et al., 2016, p. 146; Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 433). Offering a solution to dealing with the multitude of tasks and “reality shock” (p. 431), Simieou et al. (2010) suggest that on-going professional
development of beginning principals should align learning with the day-to-day activities they are involved in (p. 7). Northfield also offered suggestions to overcome this obstacle by utilizing leadership and managerial knowledge and skills such prioritizing and delegating tasks (Northfield, 2013, p. 164; Northfield, 2014, p. 420). From this, administrators were able to “cultivate trust with their colleagues by demonstrating their ability to effectively complete leadership and management tasks” (Northfield, 2014, p. 420). Trust as a novice principal holds great value.

In a study conducted by Spillane and Lee (2014), a principal remarked that “being a principal is like being pulled in about 100 very important but not always complementary directions” (p. 450) which seems to beautifully summarize what much of the literature identifies as common themes. The challenge to overcome this multitude of task responsibilities is felt at first when learning administrative protocol as well as tending to the endless stream of multiple mediums of communication from stakeholders (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012, p. 96; Northfield, 2013, p. 163). In another study conducted by Daresh and Male (2000), a new principal elaborated on the struggle to address a multitude of tasks with the example that while “disciplining some kids…minutes later, I am dealing with a call from the central office asking me for sort of report [and] at the same time…there is a parent who is demanding a class transfer…next, I am [dealing with] a roofing problem” which was noted to be before the day even got started (p. 94). This constant survival of putting fires out traverses most texts that discussed the struggles of a multitude of tasks, which has been identified to be about 150 distinct issues, on average per day, by principals (Day, 2011, p. 4).

During an interview conducted by Northfield (2013), one novice principal stated:
Until you are actually in the trenches doing this job, I don’t think you can understand how demanding it is and how much you are constantly having things fired at you...the tensions, pulls, and pressures seem to come from everywhere, all the time, and, sometimes all at once. (p. 164)

Although there are lots of people wanting lots of things, the buck ultimately stops at the principal; therefore, their decisions matter and hold great consequence or reward (Tooms, 2003, pp. 531-532) for all impacted stakeholders.

Novice principals are required to manage many challenges that are affiliated with being new school leaders which include negotiating leadership and management tensions, undergoing the aforementioned socialization process, and developing leadership trust, all while learning and leading their new organization (Northfield, 2013, p. 158). While “balancing at the top of the greasy pole” (Walker & Qian, 2006), principals manage ultimate responsibility while tending to and addressing all other demands regularly. This responsibility begins for newly appointed principals from their first day on the job which includes the learning of school culture in order to move the school forward (Galdames et al., 2018, p. 319). To shed light on what this responsibility looks like more specifically, Louden and Wildy summarize just some of their tasks when they discuss how novice principals “are confronted with the dilemmas of providing both strong and shared leadership; using resources effectively while working collaboratively; being responsible for decisions made by or with others; and being responsive to local needs within a framework of system priorities (as cited in Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 558).

To provide a counter-argument to this philosophy that novice principals have this singular responsibility, Spillane et al., identify that this belief offers a self-fulfilling heroic
image, in which the distributed approach to leadership is inhibited (2015, p. 1075). Regardless of how the responsibility of ‘being the boss’ is addressed, nobody can imagine what it really feels like until they are living in that role (Daresh, 1986, p. 169).

The way principals today are portrayed includes perspectives such as an “underpaid workhorse tangling with the conflicting demands of instructional leadership, bureaucracy” and a multitude of other tasks that are often deemed unrealistic (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 298). Since principals make big-picture decisions that are best for the organization, some of their actions may not be appreciated or understood by their teachers, students, families, or communities (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 446). Inevitably, their decisions will always displease someone in some way (Rooney, 2000, p. 77). Because of this, on a personal level, novice principals often experience issues related to anxiety, isolation, and frustration (Lochmiller, 2014, p. 62). To counteract some of these concerns, Wildy and Clarke (2008) identified the importance to have, or coach up, the interpersonal skills of being collaborative and fair, persistent, and decisive, as well as flexible (p. 470). These interpersonal skills can potentially impact day-to-day complex situations involving parents, staff, and community members (p. 481). With this organizational impact, new leaders are responsible for deciding if they want to continue direction or change course for all aspects of their building (Bengtson et al., 2013, p. 147). During the socialization process, it is common for new principals to conform to the status quo and continue doing the things that have been occurring within the organization in an effort to not rock the boat (Crow, 2006, p. 320; Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 302); however, “it is through adapting, changing, and often rejecting the status quo,
that the new [principal] is socialized into the role, thereby acquiring his/her own distinctive identity” (p. 338).

The term “lonely at the top” was highly referenced when defining the isolationism that comes with being an administrator (Armstrong, 2012, p. 414; Crow, 2007, p. 57; Draper & McMichael, 2000, p. 466; Rooney, 2000, p. 77; Simieou et al., 2010, p. 1). Not only does this isolation come from the staff at the school, but often comes from the district-level, as a method to empower the capability of these novices (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 558; Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, p. 482). This also brings shifts in pre-existing social relationships, whether being promoted from within a building or brought in as an external hire (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 434). This shift may be by the decision of the staff member but may also come in the form of selective and purposeful exposure or secrecy of information by the novice principal which is known as personal and professional distancing (Armstrong, 2012, p. 420; Tooms, 2003, p. 533). It has been found that novice principals share the common challenge of feeling isolated and lonely while having to also deal “with the legacy, practice and style of the previous principal; in coping with the multiplicity of tasks, managing time and priorities; managing the school budget; dealing with ineffective staff, implementing new government initiatives; and managing school premises” (Cowie & Crawford, 2008, p. 686). An assumption exists that principals know everything and that they have almost all the answers. Unfortunately, this belief is not true, and putting in place structures to support beginning administrators is vital to their success (Daresh, 1986, p. 172).

The work of principals continues to become less predictable, less structured, and include more conflict, both inside and outside of the school building (Langston et al.,
This conflict continues to strain the possibility of positive impact that principals, especially novice principals, can accomplish. However, their expectation and responsibility to develop a vision of the future and strategic organizational management is a large portion of their role (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008, p. 19), and they are expected to reach that goal regardless of impeding factors. Ultimately, new principals are expected to demonstrate the same leadership skills as experienced principals (Harvey, 1991, p. 23) and to show success, regardless of the circumstance and context.

**School Culture and Novice Principals**

A school culture is “the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the persona of the school,” and the principal’s “personality traits, attitudes and behaviors have a crucial influence on school culture” (Lee & Li, 2015, p. 3). Since culture is comprised of both visible and invisible elements (Chang & Lee, 2007, p. 158), it is important for school leaders to perceive and understand the forces that occur beneath the surface (Lewis, Asberry, DeJarnett, & King, 2016, p. 60). This culture permeates the school and has ability to influence the way people think, feel and act in terms of their motivation, productivity, and commitment to improve education. Embedded in the novice principal’s role is the culture shaper, builder, and re-shaper since (Hallinger, 2005, p. 223) “an efficient school principal should be able to read the culture correctly, assess the culture appropriately, and reinforce or transform as needed to make the school run smoothly and effectively” (Lee & Li, 2015, p. 4).
Each stage of a novice principal's placement at a new site offers unique challenges and opportunities. Though there are many challenges that these beginning principals face, one common challenge is the comparison to prior individuals in that position and the legacy and practice of that individual's leadership style (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 435). “School teachers and other employees compare the novice principal to the prior principal and resist new policies and procedures in the school” (Bayar, 2016, p. 193) which include just some of the struggles of being accepted into the pre-existing culture that stays behind after the prior principal leaves. Ultimately, the ability to understand the norms and values of the school when transitioning in holds greater potential in productively identifying solutions and thoughtful implementation of change than the omission of such understandings (Henstrand, 2006, p. 6). Asik-Dizdar and Esen (2013) provide insight into this need for understanding when they state:

For human beings and human organizations, the need to understand what they are doing and why they are doing it seems to be a fundamental tendency, as it fulfills the urge to make sense of their experience and the purpose of their actions, as well as to realize their positions relative to others with what they do or say. (p. 3)

This research is grounded in their philosophy of needing to understand culture and then builds on it with the questions of how that process occurs. Making sense of these cultural norms is important since these pieces materialize into the identity of an organization (Weick et al., 2015, p. 409). Navigating this integration and method of identification and understanding has been rarely discussed in literature; however, multiple common themes and methods did emerge including trial and error learning,
collaborating with stakeholders, asking questions, building trust and relationships, building social networks and authentic open-lines of communication.

**Experiential Learning of Culture**

The social and cultural elements of a place impact the organizational context, so it is important to consider these elements when holding a position of influence, such as being a principal (Kwantes & Boglarksy, 2007, p. 209). Principals promoted from within a school come into the role with their finger on the pulse of the school culture already. So, they may have fewer challenges in recognizing and understanding cultural norms. Being an insider may also make transitioning challenging for these individuals as they view culture in the same way, as they are a part of the socially constructed standard. The perspective as an insider may be different than that of a new hire coming in. Those that are new to their site present an interesting circumstance of cultural learning and understanding. New school principals at sites that are relatively old and conservative are “often defeated by the school’s traditions and cannot survive even the first few days of the principalship” (Lee & Li, 2015, pp. 9-10). If principals are not culturally aware, a divide may form between them and the staff, posing serious issues for future collaboration and mutual respect (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 301). Though the intention of this review is to focus on the means of understanding culture, it is important to recognize why this understanding is important. That being said, the possibility for implementation of school reform successfully, if the principal lacks an authentic understanding of the school culture, is extremely low (Galdames et al., 2018, p. 333; Hernstrand, 2006, p. 2).
How these new principals proceed through the process of understanding this cultural legacy is of particular interest to me. Thinking specifically about cultural norms, the first year may include observations and information gathering through exposure and experience. The second year may include more sense-making, based on the prior year’s experiences. “Sense-making occurs often in response to challenging circumstances…but individuals narrate their understanding of the situation” (Swen, 2019, p. 2). Since school leaders are the key to enacting change in a culture (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 61), I am interested in how the novice principal comes to understand school culture through these first three years of experience as a school principal, which have been identified as a major and essential part of the learning process (Tooms, 2003, p. 531; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 338). On-the-job learning and trial and error were referenced as some of the most common tactics, broadly, for novice principals (Beam et al., 2016, p. 157; Daresh & Male 2000, p. 91; Harvey, 1991, p. 13). Wildy and Clarke (2008) believe that on-the-job learning should not be exclusively relied on to acquire role conception (p. 736), but they don’t offer a specific solution to this flaw that is currently utilized most often (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 568). The idea that novice principals ‘grow into leadership’ and gain knowledge, skills, and abilities for leading while they learn emphasizes the need for the presence of support systems such as mentors, colleagues, and superiors to allow for debriefing, critical reflection, and sense-making (Northfield, 2013, p. 177; Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). As mentioned previously, preparation programs are currently doing a poor job of preparing principals to take on the practical knowledge and skills they need (García-Garduño et al., 2011, p. 100)
which begs the question for future research as to whether these programs are even needed at all (p. 103).

Being an active listener who pays attention to the direct and indirect cues, concerns, comments, and questions was identified as a successful means of identification of cultural elements within an organization (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003, p. 479; Harvey, 1991, p. 24; Rooney, 2008, p. 84). This strategy doesn’t necessarily mean that the information collected needs to be acted on, but sometimes simply empathized with (Northfield, 2013, p. 166). By doing so, a professional and personal bond may be formed that strengthens relationships and builds a foundation of trust and personability. It is important to note that some of these cues are visible while others are not, such as the “ghosts of the past” that still rule the school (Rooney, 2000, p. 77). The visible layers of culture include “buildings, clothing, behavior modes, regulations, stories, myths, languages and rites” while the invisible layers include “common values, norms, faith and assumptions of business organization members” (Change & Lee, 2007, p. 158). Novice principals must focus on problem seeking and problem solving which should include both the visible and invisible layers of culture (Harvey, 1991, p. 19). This collection of information may come in the form of simply observing, whether it be rituals, interactions, methods of communication, or other pre-existing cultural elements (Crow & Glascock, 1995, p. 24; Galdames et al., 2018, 326; Harvey, 1991, p. 29; Tooms, 2003, p. 533). It may also come in the form of creating and engaging in opportunities for formal and informal dialogue. These conversations hold tremendous value when they include the hopes and ideas of staff, as well as their concerns, which has the potential
to increase trust and acceptability when their concerns are acted on and/or validated (Northfield, 2014, pp. 422-426; Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 303).

It was mentioned in all interviews conducted in the research by Draper and McMichael (2000) that devoting the time as a new leader to talking with all employees, including janitorial staff and ancillary staff, was worthwhile for their understanding of the school context as well as relationship building (p. 465). Cultural cues, such as story-telling by employees, provides a critical opportunity to gain insight through a direct and/or indirect method and therefore should be considered as valuable, meaningful, and ultimately insightful (Crow, 2006, p. 320; Crow 2007, p. 61). Fostering conversations with employees that promoting story-telling can be very powerful for information gathering. Veteran staff may offer valuable insight into the culture of a school and are sometimes guardians of traditions and rituals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, p. 28; Northfield, 2013, p. 165). Just as Abrashoff (2012) mentioned in his work, the more you walk around and the more you are seen, the more people are willing to talk more openly (p. 156). Simply being a visible presence in the school allows for these conversations to occur while simultaneously acting as a model for the desired values the novice principal wants to exemplify and reinforce indirectly (Draper & McMichael, 2000, p. 465; Hallinger, 2005, p. 233; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987, p. 58; Northfield, 2013, p. 164).

The modelling of expectations transcends into personal and “backstage behaviors” as well, and therefore is something that novices should be mindful of inside and outside of the school setting (Tooms, 2003, p. 532). Modelling of behavioral and professional standards, such as working hard, being prepared, and taking responsibility for decisions, also acts as a platform to act with integrity and build a foundation of
trustworthiness (Northfield, 2014, p. 423-425). This focus on modeling was noted in only one article as an important role that the district should play in supporting and shaping beginning principals as well (Lee & Li, 2015, p. 11).

In order to build a foundation, novice principals must negotiate “the multiplicity of roles, functions, and duties associated with the principalship for the first time” (Northfield, 2013, p. 162) which includes applying interpersonal skills in order to best navigate the variety of interactions they address on a daily basis (Cowie & Crawford, 2008, p. 682; Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 730). The more interactions the novice has, the more likely they will be able to understand the culture of the school (Spillane et al., 2015, p. 1071) since meaning is constructed based on these interactions (Asik-Dizdar & Esen, 2013, p. 5). Principal preparation programs could benefit from including the study of interpersonal skills, in order to support novice principals handling conflict, enhancing teacher capacity, improve performance of their organization, cope with the demands from stakeholders and ultimately communicate effectively while both giving information and receiving information (Daresh, 1986, p. 170; Northfield, 2014, p. 423; Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 733). Regardless, novice principals must be actionable on the foundation they build, which will gain buy-in, trust, and respect, allowing for more authentic communication and ultimately more success (Eilers & Camacho, 2007, p. 622; Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008, p. 19).

Beginning principals have opportunity to utilize the concept of culture to understand the complex workings of their organization (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 60). Once novice principals begin to form their understanding of the culture, it is important for them to then reciprocate their knowledge back with a few key actions. The experiential
learning process that is common, which is often referred to as “by doing” in the literature (Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 304), can potentially be a sink or swim situation (Rooney, 2000, p. 77). Being purposeful about deciding what is most important to them and being consistent with it, is important to foster their positive relationships, allowing the culture to prosper (Northfield, 2014, p. 417). This includes being consistent “tomorrow and next year” while staff continue to extract their own cues and build their own perspectives (Nelson et al., p. 693). This consistency “means establishing values, priorities and what one stands for – an educational platform” (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 338) which also serves the purpose of aligning tasks to the vision of the school (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008, p. 19). Additionally, this consistency allows novices the ability to deal with the multitude of tasks they come across since they are able to streamline their decisions in some cases (Draper & McMichael, 2010, p. 471).

Platforms of novice principals should be consistent on student safety, promoting respect, motivating staff, and establishing good relationships (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, pp. 567-568; Petzko, 2008, p. 229). This consistency may eventually foster a positive professional reputation (Northfield, 2014, p. 417). Without this relationship and repertoire based on a clear set of values, a divide of teacher culture and administrative culture may begin (Harvey, 1991, p. 19). One’s reputation prior to placement also has the capacity of helping or hindering success during early years of principals.

**Cultural Sense-Making**

“Sense-making is the process by which people understand, or make sense of, their current situation. Sense-making involves noticing, interpreting, and focusing on cues in one’s self or one’s environment and using this information to craft a response…”
Successful novice principals should be able to read, assess, reinforce, and transform culture (Lee & Li, 2015, p. 4). “Over time, extensive contact with other school participants enabled…principals to come to understand the context and the form of expression for shared meanings in the school” which over time provided opportunity to become an active member of the school culture (Harvey, 1991, p. 13). From these cumulative interactions, novice principals must extract cues and make sense of the direct and implied message that is being shared with them (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007, pp. 206-207; Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 17; Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). “Furthermore, sense-making is shaped by evolving professional philosophies, institutional constraints, and cues from their context” (Swen, 2019, p. 3). The process of sense-making is grounded in how individuals construct their identity and the ways in which the individual participates in an ongoing iterative social process of discovery, reflection and thought (Asik-Dizdar & Esen, 2013, p. 2; Spillane et al., 2015, p. 1069; Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006, pp. 18-19). “The social culture affects schema development in the organizational context, the meaning of effectiveness in an organization may be affected by the school culture of an employee, and therefore should be taken into account…” (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007, p. 209). This sense-making process goes hand in hand with role conception and status change, as novice principals seek to understand their new school organizations (Spillane et al, 2015, p. 1069). Novice principals must ask themselves, ‘what’s the story here?’, “what does this event mean?’ and then ‘what should I do here?’ (Swen, 2019, p. 6; Weick et al., 2005, p. 410) which pushes them to understand their experiences and decide on actions moving forward. From the perspective of Weick et al., sense-making is a reflective
practice. Asik-Dizdar and Esen (2013) pose a counter argument that this process should occur in the moment and is the concurrent act of thinking while doing (p. 5).

The sense-making process is also a part of the negotiation of meaning between the expectations of a rough blueprint of what novices believe they are entering into and the realities of the context they actually experience (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 335). “To work with the idea of sensemaking is to appreciate that the smallness does not equate with insignificance” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410). That said, being a leader requires that individuals are continuously cognizant of context and the on-going negotiation of human interaction (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 555). This negotiation of meaning occurs collectively through systems of symbolic discourse, communication and interactions since culture is constantly evolving and forming (Harvey, 1991, pp. 2-3). Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the principal to ensure the culture aligns to the vision of the school, which is rooted in identifying the “key values, beliefs, and assumptions that underpin the shared meanings” that impact and influence the actions of staff members (pp. 4-5).

Schein (1992) presents one model for analyzing culture that includes the constant interaction between three key components: (1) artifacts which include the “visible organizational structures and process”, and (2) espoused values which include the “strategies, goals and philosophies”, as well as (3) basic underlying assumptions which include “unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings” (as cited in Langston et al., 1998, pp. 9-10). This model is just one way of analyzing and understanding the culture of an organization. Organizational culture theory was identified as a useful framework for analyzing multiple perceived
relationships within an organization, including the culture and the leader (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007, p. 211).

**Time.** Time is a crucial component in identifying and understanding culture. Though mentors are capable of supporting the transition for new principals to their site and supporting their information gathering and understanding of the school and district culture (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006, p. 169; Crow, 2007, p. 53; Daresh, 1986, p. 173), they often have their own work that capitalizes on this time, and therefore the transitional support for culture is often omitted (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006, p. 183; Beam et al., 2016, p. 156; Hallinger & Murphy, 1987, p. 57; Rooney, 2000, p. 77). However, if principals can understand the culture of their schools, they are able to implement practices that consider the complex forces working beneath the surface and be more effective (Lewis et al., 2016, pp. 60-61); thus, not supporting novices during this transition is a missed opportunity. Evidence was presented that it may take new principals up the three years to develop a true understanding of the “deep structure” of a school (Harvey, 1991, p. 14) which includes the underlying foundation of beliefs, values, and basic assumptions (Langston et al., 1998, p. 8). To develop trust and leadership legitimacy, allowing for acceptance in an organization’s culture, time is essential (Northfield, 2013, p. 173; Northfield, 2014, p. 418). For this to be possible, meaningful, and structured reflection must occur as well (Wildy & Clarke, 2008a, p. 484). Reflection can support novice principals “crossing the bridge” into their administrative role (Rooney, 2000, p. 78; Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 304). Unfortunately, novice administrators often find themselves with a loss of support systems and therefore lack the necessary personnel to support critical reflection (Alsbury & Heckmann, 2006, p.
Providing meaningful mentors that play an active role in the growth and development of novices was identified as one way to overcome this (Alsbury & Heckmann, 2006, p. 172; Daresh, 1985, p. 173; Crow, 2007, p. 53).

**Integration.** Integrating oneself into the culture was identified across multiple texts as a crucial step in supporting the sense-making of the organization (Draper & McMichael, 2000, p. 459; Wildy & Clarke, 2012, p. 71). In a study conducted by Northfield (2014) looking at beginning principals that were newly appointed, it was found that “they had to immerse themselves into the rapid first of learning school operations and organizational protocols whilst also attending to managerial and administrative tasks associated with school functions and routines” (p. 433), in order to better understand the school’s culture and build trust. This includes exemplifying the idea that “we’re in this boat together, so how should we respond to this problem?” (Bengtson et al., 2013, p. 148). Additionally, sending a clear message that the novice principal is the “lead learner” and willing to understand and improve personally and professionally (Eilers & Camacho, 2007, p. 620; Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 303), as well as being open to feedback (Crow, 2006, p. 312), is imperative to develop trust and respect which simultaneously builds a positive culture for students and staff (Sorenson, 2005, p. 63). Reflection also needs to occur that involves thinking through personal values and personal ethical stances (Daresh & Male, 2000, p. 99). Laying out a clear values-based identity is one way of developing this foundation (Northfield, 2013, p. 163). This can be enhanced by debriefing with peers which was recognized as an opportunity that must to be actively sought after to be made possible (Daresh, 1986, p. 172; Daresh & Male, 2000, p. 98). In these peer-debriefs, novices have opportunity to talk through problems
and mistakes, share ideas, and clarify thinking in a non-judgmental informal way (Crow, 1995, p. 32; Crow, 2007, p. 59). When these pieces come together, the novice principal has the ability to understand the ‘invisible hand’ of the institution that shapes it (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409).

**Negotiation.** Novice principals must constantly engage in a negotiation of culture. Since schools are complex and dynamic organizations, this negotiation must be on-going (Weick et al., 2005, pp. 410-413). Being direct with various stakeholders about this negotiation is one example of a method of engagement, such as on-going shared meaning making discourse (Harvey, 1991, p. 10). This meaningful discourse can be presented in the form of asking staff members value questions, including what they want to remain in the school and what needs to be changed or removed entirely (Leithwood & Jantzi; 1990, p. 25; Northfield, 2013, p. 163; Rooney, 2000, p. 78). Whether this shared meaning-making occurs with others or not, ongoing retrospective meaning making of experiences and events holds opportunity to facilitate forward thinking and future planning (Asik-Dizdar & Esen, 2013, p. 2; Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 569; Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 10; Rooney, 2008, p. 85; Weick et al, 2005, p. 409). The principal must display a level of openness if he/she wants to gain credibility, which is considered necessary to become a “key artisan who frames the culture of the school” (Harvey, 1991, p. 29). Since “you don’t know what you don’t know” (Beam et al., 2016, p. 158), being committed to learning and remaining open-minded fosters the development of skills and qualities (Asik-Dizdar & Esen, 2013, p. 4; Crawford, 2012, p. 288; Mentz et al.) as well as improves self-confidence, increases decisiveness, and
much more (Crow, 2007, p. 57). The negotiation of meaning was identified in many articles related to the leader’s impact on the culture of the school.

**Approaches Utilizing Collaborative Opportunities**

For principals to understand the culture of their new school sites, they must develop relationships built on trust and open lines of authentic communication. This communication can include skills related to decision making, problem solving, negotiations, planning, modelling, inspiring and much more (Galdames et al., 2018, p. 322; Karstanje & Webber, 2008, 744). “Communication and coordination in the course of participation as shared endeavors involve adjustments between participants…to stretch their common understanding to fit the new perspectives in the shared endeavor” (Rogoff et al., 1995, p. 53) which exemplifies the symbiotic nature of meaning making that is built on participation and communication collectively (p. 54). “Communication is a central component of sensemaking and organizing” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413) and thus is an ongoing process. Communication is one platform by which novice principals can learn and better understand the culture of a school (Beam et al., 2016, p. 158; Crow, 2007, p. 57; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, p. 29). “By opening lines of communication, asking questions and taking the time to actively listen to staff members, beginning principals [are] able to learn site-specific routines and protocols and make informed leadership decisions” (Northfield, 2014, p. 427). Simply put, authentic open lines of communication are necessary. Putting a meaningful effort into ensuring these lines are open, novices must be purposeful about building their foundation and how others can connect with them.
One of the first steps for newly appointed administrators to build trust and common understanding with the current staff is showing respect for the legacy of the previous administrator (Barnett, 2012, p. 96). New principals must find ways to manage the legacy, practice, and style of their predecessor (Beam et al., 2016, p. 147; Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 435) since implementation by these individuals shaped the culture of the school in their image, and that impact influences the school for years to come (Galdames et al., 2018, p. 331; Rogoff et al., 1995, p. 46; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p. 328). Novice principals sometimes must overcome the ‘shadow of the principal’s past’ challenge (Crow, 2007, p. 60) since it isn’t uncommon for remaining staff members to reminisce solely on the positive aspects of the previous leader. Therefore, showing respect to their legacy nurtures a positive foundation moving forward (Spillane & Lee, 2014, pp. 435-436).

Without a positive foundation, it will be hard to build relationships within the building (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 60; Mentz et al., 2010, p. 161). A successful principalship must be built on relationships with community members, staff, and students, based on mutual trust and respect (Crow, 2007, p. 57; Rooney, 2008, p. 85; Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 732). Building trust within an organization is imperative if a novice wants to find success working with their staff (Northfield, 2013, p. 166). “Trust is a complex, multidimensional and dynamic construct and is largely a function of the nature of the relationship that exists between participants” (Northfield, 2014, p. 411). Since interdependent and dynamic relationships exist within schools, a mutual sense of vulnerability exists, as novice principals communicate, delegate, collaborate, and lead, therefore requiring the baseline necessity of trust to be present (p. 414). “Trust-based
relationships increase the ease and incidence of organizational communication and decision-making and, as a result, positively affect and improve school functioning” (p. 412) which starts on day one for novices (p. 423). Harvey (1991) identified a few methods to build trust which includes being empathetic, showing good faith, practicing solutions-based thinking, and allowing for an appropriate amount of time for exposure and learning (p. 23). Ultimately, “a principal's trustworthiness promotes school health and reflects positive school culture and is positively correlated to the use of collegial leadership practices” (Northfield, 2014, p. 411).

During an interview conducted in the work by Eilers and Camacho (2007), a new principal came across resistance to continued learning and collaboration at his new site. To remedy this, he implemented a few levels of support such as being a model continual learner, implementing grade-level teaming and shared preparation times. He also planned and implemented a 2-day, off-campus workshop that focused on team-building, stress reduction, conflict resolution, and personal responsibility that was also followed up with sessions throughout the year. A combination of these strategies was proven to be beneficial since the school showed some success in the areas of identified systems of support, guidance, structure, and collaborative processes (pp. 620-621). As mentioned previously, when implementing systems of support, context matters, and it is important therefore to recognize that this intervention was successful due to the factors applicable in a specific time and place (Harvey, 1991, p. 14) and may not be transferable to other situations.
To inform praxis and justify action, the new principal must assess the significance of the culture which can be done through the following steps identified by Harvey (1991, p. 12):

- *Learn school operations:* devise strategies to discover, describe, conceptualize, and explain the existing culture of the school
- *Build a network of influence:* plan a collaborative process for the critical review and the transformation of existing culture
- *Performance through relationships:* communicate a shared purpose that is grounded in the culture of the school, so as to promote student learning

This method is not meant to be linear but allows for the on-going formation and negotiation of organizational culture as well as shared meaning making (Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 30). The team-learning mentality allows for stakeholders to come together and learn from each other (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 58), which will then shape actions collaboratively that will fit the specific needs of the school (Hallinger, 2005, p. 229). Information gathered from these meetings has ability to support the socialization for the novice on aspects such as the norms at the school for behavior management, conflict resolution, decision making practices and management expectations (Crow, 2007, p. 62). Since principals are the lead authority figures of their school, it is important for them to understand the organizational culture of their site, which includes the routines, policies, protocols, structures, and norms (Northfield, 2014, p. 422), which allows them to conduct their job effectively (Galdames et al., 2018, p. 319).

Organizations are not static, and therefore their cultures are not either; they require on-going interpretation since interactions and multiple actors continue to alter the identity of
it (Asik-Dizdar & Esen, 2013, p. 11). The reality does exist that current staff members may be resistant to accepting a new ‘outsider’ principal (Beam et al., 2016, p. 155; Crow & Glascock, 1995, p. 34).

Developing social networks has been found to be a crucial factor in bridging the gap between the novice leader and the underlying culture at play (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006, p. 172; Mentz et al., 2010, p. 162; Northfield 2014, p. 416). In one study conducted by Armstrong (2012), it was found that “establishing support networks with fellow administrators inside and outside their schools and reconnecting with mentors and sponsors for advice and support also helped to facilitate the emersion cycle” (p. 412) and therefore it can be extrapolated that support networks expediate and enhance socialization and organizational learning. This network has ability to provide the principal with capacity to discover, describe, and conceptualize the elements of the culture in the school (Harvey, 1991, p. 17; Langston et al., 1998, p. 18). This system can be in the form of creating non-administrative leadership teams, which has been identified as a valuable asset to remediate issues of isolationism as well as acting as a liaison of information between the staff and new principal as well as vice versa (Draper & McMichael, 2000, p. 468; Galdames et al., 2018, p. 331; Lee & Li, 2015, p. 12). Two examples of such a team is a School Advisory Council (SAC) or a School Improvement Plan (SIP) committee (Northfield, 2013, pp. 160-161) in which veteran teachers, natural leaders, and willing participants facilitate the planning for the on-going development of the school (p. 165) which offers multiple positive outcomes such as improved collegial support (Leithwood & Jantsi, 1990, p. 24). It has been found that schools with
collaborative cultures are associated with higher levels of achievement (Galdames et al., 2018, p. 332; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, p. 3).

Working with key stakeholders, including students, staff, community members, and district representatives, is necessary (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008, p. 20; Sorenson, 2005, p. 62; Walker & Qian, 2006, p. 303). For new principals to maximize their effectiveness, they cannot act alone (Mentz et al., 2010, p. 165). This includes promoting the involvement of stakeholders in decision making of school-related circumstances (Harvey, 1991, p. 28). If stakeholders are not involved in decision-making and/or are not listened to, then the likelihood of project implementation being successful is often low (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008, p. 22). Additionally, parents and students play a large role in influencing what values, knowledge and skills are welcomed in the school culture and which are not (Crow, 2006, p. 319); therefore, knowing and understanding the community is important (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003, p. 481). Collaboration and communication were constantly referenced as key to building these relationships (Beam et al., 2016, p. 154; Harvey, 1991, p. 11; Rooney, 2008, p. 85). It has also been noted that exemplifying an emotional investment with stakeholders holds value (Northfield, 2013, p. 166; Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 730). These methods include suggestions such as offering needed resources, emotional care, and overall support (Lee & Li, 2015, p. 15). This philosophy can also be seen in the distributed leadership model in which responsibilities are delegated out to various staff members, thus reducing task load related to leadership and management (Spillane et al, 2015, pp. 1076-1077). It is important to note that when so many other members are ‘invited to the table’ there often is an increased occurrence of conflict, disagreement,
and human emotion (Barnett et al., 2012, p. 115). One method of combatting this struggle is to capitalize on credibility when working with these stakeholders (Beam et al., 2016, p. 154).

**Chapter Summary**

By grounding this work in the literature currently available, the research approach for this study can be created and defined in a meaningful way. Ultimately the people that occupy a place are critical to the ongoing negotiation of defining what the culture is in that place. Novice principals are in a unique position of rapid learning, managerially and within their formation of a leadership identity. While grappling with these major issues, novices must figure out ways to learn about the unique culture of their site, as the context of each placement varies greatly. By collaborating with stakeholders, developing meaningful lines of communication, and allowing time for relationships to grow, these individuals must build a platform that is built on the values of both the organization and the all parties that both occupy it and define it. This process of meaning making is rarely studied, as it relates to novice principals and learning school culture, but deserves the utmost respect and attention since it has the ability to make or break the future impact by that principal. Figuring out how culture comes to be understood can support the growth of the research participants, may inform principal preparation programs, and may equip aspiring principals with a point of reference as they develop their own strategies and skills.
CHAPTER THREE: 
METHODS

A cross-case study design was used for this research, guided by a single question: What approaches are used by novice principals to understand school culture?

Research Paradigm

The selection of cross-case study was informed by Greenfield’s (1978, p. 137) perspectives on the social realities of an organization. This perspective is rooted in social constructivism and aligned to the interpretivist paradigm. Constructivism and interpretivism are often used interchangeably (Merriam, 2010, p. 457). “According to social constructivism, everything involved in the social world of individuals is constructed by them and is therefore intelligible in them” (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 3). The interpretivist paradigm was used to understand the meaning and social construction, rooted in personal beliefs and values, that these novice principals have experienced (Wildy & Clarke, 2012, p. 66). Using this approach enabled me to appreciate the experiences of novice principals learning about school culture, from their perspective.

The social world is based on human consciousness, rooted in concepts and beliefs but also tied to the physical entities and the meanings of those entities (Clarke & Wildy, 2010, p. 3). Approaching this work through the lens of social constructivism
allowed me to better understand how meaning is made and how cultural signals and symbols can be understood. Additionally, within this perspective, truth is dependent on one’s perspective (Yin, 2003); therefore, in order to understand it, one must understand that individual’s perspective (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). This paradigm guided this research as well as the interpretation and discussion of data.

Research Design

Gaining insight into the perspectives of lived experiences of novice principals can be supported by a case study design. A case study “is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2010, p. 456). Within this bounded system, there is a single entity or system, which in this case will be each novice elementary school principal in his/her respective school setting and the experiences he/she has had learning school culture (Yin, 2012, p. 6). "As a research strategy, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Since these cases are grounded in the unique histories of their places, such a study qualifies for the distinction of being a case study (Merriam, 2010, p. 456).

Case studies allow for an in-depth analysis rich with detail, completeness, and within-case variance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 197). In seeking the “how” of what novice principals do, a case study design was able to provide insight into the realities of those individuals (Yin, 1994, p. 289; Yin, 2003, p. 9). To navigate this space of complex phenomena, rooted in the context of place, a case study method provided specific insight into each case respectively (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544).
A cross-case study design was utilized to provide insight into each case individually, but also compare commonalities and differences represented between participants and cases. Using multiple cases, allowed me to analyze both within the case itself, and across settings found in other cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550).

The data source came from 21 questions asked during two semi-structured interviews based on the school culture assessment adapted by Wagner and O’Phelan (1998). This approach enabled opportunity for insight “into the participants' lived experiences, the subjective (e.g., attitudes, feelings, and perceptions) and objective (e.g., reality and events) factors that influenced” (Armstrong, 2012, p. 403) their cultural learning and the interpretation of complex experiences and encounters.

“Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2010, p. 457). Therefore, it was the purpose of this work to understand novice principals and the approaches they use to understand the culture of their schools. This will be rooted in the context of each case and then compared against each other case during the later stages of data analysis. It is the intention of this study to thus illustrate both the unique and common practices of the participating novice principals. “To generate meaningful leadership theories, leadership should be viewed in depth, from the inside, by focusing on practicing leaders and their interactions with others in a specific context” (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 555).

**Participants**

By identifying multiple sources for data collection, data credibility will be enhanced (Yazan, p. 142; Yin, 2003). The goal was to identify three to six participants,
but the available pool of candidates was limited. Participants were identified by reaching out to district personnel affiliated with principal preparation programs within one public school district on the west side of Florida. District personnel were directly connected with novice principals and were asked to identify those who would meet the primary research criteria: willing participants who are in their first three years of being elementary school principals as well as new to their school sites. Using information-oriented selection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 182) was important. Many principals in the district are promoted from within, having experience as an Assistant Principal at that school, or previously working at their site. The purpose of this study was to look at novice elementary school principals who had never worked at their school site prior to their appointment as principal. Also, limiting the pool to novice principals in their first three years of practice was guided by Armstrong (2012) who noted that novice administrators enter their fourth and final stage of transition when they enter their third year on the job, which includes a level of comfort and consistency (pp. 415-416). The pool of possible participants identified by the district was limited (7), and the pool of participants that were willing to be a part of the study was smaller (3). Ultimately, two Caucasian females and one Caucasian male participated in this study.

**Institutional Review Board**

Before any research was conducted, this study required approval from both the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the district. For IRB approval, I submitted all necessary paperwork and responded to a variety of prompts that ensured I was protecting the privacy of participants, conducting ethical research, as well as complying with any and all policies and regulations from the local, state, and federal
levels. I completed the required human subject protection training and certification. An online application was completed and then reviewed by the appropriate academic department for review and IRB. Revisions were made as required through the IRB process. After adjustments were made, the IRB Chairperson reviewed the research application and provided a formal letter approval letter to move forward.

District approval for research involving school board employees was also received before I proceeded with data collection. This approval required two key steps. The first step was a basic application identifying the researcher and a brief summary of the intention of the work including factors such as the research title, brief abstract, and source of the research assignment. The second stage included a more thorough description of the study. Within this step, the research question was elaborated on, the methods of data collection, the intent of publishing the work, the benefits to the district (including alignment to the district’s strategic plan), expected timelines, and potential risk. Similar to the intent of IRB, this stage is put in place to ensure the privacy of all research participants, security and confidentiality of data, and ethical conduct of research. Upon submission, the district’s Research and Evaluation department reviewed the application and responded by granting me access to data collection within the district.

Data Collection

“Education is a social science that involves real people in real time and an in-depth snapshot of some aspect of educational practice can be enormously instructive to others in the field” (Merriam, 2010, p. 461). There are multiple perspectives that can offer a narrative of school culture and novice principals, including, but not limited to,
those of the principal, the teachers, stakeholders, and district personnel. Clarke and Wildy (2010) believe that “theories of organizational and ‘administrative’ life should be generated inductively by examining the perspectives of practitioners themselves is fundamental to representing what is going on in schools” (p. 10). From this perspective, context matters, and data should be generated from the view of an insider (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 555). Others suggest that searching for the mechanism of acquisition, as a means to understand knowledge or skills, should not be done, and that the institution should be analyzed instead (Rogoff et al., 1995, pp. 57-58). For this study, the data came from the perspective of the novice principal.

For the purpose of this research, 21 questions were used in a semi-structured interview format. These questions looked at various elements of school culture and approaches novice principals used to understand each one of them. These questions were meant to explore the participants’ experiences as they related to various elements of culture, structured within the framework presented by Clarke and Wildy (2004), but the questions were based on the assessment of culture presented by Wagner and O’Phelan (1998).

Wagner and O’Phelan developed a School Leader’s Tool for Assessing and Improving School Culture which was meant to be a tool to audit, diagnose, and assess elements of school culture (1998, p. 1). After an extensive search of inventories and surveys related to school culture, this tool was selected due to its alignment to the research purpose. This tool has been adapted in a variety of ways since 1998, mainly to help diagnose and provide insight into elements of culture for professional development purposes. Wagner does not provide limitations to its use for cultural
surveys specifically, but the elements presented are found in other cultural assessments since its publication. Many of the identified tools that are used to analyze culture in schools today were rooted in this landmark tool or highly aligned to its elements. Additionally, many tools that were found were used by principals to diagnose school culture rather than the tool created by Wagner and O'Phelan (1998) that identified elements of culture holistically. For this qualitative study, using components from a tool that had already been created, to guide my thinking, helped me approach school culture from a variety of angles, all of which were situated within the literature that supports what school culture is comprised of.

Thirteen elements used for observation of culture within this assessment were used as interview questions (Wagner, 1998, p. 10). These elements served as a guide to frame my thinking, while using concepts but not the exact intention of their purpose. From these adapted domains, each participant was asked what they know about that element and how they came to understand that knowledge. The survey, along with an introduction to the interview for participants, is provided in Appendix A. Table 2 provides a summary of the interview questions and how they are connected to Wagner’s elements and to the literature reviewed for this study. Pre-identified elements from Clark and Wildy’s (2010) framework have been listed; however, it was anticipated that the responses by participants may or may not align, depending on where the conversation was taken during the interviews.

Data were collected utilizing these semi-structured interviews as the primary format for data collection. Within qualitative research, “the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2010, p. 457). In-person
1:1 semi-structured focused interviews were conducted with each of the three novice principals identified. These interviews were conducted in two stages.

**Table 2. Interview Questions Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Possible Clarke &amp; Wildy (2010) Framework Alignment</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Literature Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Context</td>
<td>People, place, system, and self</td>
<td>Tell me a bit about what brought you to your current position as a principal and a bit about your career in education.</td>
<td>“Context makes a difference in the management of organizations” (Hallinger &amp; Snidvongs, 2008, p. 10) and as novice principals transition to a new school and a new role, they must be cognizant of the cultural code they are transgressing (Langston et al., 1998, p. 3).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Collegiality</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>How do adults treat each other, i.e., respect and harmony vs. disrespect and discord?</td>
<td>“The culture of professionalism that is fostered in professional communities is what builds capacity and drives high expectations for better performance” (Eilers &amp; Camacho, 2007, p. 617). Novice principals often face issues of confidence, self-efficacy, and pressure (Clarke &amp; Wildy, 2010, p. 14) but building a solid foundation in which they are confident in themselves and their faculty is important (Bengston et al., 2013, p. 144).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Efficacy</td>
<td>Self and people</td>
<td>Provide me some context on how staff has a feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions: i.e., do people tend to live with or solve problems?</td>
<td>By celebrating the success of staff members publicly, colleagues gain a greater appreciation and positive perspective of each other, all while improving school growth efforts (Leithwood &amp; Jantzi, 1990, p. 31).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. High expectations of self and other</td>
<td>Place, self, and people</td>
<td>What are specific examples of how excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated, supported, and shared?</td>
<td>If the structure of the school organization is overlooked and the novice principal is not open to stretching their thinking and understanding, the system will suffer (Bolmon &amp; Deal, 2017, p. 69; Crow, 2007, p. 54; Rogoff et al., 1995, p. 53)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Experimentation and entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Place, system, and self</td>
<td>What are some ways new ideas abound and invention occurs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Trust and confidence</td>
<td>People, place, and system</td>
<td>What evidence do you have that participants believe in the leaders and each other based on the match between creeds and deeds?</td>
<td>Without trust and an established team mentality, there is frequently a high turnover of staff and a dissatisfaction with the job (Reed &amp; Kensler, 2010, p. 576). Additionally, the novice principal must build confidence themselves while also building the confidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>People, place, and system</td>
<td>How are improvement efforts substantive with abundant resources made available by all?</td>
<td>It is the principal's responsibility to support learning communities and collaboration to maximize the innovation possible within a school (Crow, 2007, p. 54).</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. <strong>Tangible support</strong></td>
<td>People, and self</td>
<td>How do you support people feeling special and acting special?</td>
<td>“Positive culture includes traditions and rituals to call attention to, and reward commitment and accomplishments” (Wagner &amp; O’Phelan, 1998, p. 5).</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. <strong>Appreciation and recognition of improvement</strong></td>
<td>People and place</td>
<td>Provide evidence of how caring is expressed through “kidding or joking in tasteful ways.</td>
<td>Principals who aspire to be effective, must have a sense of humor while modelling the highest regard of honesty and integrity (Rooney, 200, p. 77; Sorenson, 2005, p. 62)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. <strong>Humor</strong></td>
<td>People and place</td>
<td>Talk to me about how those affected by a decision are involved in making and implementing the decision.</td>
<td>Building relationships and involving stakeholders in shared decision making improves performance for teachers and students, increases buy-in, and is built on the confidence in self by the principal (Spillane et al., 2015, p. 1070; Wildy &amp; Clarke, 2008b, p. 733).</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. <strong>Shared decision making by all participants</strong></td>
<td>People, place, and system</td>
<td>How do participants understand what’s important and avoid trivial tasks?</td>
<td>“In healthy cultures, the purposes and goals of the organization are understood and the purpose of work is to move the organization toward the realization of the vision” (Wagner &amp; O’Phelan, 1998, p. 5).</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. <strong>Shared vision</strong></td>
<td>People, place, and system</td>
<td>What are the school’s identifiable celebrations and rituals that are important to the school community?</td>
<td>A pivotal variable in building a collaborative culture and increasing self-esteem and levels of comfort is the continued implementation of symbols and rituals (Leithwood &amp; Jantzi, 1990, p. 31).</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. <strong>Traditions</strong></td>
<td>People, place, and system</td>
<td>How does information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels?</td>
<td>Principals have a better chance at learning about the culture of their school site, if they maintain open lines of communication and engage in active listening to what stakeholders have to say (Northfield, 2014, p. 427).</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. <strong>Open and honest communication</strong></td>
<td>People, and place</td>
<td>What evidence is there of behavior being communicated and influences by internal imagery?</td>
<td>Storytelling, songs, myths, and ceremonies are all means by which informal socialization can occur shedding light on the cultural elements of an organization (Crow, 2006, p. 320).</td>
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<td>14. <strong>Metaphors and stories</strong></td>
<td>Place and system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Strategies &amp; Methods</td>
<td>Place and system</td>
<td>Place and system</td>
<td>Are there any other specific strategies or methods you used to learn about the school culture at your site?</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Learning Source</td>
<td>Place and system</td>
<td>Place and system</td>
<td>Where did you learn about how to understand school culture?</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Place</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>How did you learn about the school context including the people and issue that the school faced, upon your beginning months on the job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. People</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>How do you handle the wide range of interactions on a day-to-day basis? Specifically, how do the wide variety of issues presented by staff members impact these interactions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. System</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>How has the district helped and/or hurt your success in learning about your school organization and its culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Self</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>How do your experiences and your opinion/perspective impact the way in which you learned about culture at your school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Open-ended</td>
<td>People, place, system, and self</td>
<td>People, place, system, and self</td>
<td>Is there anything that you would like to share with me that we have not discussed, as it related to school culture and the way in which you came to understand it, at your school site?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The **first stage** was used to collect data based on the formulated interview questions, aligned to the guiding research question. Meeting face-to-face, the participant was asked what they knew about the 21 question semi-structured interview topics, each covering an element of culture. During this process, probing questions were used to gain further insight and understanding based on the participants’ responses. In order keep consistent across interviews with these probing questions, a standard protocol of questions were implemented. These questions included, but were not limited to: (1) Can you be more specific? (2) Can you provide an example of that? (3) How did you learn about this? (4) Are there any other times this occurred? (If so, what happened?). These probes were prompted based on the course of the conversation, and what information came forward during the interview. The probes varied on a case by case basis. It was never the intention to abandon the focus of the question, but if the participant began sharing specific evidence or insight that may provide valuable data aligned to the research question, then I engaged them in a semi-structured way, off-script, adapted to the situation, and attempted to learn more about what they were sharing, as it related to the research purpose.

These interviews were transcribed and shared with the participants respectively. Providing these transcriptions served two purposes: (1) It was one embedded form of member checking; (2) It also provided context for the participant to reflect on and have the opportunity to expand upon responses captured in the transcript. For the second stage, a follow-up face-to-face interview was conducted. This time, each of the 21 questions were covered again, but this round focused on understanding how the participant learned about this topic. Building on the previous responses to identical
questions provided more rich responses, aligned to the research objective. Four additional questions were also implemented for the second round; these connected directly to the framework that was being utilized.

Both the first round and second round of interviews were conducted at the school site with the respective principal in a space designated by the respective participant, which ended up being their office for all six interviews. Each interview was scheduled with the participant on two separate occasions, allowing time to transcribe the data, as well as time for the participant to process their responses.

**Second stage** interviews were transcribed and shared with the participants once again. If clarification or elaboration was necessary, follow-up phone calls were used to gain further insight. This stage was solely intended for elaboration, clarification, and follow-up questions based on analysis of data from the interviews. In an effort to provide as much detail as possible, these follow up questions were conducted on an as-needed basis. Additionally, I anticipated that allowing for reflection time by the research participants might enable them to talk more deeply about their responses, if necessary. By conducting these follow-up questions, if needed, via phone, non-verbal communication such as body language could not be observed. Additionally, there was possibility that other distractions might impede the novice principal responding. With that being said, no follow-up questions or clarification were needed.

**Data Analysis**

Aligned to Yin’s (2003) work, this research aimed at identifying the “how” of what novice principals do. In order to do so, the data produced within each case were analyzed in a critical and systematic way. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure
accuracy. The recordings were then transcribed by the researcher. I elected to transcribe the interviews myself as I felt doing so would provide greater understanding of the stories being told and allow me to connect with the data in a more meaningful way prior to analysis (Lichtman, 2013, pp. 260-261). And, as noted previously, these transcriptions were shared with the participants after the first round of interviews and after the second round of interviews.

Transcripts were coded using Microsoft Word, based on four themes in the framework presented by Clarke and Wildy (2010): place, people, system, and self. This study adopted the definition of ‘transcripts’ by Merriam-Webster as a written, printed, or typed copy of dictated or recorded material or media resource. First, I transcribed each interview. Once the interview was transcribed, I coded each participant’s responses based on the lens presented by Clarke and Wildy (2010). Aligning the data to people, place, system, and self provided a systematic way of organizing responses (Yin, 2012, p. 15). Embedded within the transcriptions, I anecdotally recorded the aligned theme from the framework. Though it was my intention to thematically categorize these codes, I was specifically alert to emerging themes based on what I discovered within the data. Within these codes, I looked for the actions these novice principals took to make sense of the culture in their specific sites. These codes included strategies, methods, or more specifically what the strategies or methods were.

I then compared across the coded transcriptions, looking for similarities and differences (Yin, 2003, p. 47). Coding included, specifically, identifying the skills, tactics, methods, and activities that the participating novice principals used to identify elements of their school cultures. All annotations were made in the margins of the
transcription and then also recorded on a separate coding reference sheet. This method was being used as a way of organizing data which Yin (2003) recognized as a critical piece of data analysis. Once there appeared to be an overlap in responses, and no new approaches were presented, I believed I had met saturation. Approaching the data through a cross-case synthesis was aimed at identifying a pattern of conclusions that might be drawn (Yin, 2012, p. 17).

I adopted the definition of analysis as “a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (Stake, 1995, p. 71). Coded interviews were compared to one another after each case had been coded (Merriam, 2010, p. 460). I looked for commonalities and differences within each of the four themes and recurring patterns between the three novice principals. The aggregation of data included coding, sifting and identification of themes (Lichtman, 2013, p. 243) in actions the novice principals described to make sense of school culture. From this analysis I formulated concepts and understandings (Armstrong, 2012, p. 404; Lichtman, 2013, p. 252) of how the participating novice principals came to understand school culture. This inductive method was used in order to gather and interpret data as a means to understand novice principals’ actual practice instead of imposing a normative model or theory (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 729) to interpret data collected.

The interpretation and discussion of findings is descriptive (Merriam, 2010, p. 457). This method has the potential of offering the reader a vicarious experience as portrayed and discussed by the researcher (Merriam, 2010, p. 460). Donmoyer expanded on this idea when he stated that “case studies can take us to places where most of us would not have an opportunity to go” (1990, p. 193). Findings are presented
in a summary form, aligned to the framework presented by Clarke and Wildy (2008; 2010) and articulating the approaches described by the participating novice principals as ways through which they came to understand school culture.

**Validation Strategies**

In an effort to increase trustworthiness and credibility, a variety of methods were used, based on Creswell’s standards (2009).

**Member Checking**

Interview transcripts were provided to the study participants to ensure accuracy of interpretation as well as cross-referencing data for consistency and inconsistency (Merriam, 2015, pp. 242-246). Aligned with Yin’s approach to case study design, once “all the evidence has been reviewed, and after an initial case study narrative has been produced, a final part of the data collection procedures is to have the factual portions of the case studies reviewed by the major informants” (1981, p. 106). Once the analysis of the data was complete, the report was shared with the participants once again to ensure alignment and accuracy. Sharing this information with the research participants is intended to strengthen the validity of the findings by ensuring the interpretation of the data is accurate and true (Ary et al., 2006, p. 243; Creswell & Creswell, 2009, p. 191). This also serves as a courtesy to the research participants (Yin, 1981, p. 106).

**Rich and Thick Description**

Findings are reported using detailed descriptions of the setting and responses. This method is often used in qualitative work as a way to add context for the reader and situate the analysis within a shared perspective experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2009, pp. 191-192) and to help what is described feel real and relatable to readers.
Bias

I have included self-reflection through elements of reflexivity and an example of my research journal (see Appendix E) and transcriptions with codes and comments in the margins (see Appendix F). As a researcher, my background, gender, culture, history, and identity impact my interpretation of data as well as the means by which I collected data; therefore, being transparent about who I am is intended to create an open and honest narrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2009, p. 192).

Reflexivity

The role of the researcher is to interpret the data that is identified; therefore, one’s own schema, background, and experiences may impact the interpretation of the analysis. As a method to reduce bias, reflexivity has been used to reflect on self and attempt to identify pre-existing perspectives and philosophies that can skew my interpretation of the findings from this work. As the sole researcher, working in schools myself, I understand that my previously lived experiences define my paradigm. It is not possible to remove my bias entirely, but thinking critically about who I am, the role I play, and how my past will impact my interpretation of data is important to include. Harris (2003) stresses the importance of researchers serving this role in education as “...the opportunity for those in schools, absorbed and, at times, weighed down by day-to-day practice, to express the values, impressions, fears, passions and in this way allow their latent understanding to become manifest” (p. 135) through the work of educational researchers.

There are both positives and negatives to a single researcher being the sole source for collecting and analyzing the data. “Since understanding is the goal of this research, the human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and
adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data” (Merriam, 2010, p. 457). This method also allows for human error. Within my interpretation of data, components of reflection have been embedded to help situate my interpretation and be transparent about ‘self’ and its impact on analysis and discussion. As a method of reflection, I included marginal comments in my analysis of transcriptions of my internal thoughts and feelings.

Though I did not work in the district that I conducted my research in, I did work in the district previously, and therefore must be cognizant of who I am, what my participants might already know about me or my previous work locations as well as how this may impact the data I collected. Though I did not know the research participants prior to the study, I do accept that they will perceive me a certain way, knowing we have administrative roles in common. This relationship has the capacity of impacting, for better or worse, how they interacted with me as a researcher.

**Ethics**

To protect the identities of research participants, schools, and school districts, pseudonyms were assigned. This will provide anonymity for the principal, school, staff, students, and community, but still allow for an accurate depiction of context. Additionally, though interviews were conducted on school sites, there was limited to no interaction with any students or staff aside from the principal himself/herself. Upon completion of interview transcriptions, research participants were able to review the transcriptions as well as analysis of data. This was done to reduce the risk of misrepresentation of the research participants’ perspectives.
Ensuring the confidentiality of participants was of the upmost importance throughout every stage of this research including the housing of data and the reporting of findings. As mentioned previously pseudonyms were used for the district, for the schools, community, and research participants. All digital recordings, transcriptions and documents are stored on the University of South Florida’s (USF) IRB approved cloud-based storage system, box.com. This storage was shared with my committee chair. Access to the secure cloud-based drive will not be shared with anyone else, and the credential to enter it is synced with USF’s single sign-on username and password. These recordings will be stored at this box.com site for a period of 5 years and will then be permanently deleted.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study. Findings were based solely on data produced from interviews with the three participants. This method is justified in the philosophy that sense-making occurs at the individual level, but from a research standpoint, other voices are absent in its interpretation. Therefore, cautions should be taken when interpreting these data, especially when attempting to apply findings to other circumstances and contexts. Since such a small population of novice principals were represented in the study and data were self-reported, generalizability to principals more broadly, may not be appropriate (Crawford & Cowie, 2012, p. 183). Data gathering was influenced by my own skills, as they relate to conducting a case study, choice of the interview protocol, and interviewing (Yazan, 2015, p. 149; Yin, 2003). In addition, issues of power may be present as novice principals are socialized into a district culture.
of administration, so it is recognized that data validity and veracity could be compromised (Bruce et al., 2012, p. 102).

**Chapter Summary**

By using semi-structured interview questions based on the culture assessment by Wagner and O’Phelan (1998), this research was intended to gain meaningful data from the perspective of three novice principals, aligned to the research question and purpose. In order to accomplish this, a social constructivist paradigm was used. Accepting that social realities are constructed by the individuals that occupy a space is appropriate for this work, as it accepts the on-going evolving of a school’s culture based on internal and external influences that are changing all the time. Just as novice principals need to make meaning of situations regularly, this study provides a snapshot of approaches participants may have used to gain understanding of their school’s culture. Data were interpreted within this interpretivist paradigm in order to understand what the research participants described. Several methods were used to increase reliability and accuracy such as including researcher reflexivity, sharing transcriptions and interpretations with research participants, and analysis of the transcriptions.
CHAPTER FOUR:
RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify the specific ways in which novice principals come to understand school culture at their site, and more specifically the approaches that they use. Looking at the case of three principals and analyzing what they identified as knowing about the culture at their site, and then how they came to learn about those elements, an inventory of approaches were created, aligned with the identified framework for this study. Data were analyzed based on the interpretivist paradigm, as it was the intent to learn about how these participants perceive their learning. Findings are therefore rooted in the realities of each participant respectively. Transcription data were first thematically coded according to place, people, system, and self, and then sub-themes that emerged aligned which each of those elements were then analyzed across each study, thus building an inventory of ways in which the three novice principals learned about their school’s culture.

Study Context

A cross case study approach was used for this study, so it is important to articulate aspects of context, as the results are framed in the socially constructed realities of a specific time and place. Based on the research design, two rounds of interviews were set up. For all participants, the first round was conducted on March 1, 2019. These interviews were then transcribed and shared with participants on March 3,
2019 for their review. This review allowed for the participants to reflect on their answers, and any feedback they provided affected the semi-structured questions for round two. The second round of interviews were conducted on March 8, 2019 for two of the participants. Due to difficulty with scheduling, the third participant was not able to participate in the second interview until April 8, 2019, a full month after the other participants. These interviews were then transcribed and shared with participants on April 11, 2019. When sharing the interview transcripts, participants were asked to verify that the transcripts accurately captured their responses. For all six occasions of this, no participant requested any changes or corrections. All interviews were conducted face to face in the participants’ respective offices, for both rounds.

**Participant Population**

For this study all of the participants have been given pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of their identities. The name of the school district and the names of the schools have also been given pseudonyms. All participants were part of the same district which was given the name Bungalow Bay Public Schools (BBPS) for this study. This district is located on the west side of Florida. All three schools are public elementary schools and have been around for many years.

When working with the district to identify participants that matched the research criteria, seven participants were found to be eligible, and three of the seven were willing to participate. This set of three met the research criteria in identifying three to six participants. Additionally, all three were within their first three years, working at their public elementary schools. None had worked at their respective sites previously. Most importantly, they were willing to participate and share their insights into what they
perceive the culture is like at their schools and how they came to understand those school cultures.

The first participant is Charlotte Champagne who is a white female in her early 40s. She is in her third year as principal at Archo Elementary School (ES). Prior to her placement as the principal at Archo ES, Charlotte had never worked there, but had worked at multiple other school sites in BBPS. Charlotte shared with me that she was a middle school teacher and followed a wonderful assistant principal to the elementary world. She later became a science resource teacher. She was eventually convinced to get her Master’s degree in Educational Leadership, allowing her to eventually become and assistant principal and later a principal. Her first year as a principal was at Archo ES. Charlotte identified that the aforementioned wonderful assistant principal helped groom her to become who she is today. Charlotte feels that her job as the principal is “seeing adults impact students, based on something [she has] said or a suggestion [she has] made to them to try and implement. And seeing their success is what brings me much joy” (C. Champagne, interview, March 1, 2019).

The second participant is Teddy Turner who is a white male in his late 30s. He is in his second year as the principal at Aero Elementary School (ES). Prior to his placement as the principal at Aero ES, Teddy had never worked there, but had worked at multiple other school sites in BBPS. This is Teddy’s 12th year in education. He has taught both lower and upper elementary as well as middle school. He then became the assistant principal of a Title I school that struggled academically, and he helped move the school from a state letter grade of an “F” to a “C”. After five and a half years there, he was appointed as the principal at Aero ES. Teddy identified his first principal as the
reason he is a principal today. He stated she was amazing, treated her staff like she was their mother and that she led by example. Teddy feels that his job as the principal “is to create the environment where teachers can be successful, that’s it” (T. Turner, interview, March 9, 2019).

The third participant is Mary Miller who is a white female in her early 40s. She is in her first year as the principal at Bunker Elementary School (ES). Prior to her placement as the principal at Bunker ES, Mary had never worked there, but had worked at multiple other school sites in BBPS. Mary has spent a majority of her career in lower elementary and in December of her first year in 3rd grade, she was placed as the assistant principal of a magnet school. She then moved on to two more schools throughout her time as an assistant principal until she was placed as the principal of Bunker ES. This is now in her 9th year as an administrator in BBPS. Mary feels that with every school being different, she has been able to form her purpose in her new site, now having experiences and exposure to different systems, routines, as well as what best practice looks like. Mary did not identify a specific mentor that helped her shape her transition into administration. Mary’s goal is ultimately to “move the whole school forward, together” (M. Miller, interview, April 9, 2019).

**School Context**

The number of years each school has been open is important, as it helps frame the history of culture at each respective site. Schools that are in the first years of opening do have a culture by default, but some elements of culture may still be evolving, such as traditions, stories, tangible supports and more. Based on the purpose of this study, however, it was the intent to look at the process of learning about culture,
not changing it or building it. Additionally, all three schools have fairly comparable staff size with somewhat varying student population size. Length of time the school has been open, significant events in history, staff size, student size, population demographics and expectations from the district are amongst just some of the many factors that may impact context and thus the way by which these novice principals must learn about their respective school site’s culture.

Archo ES first opened in 1922. There are currently 51 employees on campus. There are 450 students on campus. The student population is 60% Black, 20% Hispanic, 13% White and 7% Multiracial. Currently, 85% of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch, and the school is identified as a Title I school. Charlotte assumed her position at Archo ES during the summer. The assistant principal at the time was the assistant principal prior to her arriving.

Aero ES first opened in 1992, and there are currently 56 employees on campus. There are 730 students on campus. The student population is 56% Hispanic, 19% White, 13% Black, 6% Multiracial, and 6% Asian. Currently, 84% of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch, and the school is identified as a Title I school. The school currently has the state letter grade of a “B”. Teddy was appointed to Aero ES in April of 2017. At the time the assistant principal who was there for the beginning for the school year remained and then was moved over the summer.

Bunker ES first opened in 1964, and there are currently 56 employees on campus. There are 540 students on campus. The student population is 75% Hispanic, 9% White, 9% Black and 2% Asian. Currently 92% of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch, and the school is identified as a Title I school. The school currently
has the state letter grade of an “A”. The prior principal was the principal for two years and had also been the school’s assistant principal.

Data Preparation

During both rounds of interviews, participant responses were audio-recorded. These recordings were then transcribed using Microsoft Word. The transcription process allowed me to interpret the data in an on-going way as well as develop a connection to it. After the first round of interviews, the data were shared with the respective participants to ensure accuracy. This also allowed for a point of reflection and conversation in the second round. After the second round of interviews were completed, the transcripts were shared again to ensure accuracy.

Transcriptions were then coded based on the pre-identified framework by Wagner (2006). Through this lens, responses were identified in four categories: people, place, system, or self. Themes that emerged that aligned to literature discussed in chapter two were also coded. Additionally, researcher notes were added along the page that analyzed omissions, misalignments, commonalities, and unique differences. To begin analyzing, codes were compared from each of the three participants and what they knew about each element of culture. Since the first round of interviews sought to identify what the participants knew about culture, the conversation and prompts were solely on the aspects of culture that existed. Building on this identification, round two looked out how they learned about each of these elements. Once again, the transcriptions used codes that were identified by Clarke & Wildy’s (2008b) framework, coding and sorting responses into people, place, system, or self. Emerging themes and responses that aligned to literature discussed was again coded and then sorted into its
correlating element as a sub-theme. The responses from each participant were compared across interviews as well as connected to the first round of interviews for contextual purposes.

Findings

Based on the coding process and study design, transcriptions were coded and sorted based on place, people, system, and self. Sub-themes that emerged within each of these elements were then chunked within their respective categories. Ultimately, it was the intent of this work to develop an understanding of how these novice principals learned about their cultural context within a particular time and place. It was the intent to make the analysis and interpretation of interview data richly descriptive (Merriam, 2010, p. 457). The following description, comparison and analysis is intended to summarize what the novice principals learned and how they went about learning it.

Place

Place includes the complexities of their context, especially the people, the problems, and issues, as well as the culture of the school and community (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 730).

Charlotte. Based on Charlotte’s first interview, which was meant to identify what she knew about place, a variety of contexts was made clear. Charlotte stated that there seemed to be a pre-existing culture in which teachers help one another, without the needed involvement of administration. Prior to Charlotte's arrival, the school had a leadership team comprised of non-homeroom teachers, which she continued. One of the main issues when first arriving, was very low reading scores, and the school grade
was a “C”. With this concern in mind, Charlotte was driven to identify the source of the issue and remedy it.

One of the first elements of place that Charlotte identified was the expectation of her new school. During her interview process, she was informed of the extreme behaviors, unhappy personnel, and a general need for improvements at Archo ES. In order to learn more about the perceptions of these staff members, she used a faculty meeting to identify the vision of the school. The staff members' task was to draw a picture for their vision of Archo ES. When asked how she came to understand the school culture as it related to a shared vision, Charlotte stated:

We made it, we actually drew a picture. I had each teacher and staff member draw a picture of what they wanted Archo ES to look like. And then we all shared our pictures. And every single one of them looked the same…We bring them out every so often to remind ourselves that we all have the same vision, we are all working towards the same things, and it’s about moving these children. (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

Charlotte stated that she found through this visual experiment that the pictures included children lined up outside the building, everyone with smiles on their faces, the inclusion of elements of art, paint brushes, musical signs, and a beautiful neighborhood. “We wanted to have a full school, children wanting to get in here, and celebrating the arts” (C. Champagne, interview, March 8th 2019). Charlotte spoke about traditions as well, highlighting the approach of questioning by asking. She stated that she learned about traditions by doing the following:
Through questioning. Just learning. Um, asking questions both to students, to parents, to the personnel that stayed. And even some of the personnel that left. Just asking well, how did you do that? What did that look like? And then just looking at the data, student scores and just seeing, trying to gather what it was like prior to my arrival. (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

From these questions, she was able to learn about specific magnet program nights, special events, and other elements such as the stories of place. She also was able to build a visual of her own, based on the responses from staff members.

**Teddy.** Based on Teddy’s first interview, it was made clear that data were used to articulate what is known about the school. This was present in explanation of what teacher attendance, student attendance, and budget allocations were like when he first arrived. Just like Charlotte, Teddy felt that the school grade (a “B”) could be better. Teddy stated that zero dollars from the Title I budget were spent on technology; instead, all of it was spent on human capital. Teddy also used surveys and interviews to collect data, like Charlotte and Mary. From these conversations, he was able to identify what the shared vision looked like amongst staff. He stated:

There wasn’t one. Nobody knew what the school was doing. I asked people specifically, what is the vision and mission of your school? I don’t know. I don’t know. Oh, perfect! Well it made it easy to help realign the focus obviously. So, there was no correlation to, it was a long, really long wordy thing and people had no idea what was really in there. (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019)

When Teddy was asked originally about what he knew about the vision in the first interview, he did not mention this piece. He stated:
So, the shared vision is right there [pointing to the wall]. It’s the same as the
district…but what we say with our mission is that R cubed equals success.
Responsibility, relationships, and respect. If we have all three of those things,
then we’ll have success. (T. Turner, interview, March 1, 2019)

Teddy went on to elaborate what each of these elements stand for now; however, the
focus of his response was on what is going on now, not what it was before, which is
validated by his identification of a void of buy-in to the pre-existing vision and mission.

Teddy stated that he was purposeful in talking with folks who had been at Aero
ES for many years, who could give him more information on the context of the school,
which he was now responsible for. One example of this is:

So, in our courtyard, we have, by one of the staircases, there is a random bench,
just sitting there, a random, like you would see in a garden or something, like a
little garden bench or whatever. And it’s uneven and it’s broken. There is a bird
bath and the bird bath doesn’t work or whatever. And so, it didn’t look very nice
and so I figured well if it doesn’t look nice, I might as well just chuck it, right? I
want things to look a certain way and look nice. I went and asked, because there
is no plaque or anything. Uh those two things are put there after a teacher past
away of cancer. So, imagine if I would’ve walked over there, you know. It was
summer of my first year. Didn’t know anything from anything. I chuck these
things away and the teachers come back on pre-planning and see this stuff gone
of someone who wasn’t part of their staff. I think she was here 8-10 years. No
matter what I do, they’re done with me. All because, I didn’t ask a question. (T.
Turner, interview, March 8, 2019)
Archo ES has been around for 26 years, and there are three teachers who have been at the school for all 26 of those years. Teddy states, they are his go-to people when he needs to understand the *why* or the *how* of Archo’s culture. When it comes to learning about a place, Teddy says, “So just literally listening and asking questions are, I think, the two critical things to helping, not a new principal, but any principal, to be successful” (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019). The other piece for him was exposure over extended periods of time. He felt that the longer he was at Archo ES, the more comfortable folks felt around him.

**Mary.** Mary identified a variety of elements of how the school worked and or didn’t work when first arriving. One important piece of context of place that she identified was that there was a very large turnover of staff the year she came in. With that, a lot of new teachers are now on staff. She felt that the change of staff was a major player in a change of culture when arriving. When talking about identifying the culture within the context of transition, Mary stated that she learned about stories through her one on one interviews. She stated:

There were conversations that happened in those [interviews] that I learned about the culture…Just about like the staff that was here prior, that is not here anymore. That really changed the culture. They felt they were kicked out. With new admin coming in, they were worried about how that was going to change again.. and turnover. You know, it took a turn for the worst and that [I’m] hoping to build that sense of community back up again. (M. Miller, interview, March 1, 2019)
Mary also stated that attendance has been an issue for students, and after her arrival, student attendance became a focus, with multiple programs and systems implemented to improve it.

In order for Mary to learn about the vision of Bunker ES, one of the first things she did was sit down with the sitting assistant principal and ask her directly. When Mary spoke about this meeting, she stated:

*When I was appointed, we sat down for a whole day in Panera and I just got kind of the logistics of everything. Things that were happening in the school, things she was seeing, um you know. Teachers that I just needed to be careful of. And along those lines, of helping, because it’s hard, when you come in, in July and you do not know how things run. Doesn’t know how the lunch room looks, don’t know how dismissal looks or anything like that. So being able to have those conversations and then also, who my resources are. You know, those tangible resources that are going to affect the kids and the teachers in the classroom.*

(M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019)

When asked to elaborate on her approach to these conversations, Mary stated that she “…had guiding questions for her, you know. I had access to the calendar before we had that meeting. And I like wrote down questions of things that I may not know about” (M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019). She supplemented the conversation with the individual one on one conversations with her staff, and she was able to gather the staff’s status on the implementation of a unified vision. When prompted about these conversations, Mary stated:
…when I became the principal here, like within my 30 days, I did one on one interviews with every staff member that signed up, to kind of get their background, and history, and hear what they’ve dealt with…There were specific questions I asked, where they see this school going, things that might have happened prior that they would like to see changed or that they would like to see continue. (M. Miller, interview, March 1, 2019)

When Mary was asked about traditions in the first interview, she started by pausing for a few seconds followed by, “uhhh traditions….ummm…I’m trying to think,” paused again and stated that “beside night events that consistently happen, I can’t really say there are traditions” (M. Miller, interview, March 1, 2019). When asked in her second interview how she learned about traditions, she identified her source as “I think in the first part of the interviews. To see them. They told me about them. That they should be changed, because they were kind of grandfathered in” (M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019). Two examples of traditions that emerged in the second round were that of the principal providing a luncheon for staff during Christmas time, as well as teachers hosting a pot-luck at the end of the year. Mary stated that she also learned about the metaphors and stories at Bunker ES by simply being present and listening to conversations of staff. When asked to expand on how she does that, Mary stated that she thinks it’s about “being present in the building and stuff like that would give you a more opportunity to hear those stories. Um and conversations going on, however, like I said, I am one to point it out.” (M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019).
People

People means that school leaders are able to handle a range of complex interactions on a day-to-day basis with diverse constituent groups as well as build a knowledge and understanding of those individuals (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, p. 730).

Charlotte. Charlotte spent a great deal of time discussing people in her responses. She identified her staff as being very supportive of one another and gave examples of staff members collaborating to coach one another, problem-solve instructional issues, bounce behavior issues off of, and overall helping when able to. When describing what collegiality looks like, Charlotte stated:

They’re a great team of teachers. They all support and help one another. From Kindergarten to 5th grade to 3rd grade. I mean everybody is just one big cohesive family. We call each other the Archo Team. They do things together in school and they actually do social things outside of school. (C. Champagne, interview, March 1, 2019)

Charlotte further noted that supporting and praising one another was part of the culture regularly, and elements of it were there prior to Charlotte’s transition.

When Charlotte was asked how she learned about how staff members interacted and what the element of collegiality looked like, she stated:

By watching. I watched the different people. Like the groups of teachers. I sat back and just kind of observed how the systems operated. How the people enter and exit the school? How did they make copies? When do they sit and chat? Where do they sit and chat? So, I kind of just sat back and just kind of observed and watched the patterns. And once I figured out some of the patterns, I then
was able to move into how to address them and change them into a way that I needed them to run. (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

Charlotte began arriving early and staying late once she found out that a group of teachers were always early and another group always stayed late. She found ways to insert herself into the area and then into the conversation. From this presence, she stated that she was able to learn the gossip and learn who the social leaders were on campus. Charlotte refers to this group as the “strength within the walls” and states that “they are the ones that kind of lead the charges and so once I figured out who those people were and the power in which they hold internally…I use that system myself” (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019). Once she identified these individuals, she would then watch them, see who they interacted with and observe who they would sit with. Charlotte felt that by being present, listening, and taking action based on their concerns, she was able to gain their trust and then ultimately use them to help her roll out some of her initiatives. Charlotte was highly attentive to these “little social networks”, as she referred to them, and would constantly watch how these groups operated.

Charlotte learned about efficacy at Archo ES by sitting and watching, as well as through strategic questioning. She stated:

Sitting and learning. But also, through questioning too. Because we met with every teacher, and then we met with teams. To really understand what their beliefs. I’m trying to learn their belief systems. By trying to get to know what their belief systems were, to make sure they align to my belief system. And if they didn’t, then we had you know, that became a different conversation with
teachers. But I had to just get to know them. And so, I did that individually, like very first. And then very intentionally during pre-planning, we sat down with each teacher individually. Talked about their goals, what their beliefs are, what their classroom looks like. Almost like an interview, but not an interview because they already had the job. But just knowing who they were, to then work on their strengths. And then observations. Going into their classrooms and seeing why they are and then guiding them through coaching feedback notes, to get to them where we needed to get to. (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

Charlotte mentioned that she was able to quickly learn about those who she could trust and those she could not. When asked why, she stated that the rumor mills were often her source. When confidential information would seep out, she would reflect on who was in the room, become a little investigator and identify the source of the issue. Additionally, Charlotte relied on her capital within the building. Charlotte stated that her secretary is the pulse of the school.

My secretary is a great pulse…She can tell when there are disgruntles. Because she hears everything. Everyone stops by her office and talks with her. As well as the media center specialists. So, when things are starting to go amuck, they’ll let me know. Or maybe there is someone I have forgotten to smile at. They’ll say you might need to go by so and so’s room and check in on them. And so, I do. They kind of keep me going on who needs what, because they know it all. And so that’s my pulse. And they kind of, because they’re young, they also go to after hour events. So, they really truly are getting a feel for what’s going on. (C. Champagne, interview, March 1, 2019)
Charlotte reiterated that all of this is purely based on building relationships with all stakeholders. Charlotte found that sometimes she would make mistakes, she would reflect on it and use those times of trial and error as a learning opportunity, all while being transparent about the situation.

**Teddy.** When discussing people, Teddy felt that most of his staff are collegial to one another, but stated that’s not how it was when he first arrived. In order to learn about this element of culture, Teddy stated that:

There was formal and informal conversations around figuring that out. So, when I first got here, I was appointed April of 2017, so just about two years ago. And at that point of the year it is a good point for principal transition because the school’s structures and procedures were already in place. So, at that point, all that I had to do was watch and listen. Um you know, because people told me things before I got here that were not part of this campus. And they said oh, this happened there, this happened there. And I just took it as a grain of salt and I wanted to see it for myself and hear it for myself before I made my own decisions and my own thoughts about what was occurring. So, when I got here, I looked at the TELL survey obviously, which is our survey that tells us, you know, the teachers give a survey about how they feel about the school, the culture, what’s going on, and it was not very good. Um, so, I looked at that survey results and then when I first got here, like I said, I just walked around and soaked up the last two months of the school year to just see what was going on before any changes needed to be made for the following school year. (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019)
In this case, Teddy quoted data from the Teaching, Empowering, Leading & Learning (TELL) survey which showed that when he first arrived, 52% of staff felt there was trust amongst staff. Based on the data two years later, that number is now 89.4%, a growth of about 37.4%. He also felt that previously, staff actions were based off of compliance, and not respect. Aligned to that same issue, Teddy found that there were 590 instructional days missed by teachers collectively. He stated that number has now fallen to 272 days missed which was an increase in attendance by 318 days. For Teddy, being consistent for staff is important because he feels that it builds trust with all staff members, and trust coupled with time allows for relationships to prosper. Those relationships he felt were pivotal for his success, the school’s success, and most importantly the students’ success.

Teddy stated that he had to start out on the right foot, and before entering any classroom, he wanted to get to know the people on his campus, personally and professionally. Teddy implemented a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis survey to staff, collected data on their perception of the school and then met with each person for a 30-minute block to get to know them. Teddy felt this was his first opportunity to build a relationship and open lines of communication. Teddy expanded on his sources of data gathering.

And then the formal part of it, I sent out a survey to all instructional staff members and met with them. Uh, it was called the SWOT analysis. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. And you know, this survey, I told them, will help to guide our conversations, and help to move our school forward. And uh, you know, around this, I just asked them who they were, what their current
position is, how many years have they been in education, how many years have they been specifically at Aero ES and just some other questions about them to gauge where I needed to go with my thought process moving forward. And then I met with every single member of our staff one on one, which was absolutely exhausting, for a 30-minute period that I gave for each teacher. But it gave me a chance to break down that relationship barrier, a principal vs. staff and staff vs. principal. And most of the staff members that I met with said this was the first time they have ever had a principal that wanted to meet with them one on one when they got to the school. Because I didn’t want my first interaction to be with teachers, me walking into their classrooms without getting to meet with them first, formally. So that was the main way I collected data around who the staff members were and what their thoughts were about the school. And it also opened up the lines of communication from the first meeting. (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019)

Teddy did worry that staff members wouldn’t be completely honest on the survey questions, much like Charlotte felt during her beginning faculty meetings where there was a sense of seriousness and guarding. Teddy learned that this hesitation also came out of teachers not being part of the decision-making process previously, as the previous principal did not include them. Teddy stated that he learned this by just asking staff members out right, and asking them to tell him the truth. In order to learn how staff was appreciated, Teddy once again asked his team leaders initially, in which the response was that they weren’t recognized. Teddy also noted that when first arriving he found that the staff was not comfortable questioning him. Now he feels that has
changed, but that wasn’t the norm when he first arrived. Teddy even chuckled when stating that it hasn’t always been that way. Over 50% of staff at Aero ES have been at the school for 10 or 15 years, plus.

Teddy’s principal coach helped him work through the process of learning about culture, reflecting on the answers he was receiving, and then building his action plan to tend to these concerns. With the facilitation of his principal coach, Teddy distributed a follow-up survey later in the year, in which one teacher wrote the following:

When I started teaching at Aero ES, our little Title I school was the little engine that could. I think I can. We needed little supervision and the school was successful. Then a shift happened and our school became the little engine that could not even, and morale was low. I considered leaving my beloved school but since Mr. Turner has come on board, the whole atmosphere has lightened and improved. Something as small as, he says hello every time he passes me in the hallway, goes a long way. I can tell that he has embraced the school as his own, and I really respect that. I am happy again and a worker that respects you is more valuable and efficient than a worker that fears you (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019)

Mary. When it comes to people and the way they treat each other, Mary identified a level of respect among staff, but pointed to a lack of collaboration as well as a lack of social connection. Though this is something she wants to improve, she feels this interpersonal standard was already there, when she arrived.

So, the adults treat each other with respect, however they don’t do a lot of collaborating if it’s not with their team. So, they are respectful to one another
however we are trying to work on being more social and more of a family environment of we know everyone, we talk with everyone. Along those lines. (M. Miller, interview, March 1, 2019)

Additionally, she stated that she feels there is a level of trust and confidence, based on the identification of team members working with each other constantly. Mary learned of this trust and collegiality through her one on one meetings with staff members.

So, within the first, I got the job in July. So, within the first couple of weeks, um, about a week and a half after I got appointed, teachers started back. So, um, I did one on one meetings, um, with every staff member. About a 30-minute time slot, with each teacher. They’d sign up with the time slot they desired to just sit down, have a conversation. And I had some guided questions that they could fill out before of, um, what are things that are happening at Bunker ES that you want to see continue? What are some areas that Bunker ES could improve and get better? And is there anything, history, that I need to know about that we don’t want to change, because that has become, like a staple, of what Bunker ES is. Um, so, met with custodians, paras, classroom teachers, non-instructional teachers, one on one to give me a background what they saw Bunker ES heading. And where they think, um, some areas of improvement could be needed. (M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019)

Through her guided questioning, Mary felt she was able to build an understanding of the background on Bunker ES as well as a visual for where the school was heading.

By engaging teachers in these individual conversations, Mary stated that she felt she was able to build an understanding and reality of each staff member personally.
When asked about what the element of efficacy looked like, as it related to culture, Mary stated:

Uh, I think a major part was in those conversations. To kind of get like a background of, um. Because it was individual teachers. So, they really gave me a reality of what they personally saw. So, that during those conversations, if something was pointed out, as areas for improvement or stuff that was happening, then I could get that picture by going out, in the hallways, in the classrooms, at certain events. To be able to see reality of what was happening. Were they being ethical? Um, kind of how they were treating each other, based on those conversations that we had earlier. (M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019)

Like Charlotte and Teddy, Mary found that people often showed their levels of trust and loyalty when confidential information would be shared, and she would have to identify the source of the information spreading. Mary also implemented an open-door policy like the other two participants, and found that this created an opportunity for staff members to bring things to her, creating a scenario in which information was regularly brought to her attention on top of the information she was gaining through being present and observant around campus. Mary added on to this with the idea that time would be a crucial factor in teachers feeling comfortable with her and trusting her to bring their insight forward honestly.

**System**

System includes having the knowledge, understanding, and skill to deal with the education authority as well as the means by which the school leaders are able to
navigate their way through regulations, policies, and protocols (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, pp. 730-731).

**Charlotte.** Charlotte identified a variety of systems that were in place at her site, such as the hierarchy of the leadership team, the magnet program and correlating magnet program traditions, and many of the staff members who were a part of the systems for a long time. One specific system that Charlotte noted was the way in which students dismiss, stating it was chaotic when first arriving. Charlotte also spoke about the way the school was set up, as far as where the office was positioned in the building as well as the history of the school in the area. When Charlotte was reflecting on how she has received supports from the district, she stated:

> But teaching you about the actual culture of your school, they don’t really prepare you for that. You have to learn it on the job. It’s all on the job learning…And I don’t know how you would do that. Because each school has its own feel. Its own vibe. And so, it was just…I learned as I went. Like here are the keys (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

Like Mary, Charlotte came on board, and there was a substantial turnover, as the prior principal took many of her followers with her. Charlotte stated it was a very strange year, as she was working to bring people together while attempting to learn at the same time. For her, this came from building trust, supporting implementation of ideas, and assisting in the problem-solving process.

> When I came on board, they had turnover. Because the principal who was here prior to me, took a group of teachers with them. And so therefore, the assistant principal had already started hiring the empty spots. So, we had half and half.
Half of the staff has been established and half were new. So, we merged those new people. Merged in with the current people, to merge in with me, and then the AP were all new. So, it was a very strange year. And the fact that we were all learning and growing together. But we discussed it together. I’m a very big fan of collaboration amongst everybody and being very transparent. So, we learned together and I think throughout the teacher for the entrepreneurship. I’m just trying to think how that works. It’s just being that trust with them. And I did that through the conversations, being visible, open door policy. And through those relationships, I then was able to hear what they had to say. Because they would say, hey, we should, um. For instance, the way we dismiss, our campus, before I got here, it was chaotic. It’s just like, the parents walked in, grabbed the kid, and moved them out. Now we have only four ways you dismiss. It’s very organized. I can tell you how every child gets off this campus. And that came from someone’s idea. And it worked! And we have a very safe dismissal. And I can truly tell you how every child got home, every day. (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

Charlotte stated that she didn’t know if that’s how it might have been handled prior to arrival, as it was more of a dictatorship. She learned that from the interactions, non-verbal body language, and by being straight forward and asking questions about how it was prior to her arrival.

Implementing an open-door policy, engaging in frequent conversations with teachers, and simply being visible, Charlotte felt she was able to successfully learn many of the systems at Archo ES. Additionally, through the process of trial and error,
she was able to learn about people and how they want to be interacted with, as well what systems were working and which ones were not. When asked about tangible support systems, Charlotte stated:

I had to ask questions. Like what motivates them? Like what do they like? It’s those questionnaires. At the beginning of the year, during pre-planning, when they give me their address, their information, there is a little survey questionnaire they fill out for me, telling me what do they like, how do they like to be recognized, what is their favorite restaurant. So, I have ideas on what they personally like to try to help motivate them. And then you just trial and error. You try different things and see if they work. Like I know now, my staff now likes to eat. So, I buy food for everything. (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

Charlotte is a firm believer in servant leadership and was very much so a part of things with her team. When asked about shared decision making, Charlotte simply stated “that was by getting into the work with them…by observing just the way of work that was here prior to me” (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019).

**Teddy.** When Teddy first arrived, one system the he found to be dysfunctional, was the Steering Committee, which after a few meetings he quickly realized it wasn’t working. When asked to elaborate on what that learning process looked like, Teddy responded:

It was more of a complaining session. Before I got here, they got together and just complained about things that they didn’t like. We have on our agenda when we have our team meetings. Its problem-solving oriented. So, if you come with a problem, you have to have at least one solution. Because if - it may not be the
solution we’re using but at least it’s a solution that you’ve thought through the problem instead of just complaining about a problem. (T. Turner, interview, March 1, 2019)

Teddy stated that the school’s vision is that of the district, but when first arriving to Aero ES no one knew what the vision or mission were. Teddy stated he was eager to learn about the systems and structures of his new school, because he believes those pieces are imperative to the success of a school. When looking to identify and build those systems, he found that staff members were terrified to try anything. He dove a little deeper, asked questions, had one on one conversations, and spoke with his leadership team. From his purposeful digging, he discovered the sources of this fear:

Initially terrified. Absolutely terrified. Teachers, you know whenever you go to a new school, you have to learn the why behind why people act a certain way. And when I first arrived, there were teachers here who were terrified to try anything. Because if they went outside the box, if they went off their schedule, if they went off their pacing guide, if they went all of that stuff, then they would get in trouble. And my response to them now, and then, was what you’re doing best for kids for right now and today. If the answer is yes, then keep doing it. And they didn’t believe me the first time I said that. And then I had to say it again, and again and again. And now teachers, they are okay with branching out. And if you’re trying something new and you can justify why you’re doing it, that’s no problem. (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019)

In order to find out how the budget was utilized, he spoke with the principal secretary and had all reports pulled over the last few years. He focused his analysis on spending
over $5,000 and then developed his own summary of historical spending in order to develop his plan moving forward.

**Mary.** When Mary first arrived to her school, she felt that the system was already in place for teachers to have a lot of influence when it came to decision making. During her first interview, when asked about the element of efficacy, Mary stated:

So, I would say that, um, one of the systems that has been in place here, because the teachers do have a lot of influence decision making. We do have a very strong leadership team that meets every other Friday. Umm, to build school-wide initiatives, programs. [and] how that’s presented to the rest of the staff [and] how that’s going to function [such as with] timelines. So, the leadership team really has a whole-school holistic view to it of how to make the school better, not just their classrooms. And then being able to communicate that to the whole staff. The leadership team is the main committee. (M. Miller, interview, March 1, 2019)

Mary stated that the structure of the leadership team is how it has been and how it has continued to be. Faculty meetings and emails were stated as being the consistent systems of communication, based on the need of the information.

When asked how she learned about these systems, Mary stated that many teachers aligned themselves with the norm that was already there. When probed to elaborate on how she learned what this norm was, Mary pointed to sitting down with her assistant principal at the beginning of the year; they spent a full day at Panera just talking through elements of Bunker ES. Within this conversation, Mary had a variety of guiding questions around what she wanted to know about the school, around logistics,
around people, systems, and context. For Mary, this was her first time to learn about tangible supports and build her visual of what was going on at Bunker ES and what she wanted to do for the year. Like Teddy, Mary found she just needed to be direct and ask questions to find out. Mary reiterated that teacher input was a crucial part of her leadership team, which was the case before arriving, and therefore became an element of culture she wanted to respect and therefore continue.

**Self**

Looking at *self* means having the personal resilience for the job including be able to face the challenge of their new appointment addressing their own identity while manage multiple pressures and interactions (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b, pp. 731).

**Charlotte.** When Charlotte spoke about who she was, and what brought her to her current role, she stated that “by learning about different personalities of different classroom teachers that I worked with, I had a niche to get teachers who didn’t want to do things, to do things” (C. Champagne, interview, March 1, 2019). This skill was identified by leaders when she was in the classroom, who then invested in her through various pre-placement steps of socialization, exposing her to leadership skills, supporting her ventures for credentialing, and eventually her transition into her new role. Ultimately, this mentor “helped groom me to become, who I have become today” (C. Champagne, interview, March 1, 2019). Charlotte considers herself a warm and fuzzy person who has to laugh, because that’s just who she is. She feels that there is trust amongst staff now, but stated it wasn’t that way when she first arrived:

We have it now. It wasn’t always here. But the teachers trust the administration because we support them. And we do that through conversations, even through
parent conferences and they know when they come to use with a situation, we will follow through. And not just leave them hanging. So, the trust has come from just our actions and that follow through support. But it’s also building that relationship. I had to get to know them and they had to get to know me. And that was through just lots of conversations. (C. Champagne, interview, March 1, 2019)

Additionally, she feels that there is transparency at Archo ES, due to her being open and honest. She stated if she doesn’t know something, she will be the first one to tell you.

Due to the turnover in staff, Charlotte felt that at first, the culture was very serious. Almost 50% of the staff was new, and therefore they were trying to figure things out at the same time as Charlotte, while the established staff now had a large influx of new people on their turf. Charlotte felt that her demeanor had a large impact on this, and therefore she approached the element of humor, just as she does in her own life, laugh often, cheerlead for others, and smile every day. For Charlotte, it was just about being herself. With that being said, she stated that she has very high expectations of herself and understands that her identity influences not only the staff on her campus, the interactions between her and the rest of the staff, but also the way in which all parties involved perceive their realities of her. When asked how she learns about this piece as well as monitors the changing dynamic of staff, she stated:

I’m everywhere. Like I’m constantly moving. So, I personally monitor it. And I have a leadership team also and that is based on the non-homeroom teachers. And I just put out my expectation. I expect every teacher to collaboratively plan.
I expect them to be here on time. And I expect them to show kindness, to like the teachers. Let’s make sure we model that. And let’s make sure we capture it. And when we do capture it, let’s tell them right then and there, we saw you do this. (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

She monitors the levels of humor on campus as well by her active presence.

**Teddy.** Teddy feels that his “job as the principal is to give teachers the tools to teach…I’m giving them whatever they need to be successful” (T. Turner, interview, March 1, 2019). Like Charlotte, Teddy feels that having fun and implementing humor is essential to the success of a school, as he too identifies it as a part of who he is. He did state, however, that is not how it was when he first arrived. When it comes to humor on campus, Teddy feels that his personality of being a joker has impacted the level of humor on campus; however, when first arriving, there was a seriousness to the staff.

The job is hard enough as it is. Why not have fun while you do it? Laugh at things. You know obviously, if things are beyond the laughing stage. But it’s okay to have fun. It’s okay to laugh. It’s okay to smile. And enjoy what you do because you work with kids. (T. Turner, interview, March 1, 2019)

He described the response at faculty meetings as a “weird, awkward chuckle laugh from very few people” after he cracked a joke, in which he realized something has to change. He stated:

And then there I knew that, like, I have to break this down and like it’s okay to laugh at things because it’s funny and I’m a funny guy I think. It was so awkward for me, because my previous staff had gotten to know me. But they didn’t know who I was, and that was obviously not the culture prior to me arriving. Clearly,
because they would’ve laughed if things were funny or if things were whatever. Maybe they thought I was testing them, maybe they thought, you know, whatever, like why is this happening. But now, like when we. We were able to have fun at that stuff and know that we can also be serious at the same time. And it was not that way at all, at first. And now, like, we have the comradesy is there, for the most part. Not everybody, obviously. Because that would be, that would be a utopia…I think it all starts with the person who is running the show. And if it’s okay for me to smile and to laugh and have fun and joke, but still get my job done, then they’re going to do the same thing. And guess who wins? The kids. The kids win and that’s all that matters. (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019)

Teddy also identified himself as a tech person, framing his focus on technology, as well as attentiveness to a lack of technology. This is important because he stated that technology became his focus when arriving on what this element of tangible support looked like. Teddy stated that being direct with questioning was often his route to get to the bottom of the feelings he was having based on observations.

Mary. When Mary was asked about element of humor, as it relates to culture, she stated that the staff is “very business oriented. With some humor… But while they’re on campus…They take their jobs very seriously, and there is a goal to get done. A little fun throughout the day but their main focus is on the classroom” (M. Miller, interview, March 1, 2019). When she was asked in the second interview how she came to understand humor on campus, she stated:
I think based off those initial conversations. I’m a principal that believes in walk throughs. Just walking through the school, seeing the collegiality among the teachers, seeing how they interact with the staff, how the staff interact with each other. You know, first thing in the morning, after school, you know, at events with each other. Seeing how that builds upon one another and how they treat one another. Um, to see if the humor is even there. (M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019)

When asked about what high expectations of self and other looks like at Bunker ES, Mary responded similar to Teddy, stating that she believes “as the leader of the school, you have to have high expectations of yourself, before you can ask anybody else to have high expectations as the teacher” (M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019). Also liked Teddy, Mary distributed a survey in November to collect feedback on how she was doing as a leader. For her, there are few opportunities for staff members to give formal feedback to the principal, so she created her own opportunity to do so.

The element of self also came into play when Mary navigated the space of appreciation and recognition for improvement. Mary stated that this was a strength of hers when she was an assistant principal and therefore she came into Bunker ES with her own ways of showing appreciation and praising staff members. Mary listed a variety of approaches she currently uses to show appreciation of teachers including fun activities, birthday cards, team building activities and more. She did not state in either interview how she learned about what this looked like before her arrival at the school, however.
Cross-Case Analysis

Since the purpose of this research was to identify the specific approaches that novice principals used to learn about school culture, Table 3 was created to provide a summary of findings based on each of the research participants. Mary was able to articulate 14 ways in which she learned about school culture, while Teddy was able to identify 16 ways in which he learned about school culture, and Charlotte was able to talk about 18 ways in which she learned about culture. Though the margin is small, with a sample of novice principals that had varying years of experience, it appears in Table 3 that with increased experience, ways of learning about school culture increased.

Table 3. Identified Approaches Summary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charlotte Champagne</th>
<th>Teddy Turner</th>
<th>Mary Miller</th>
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<td>• Asking questions to staff</td>
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<td>• Analyzing the school calendar</td>
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<td>• Being around before and after school hours</td>
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<td>• Experiences over time</td>
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<td>• Implementing an open-door policy</td>
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<td>• Listening to stories before arriving</td>
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<td>• One on one interviews</td>
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<td>• Tapping into social networks</td>
<td>• Walking around and observing</td>
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Within the categories of *place, people, system,* and *self,* several subthemes emerged in participants’ responses across the cases. These subthemes were: learning prior to placement, relationships, observation, asking questions, utilization of the leaders on campus, and interviews and surveys. Each of these subthemes will be described, highlighting omissions, commonalities, and differences across the cases.

**Learning Prior to Placement**

One subtheme that was identified was learning gained in previous placements. Falling under the element of *self,* all three participants brought up their administrative history and its impact on their current practice. Charlotte spoke to her own history of being at multiple sites as an assistant principal before assuming her role, and the lessons she learned of how to interact with others, how to adjust self when learning about others, and how to gather information before implementing change (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019), all based on her failures and successes doing those things previously. Teddy also alluded to his five and half years as an assistant principal and his focus on systems and structures. From this focus he discussed how he saw things that worked and those that didn’t which allowed him to be more critically attentive to the systems at Aero ES when arriving. When Mary discussed her history, she highlighted her strengths in showing appreciation and recognition of staff and how that has defined what this process now looks like at Bunker ES. Mary, however, did not

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Table 3. (Continued)

- Tapping into social networks
- Trial and error
- Walking around and observing
discuss how her history and previous mistakes allowed her to better understand how things were done at Bunker ES, but rather she focused on how she implemented new systems, based on what she’s seen.

Teddy also stated that he was told stories about Aero ES before arriving; however, he “just took it as grain of salt and [he] wanted to see it for [himself] and hear it for [himself] before [he] made [his] own decisions” (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019). This is important as it shows his open-mindedness and ability to remove bias and build his own perceptions without the influence of others. This too falls under the element of self. Though Bungalow Bay Public Schools is a larger district, each of these participants have been in the district for an extensive period of time and therefore are likely to have a stereotype of the school they were entering. Charlotte too spoke of the stories she had heard about her new school before arriving, but too, focused on building her own understanding when she transitioned in. Mary did not identify any story-telling before arriving.

**Relationships**

Building authentic and genuine relationships based on getting to know people was a major focal point for Teddy, Charlotte, and Mary. Charlotte stated multiple times that cultural understanding is based on relationships and getting to know people for who they are. For Charlotte this was the foundation of all other aspects of culture and of leadership. Charlotte did this through being present, praising often, and getting to know the teachers’ likes, dislikes, hobbies, etc. Simply put, “it’s all about relationships” (C. Champagne, March 8, 2019).
For Teddy, breaking the relationship barrier was one of his first priorities. He was mindful of power and therefore wanted to get to know his staff, before coming into their classrooms and conducting his district-mandated observations and evaluations. Teddy did this through his one on one conversations, his open-door policy, and by being active and hands-on around his school.

Mary approached relationships a bit differently, as she took a global approach. For instance, Mary is very purposeful about building relationships, not only between her and her staff, but also amongst the staff itself. This is evident in her team building activities but supplemented with her individualized praise of staff members.

**Observations**

Simply sitting back, watching, and listening to staff members and their interactions seemed to be a source for cultural learning for all three participants. This is a more passive, yet purposeful, strategy and aligns to the elements of *place* and *people* as contextual understanding is developed of both who people are and how things work. Though there were a variety of approaches that all three participants used that were a little more direct, they all mentioned the use of simply observing and collecting data based on what they could see and hear. For Charlotte, she was able to learn about the physical layout of the school including the way in which Archo ES arrived and dismissed as well as who was in each social network. For Teddy, he was able to learn about systems and structures such as how the cafeteria operated, how staff members interacted with one another and much more. Teddy stated, “I would say the biggest key is being visible, being out and about…I’m out in classrooms, I’m out doing lunch duty, I’m out at car line…because that’s when you see the real interactions and…what’s really
going on” (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019). Just like Teddy, Mary stated that she “could get the picture by going out, in the hallways, in the classrooms, at certain events. To be able to see the reality of what was happening” (M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019).

**Asking Questions**

When you don’t know something, simply asking is a great way to find out. This does require a bit of humility and willingness to be vulnerable. Asking questions falls under the element of *place* as participants attempted to learn the context of their school’s culture. Once again, all three participants identified questioning, however they went about it a bit differently. Charlotte mentioned that she regularly asks questions and that she relies on her principal’s secretary as well as her media specialist to send information her way. She supplements this by talking with folks around school and finding out what things are and why they are the way they are. Teddy and Mary were more direct in the conversations. When Teddy found things off-putting, curious, or that he didn’t understand, he would just go to the source and ask them directly. Mary approached her curiosities the same way, whether it was problem solving, learning about a system, or learning about why things are done a certain way, she would go to questions as her primary source for information gathering. Though Charlotte relied more so on her relationships and networks to ask her questions than Mary and Teddy did, all of them felt they had an accurate understanding of their *place* due to purposeful and strategic questioning.

In addition, both Charlotte and Teddy identified a specific person or a group of people who worked at their respective site for many years. Both of them used this person when trying to learn about the history of how something came to be. Whether it
was why a bench was in a certain place, or a picture hung a certain way, they relied on the capital in their building that had been around since either the beginning or at least for a long period of time. For Charlotte, her physical education teacher was this person, who she refers to her as the historian. “He has been at the school, he has been with five principals now. And I think he’s approaching year 20. So, he’s been here for quite some time. And he’s able to tell me how things have evolved. Why… and how…” (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019). For Teddy, this was a group of teachers. At Aero ES, there are three teachers that have been at the school for all 26 years it has been open. Teddy stated that “before I do things, I ask them. Because they know [the] why” (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019). Mary did not identify any individuals who have been at Bunker ES and served as story tellers of the school’s past.

**Utilization of Leaders on Campus**

It was made clear that all three participants know that a successful principal has a group of leaders beside them helping make their vision and mission possible. Permeating their responses was the power in their leadership team. Using these people as a source for information, for understanding, and for learning, Charlotte, Teddy, and Mary all relied on their leadership teams when first arriving as well as throughout their time at each of their schools. Mary stated that she has “a very strong leadership team [that] builds school wide initiatives, and programs” and that systems was built before she arrived (M. Miller, March 1, 2019). She learned about this piece of culture during her full-day conversation with her assistant principal. Teddy spoke less about how he learned from his leaders on campus, but rather how he molded them in the image he wanted to be created. Based on the relationships he has built and
expectation he has put out, he does find that his team brings information to him as well as questions him, grounding decisions based on what has happened in the past. Charlotte too utilized her relationships to tap into the natural leaders on campus in order to build trust and provide a source for information gathering.

**Interviews and Surveys**

Collecting data more formally, especially at the beginning, was the norm for all three participants, though each of them went about it a bit differently. This method aligns to both *people* and *place*, as participants were able to gain an understanding of their school through the eyes of their staff. Teddy and Mary both distributed a survey of guiding questions prior to their one on one meetings, in order to provide talking points for these 30-minute sessions. One example of a question on Teddy’s survey was “How do you think the community perceives our school?” This allowed for Teddy to not only learn about his staff, but his community through the eyes of his staff. Some examples of questions from Mary’s survey included “What are things that are happening at Bunker ES that you want to see continue?” and “What are some areas that Bunker ES could improve and get better?” as well as components of history and Bunker ES staples. For Mary these questions brought up very practical pieces of information building her sense of place and therefore creating an image of the context she was stepping into. Charlotte treated her meetings almost like an interview in which she questions staff members on who they were and what their strengths were. For Charlotte, this was her first opportunity to get to know staff members and start building her understanding of the capital in her building. Charlotte was the only participant to note that she did this with
her assistant principal as well. Both Charlotte and Teddy identified these meetings as their first opportunity to build a relationship and develop trust.

Chapter Summary

All three participants repeatedly stated the importance of building relationships. It was stressed that this must happen over time, exposure, and experience with a foundation in constant authentic communication. Being present, visible, and involved was recognized by all three participants. It is important to note that all three of these novice principals repeatedly cycled back to what they are doing now to change, fix, or tweak culture. The question probes seemed to support the participants in being critical about aspects of culture, which surfaced more approaches; however, the conversations would often shift to what they are doing now.

One big takeaway for Charlotte was she “had to learn to be quiet more, and open my ears more. So more of the active listening” (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019) which she felt laid the foundation to make changes in the future, but identified this as a crucial step for transition of a new leader. Charlotte has an open-door policy, is present and hands-on, embeds authentic communication frequently, and constantly focuses on building relationships. By strategically interacting with the people on her campus, she feels she is able to learn about who they are, and thus learn the culture of the school. Teddy was a firm believer that “it all starts with the person who is running the show” and therefore asking direct questions about how it was done at Aero ES previously, he was able to learn about his predecessor and thus the culture that she created.
Both Teddy and Charlotte pointed towards experiential learning as a crucial part of how they came to understand school culture at their sites. Mary did identify that it was important for her to walk the school and experience everything that it entails, but did not articulate specifically how her learning was ongoing or how it helped her to understand the school’s culture. When asked how the district could have supported him in learning about the culture at Aero ES, Teddy stated “there’s not much they could have done to help me learn about the systems and structures that were in place at my school, until I actually saw the systems and structures that were in place in my school by myself” (T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019). Charlotte had the same perspective which was made evident in her response to the same question:

Teaching you about the culture of your school? They don’t really prepare you for that. You have to learn it, on the job. It’s all on the job learning. So, there’s really not. And I don’t know how you would do that. Because each school has its own feel. Its own vibe. And so, it was just…I learned as I went. (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019)

Both Teddy and Charlotte felt that neither the district, nor anybody else, could truly prepare you for a new school. Though there is ample learning that can occur prior to placement, when it comes to actually learning the school’s culture, it must be an authentic process that embeds all of the aforementioned methods and any others that did not come to light within this research study.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Utilizing a cross-case analysis approach, three participants who met the research criteria and were willing to participate were interviewed during two face to face meetings. Based on Wagner’s identified elements of culture, participants first identified what they knew about each element of culture, and then identified how they learned about it (2006). With the purpose of learning about the approaches that novice principal use to understand school culture, this study identified a variety of strategies within the context of three cases. It is the hope of this work, that these findings can inform aspiring principals, sitting principals, and principal preparation programs.

Research Question

One focused research question guided this work, both in how the literature was approached and the way in which the data were analyzed. The research question was simply, what approaches are used by novice principals to understand school culture? By means of a semi-structured interview process, novice principals were able to offer insight into their learning process and how they gained understanding of the culture of their school site. The ways through which the participants learned about school culture may not be generalizable or transferable, as each participant’s perspectives were situated within their school’s context and constructed reality of culture.
Summary of the Study

Participants in the study were three novice principals in their first three years in their role. They worked at public elementary schools in a district in western Florida, and they had not worked at their respective sites prior to their appointment as principals. A backwards design was implemented first collecting information on context of school culture, and then identifying how the participants learned about elements of culture at their school sites. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to collect qualitative data (Wagner, 2006; Wagner & O’Phelan, 1998), and audio-recordings of these interviews were transcribed and coded based on a framework by Wildy and Clarke (2008b) which looked at place, people, system, and self. Subthemes that aligned to these elements were identified within the coding process which guided analysis of similarities and differences across the three cases. Subthemes included learning prior to placement, relationships, observation, asking questions, utilization of the leaders on campus, and interviews and surveys.

Based on the three participants, it was found that novice principals utilize a variety of approaches to learn about school culture. Much of their preparation for this learning occurred informally, as movement from school to school during their previous administrative experiences, exposed them to people, circumstances, and challenges. From this history, participants learned by trial and error and through on-the-job experiences how to learn about a place’s culture. Some of these approaches included observations, purposeful communication, asking questions, listening attentively, and seeking to understand. From these approaches these three principals became attuned to the elements of culture at their sites. Though systems of support were made
available such as a preparation program prior to placement, a principal coach to support on-going development, and district leadership team involvement, these novice principals consistently cycled back to simply watching and listening over time, as their largest sources for learning.

**Discussion of Findings**

The discussion that follows situates the findings of the study in relation to the conceptual framework and literature reviewed for the study.

**Conceptual Framework Revisited**

The conceptual framework for this study (Wildy & Clarke, 2008b) guided the development of the design and the presentation and analysis of findings. Therefore, reflecting on its effectiveness as a tool, as well as what the findings themselves say about the tool, is important. The interview questions were based on Wagner’s (1993) classroom culture audit, the cross between the framework and interview questions provided some challenges. It was not a clear alignment, which led to some participant responses being coded in multiple categories and/or not necessarily coded at all.

Based on the findings of this study, I believe that the framework provided a strong tool for analysis of participant responses. To explore topics that came to light through interview conversations, identifying subthemes was imperative. As these subthemes emerged, I was able to align them to the framework, based on the description and elaborations in Wildy and Clarke’s work (2008b, 2010). So, the four categories of *people, place, system, and self* worked as a framework for initial analysis of interview transcripts, but upon occasion subthemes could cross multiple categories. The framework was originally intended to support principal preparation (Wildy & Clarke,
2008b, p. 730), so it might be necessary to continue to adapt this framework in relation to the changing dynamic of schools and school leadership, and very likely school cultures, over the last 10 years.

**Literature Review Revisited**

There were multiple themes that were identified and discussed in the review of literature in Chapter 2. The findings of this study confirm much of what has been currently discussed in the field; however, there are elements that disconfirm what we currently know and provide insight into novice principals and the approaches that they may use to understand school culture.

When looking at what we know about novice principals, we know that the transition to the role lends itself to feeling lonely at the top (Armstrong, 2012, p. 414) and ultimately responsible (Spillane & Lee, 2014) for every aspect of the school’s success or failure. Some knowledge of challenges to be faced comes from leadership preparation programs (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987, p. 55), but much is learned through trial and error in practice (Daresh & Male 2000, p. 91) and hands on learning. Participants did not emphasize training or pre-service development as important for learning about school culture. Pervasive in participant responses, however, was the identification of observing, asking questions, and experiencing the school as powerful transitionary learning sources.

Some literature pointed towards formal and informal mentorships (e.g., Simieou, Decman, Grigsby, & Schumacher, 2010) and social networks (e.g., Asik-Dizdar & Esen, 2013) being support systems during the novice years, but how this happens, especially when discussing the informal networks and systems of support, was not clear. All three
participants, however, identified an administrator they had, while they were still in the classroom teaching, as someone who saw something in them, pushed them to further their schooling and certification, and currently act as models for who they try to be today. This insight offers valuable opportunity in the development and potential support of aspiring novice leaders.

When looking at school culture and novice principals, much of the literature confirmed what was identified in the interviews (e.g., Weick et al., 2015). This includes time and exposure, purposeful integration into the people and context of place, as well as the on-going experiential learning through a variety of actions. This might include staff development activities, arriving early to campus to be present during the arrival of the early-birds, tapping into the leaders within social networks on campus, engaging in surveys or one on one interviews, and much more. Though none of the participant responses disconfirmed what was discussed in the literature, the interview prompts did steer the conversation into components of school culture that were not necessarily identified or discussed in current literature much, especially that of school culture and novice principals. Some examples of these components include collegiality, experimentation, and humor. Participant responses confirmed the importance of context and the situational transitions of being a leader in a place of pre-existing people, systems, structures, and norms. Coming to understand aspects of culture takes time, purposeful actions, asking questions, observing, utilizing resources and much more (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019; M. Miller, interview, April 8, 2019; T. Turner, interview, March 8, 2019). Additionally, the identity, personality, and norms of the
novice principals themselves will determine how they navigate the space of learning about culture, and thus, the approaches they utilize.

**Participant Responses Discussed**

Each of these novice principals had years of experience of being an assistant principal prior to their placement. Both Mary and Teddy alluded to the exposure to systems and structures during their prior administrative experience, while Charlotte referenced her relationship building experience and how to navigate the space of managing people during her experience. “Despite having entered the principalship from at least several years as a classroom teacher, and usually having had some experience as an assistant principal…moving into the principal’s office is a massive shift for most new principals” (Swen, 2019, p. 5). Though these experiences were impactful and helped prepare them for their new role, it was made clear that becoming a new principal at a school relies on experiential learning. All three participants had prior experiences and mentors that helped build their mindset and perspective on how a school should be led, and that prior socialization allowed them to navigate this new space.

I found that all three participants were very eager to talk about the things that they were currently doing. During my initial conversation and consent to participate process, the purpose of the research was made clear. Additionally, at the beginning of each interview, the purpose was stated with the supplement of stating that was not my intent to learn about how culture was changed, but rather how it was understood. Each question for the first round of interviews began with “tell me about the school culture as it relates to…” and then each question for the second round of interviews began with “tell me how you came to understand the school culture at your site as it relates to…”
These approaches were meant to align to the backwards design of the study looking at what they knew and then how they learned about it. I find this interesting, not because the expectations weren’t clear, but rather the discourse that novice principals, in this case, may have been socialized into. These novice principals resorted rather quickly to what they were doing and where the school is now. I do not believe that this is due to them being removed or forgetting what it was like when they first arrived, but rather they are in a position where they are far more often marketing what is going on now, rather than harping on the past and the remnants of historical impact.

Berliner has conducted ample research on novice and experts, as it relates to teachers, which may offer insight into these novice principals and how they think about, talk about, and reflect upon their understanding of what they do (Berliner, 1986; Berliner, 2001). Berliner states that experts often engage in “deeper, rather than surface understanding of the subject matter” (2001, p. 470) which would lend itself to the more experienced principal being able to talk more about specific approaches as opposed to a less experienced principal speaking more generally.

One other piece that stood out is that increased content to speak about seemed related to years of experience of each participant. Mary, having the fewest years of experience, seemed to have the least to talk about, based on probes of cultural domains. This could also be due in part to hesitation in being descriptive, which is sometimes normal of novices (Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein & Berliner, 1988, p. 31). Teddy, being a second-year principal, was able to talk more about the approaches he used to learn about culture, but very much relied on his initial one on one interviews, his SWOT analysis, and TELL survey data. Charlotte, being in her third year of being the
principal, had far more to talk about and could point to a variety of sources of cultural learning. The way in which these three participants are able to reflect on and talk about their experiences is significant.

Being a novice includes an enormous amount of learning on a regular basis, so it is no surprise that the years of experience appeared to increase a portfolio of approaches to learn about school cultures that have evolved over time. Being an expert often involves thinking and reflecting differently (Berliner, 1986, p. 11). Automaticity of routines and identification of patterns are a couple of the ways in which experts approach cues around them that are often not processed the same way for novices (Berliner, 1986, p. 7-11; Berliner, 2001, p. 464-472) which could potentially offer insight into the variance in responses amongst the participants with a different number of years of experience.

It is important to note that both of the interviews for each participant put these novice principals in a position to reflect and identify their history. Though they were given the opportunity to let me know if there was anything they ever needed to add, I cannot assume that they did not use other approaches to learning about culture. There may be things that they did to learn about the cultures at their school sites, that they may not even be aware of. This may be the first time they were asked to reflect on their learning, and therefore their answers may not be complete. Though this does not discount the study's findings, it puts them into a perspective of context.

In her final interview, Charlotte stated that “It’s just a skill set that you have to just acquire. And you do that through relationship building” (C. Champagne, interview, March 8, 2019). She, like Teddy and Mary, stressed the importance of relationships
being at the foundation of learning about culture and being an effective leader. It was interesting that she called this a ‘skill set’; this makes one wonder if relationship building as these novice principals described it is innate, if it’s learned informally, or if it can be taught directly.

**Implications for Practice**

Identifying and understanding the approaches that novice principals use as they come to understand school culture at their new sites allows for opportunities for aspiring principals to build their personal and professional approach to the realities of the job they will be entering. In today’s schools, principals are expected to be the instructional leaders of their schools and have a massive impact on student achievement. This, too, is a topic that has been heavily researched, yet we are still finding principals that feel ill-prepared when they transition into the role. The three participants in this study each identified at least one process that helped prepare them for their transitions, including mentors, socialization processes, school leadership teams, district supports, social networks of support with former and current colleagues.

Many school districts in Florida have principal pipeline programs intended to develop aspiring leaders for entry into the principalship. Findings from this study suggest that helping novice principals develop and reflect on approaches to learning about school culture throughout the novice principal’s first 2-3 years of practice may contribute to improving not only their ‘entry’ into the principalship but also their integration into the schools’ cultures and use of insights gained to inform their actions and interactions as the work with teachers and staff to improve professional practices.
This research accepts the premise that in order to change culture, culture must first be understood. Therefore, being strategic in the training of principals is important. Findings from this study also suggest that there may be a developmental or maturation process that occurs in the first three years of the principalship. Are strategies for learning about school culture formal or informal, a byproduct of time, or influenced by exposure to particular events and experience? Building an inventory of approaches and an understanding of what strategies might leverage learning as one transitions from entry to first year to second year to third year may provide stronger, and less happenstance, development of understanding about school cultures. This, in turn, may better inform novice principals’ actions and interactions as they work through school improvement efforts.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

If this specific study was to be expanded upon, there are a few routes that could be taken that could potentially yield some interesting additions to these findings. Interviewing the previous principals of these school sites to gauge their understanding of what the school culture was when they left the school would enable comparison with the understandings of the novice principals who transitioned into those principalships after them. This could provide another layer of contextual knowledge or, at least, perceptions. With that same perspective, interviewing other stakeholders, such as parents, district support systems, students, and teachers would provide a more holistic perspective on the perceptions of culture at each school site. This, in turn, may provide insight into patterns of transmission of cultural knowledge and evolution.
Adding to the field of research on novice principals is important. With an ever-changing reality of expectations and challenges that school principals face, preparing and supporting novice principals is imperative for school success. Though the participants alluded to some formal systems set up by the district, many references were made to informal learning experiences, such as experiential learning, asking questions, observing, and reflecting. Therefore, experimenting with formalized versions of these approaches in principal pipelines, the work of principal coaches, reflective practice on novice principals, and district support systems could provide insight into the effectiveness of these approaches and possibility of building ‘skill sets’ to add to novice principals’ repertoire of transitional strategies and supports.

In addition, increasing the sample size to include more participants from this school district and/or from other school districts in Florida, and potentially in other states, could provide a larger inventory of approaches for learning and influencing school culture, as well as systems of support for novice principals that may look different in other contexts.

As the topic of novice principals and their approach to understanding school culture is expanded upon, there are a multitude of research paths that can be taken. The following future research opportunities could be potentially valuable as this topic is expanded upon moving forward:

1. How might we inquire into what appears to be a novice’s difficulty reflecting on past experiences and learning?

2. How might discourse analysis be used to examine interview transcripts to look at whose ‘speak’ the respondents are representing: the school’s, the
district's, or the academic program in which they completed their principal certification?

3. What might be learned from multi-level interviews (e.g., district supervisor, assistant principal, teacher leader, etc.) that are inclusive of the perspectives of others?

4. How might we frame examination of the interview transcripts from an emic or etic perspective?

I found the elements of culture in Wagner and O'Phelan's (1998) assessment to be quite useful in development of interview questions. By focusing the topics within the interview on very specific elements of culture, participants were able to talk to different approaches that they used. If this study were to be expanded upon, continued use of the same tool across different participant groups would allow for comparison of responses across multiple contexts, as well as exploration of the consistency of the elements and characteristics of the elements across those contexts.

**Impact on the Researcher**

The intent of this study was to bring to light some of the approaches that novice principals used to learn about the cultures of their schools. Principals are charged with being leaders that steer their school, manage people, support learning, and more broadly increase student achievement. Since beginning this study, I have transitioned from a classroom teaching position, to a dean of students, and now to an assistant principal. This transition led me to feeling deeply connected to the importance of learning about culture during transitionary times.
As I reflect on my research, methods, and analysis, it is important to note the aspects of this study that I would do differently. Though the small sample size was situational and what was available to me, I believe that my data and findings could have been richer, if more participants were available. Since critical reflection was embedded in the interview process, it might have been beneficial to explicitly ask what the process of reflection and opportunities in the past might have looked like. Additionally, the structure of the interview protocol included two rounds of the same question; however, some components of the questions prompted for similar or repetitive responses, so I would be interested to see how I could have re-worded or customized this protocol to meet the needs of this research. Finding ways to re-structure the way the interviews were conducted, such as asking the “how” of the way they learned before the “what” of the content they learned may be been an interesting path to take. Possibly coupling the question with the “what” followed by the “why” could be beneficial as well. Ultimately, there were a variety of factors that could have been tweaked retrospectively, but that is part of the process.

In research it is important to remain grounded in analyzing data as objectively as possible; however, I was excited about alignment I saw with research that I had read, as well as the successes of each of these novice principals. Though the approaches they identified were contextual, they provided opportunities for my own reflection and professional growth.

**Concluding Remarks**

Principals sit in a unique position where they are expected to have positive and lasting impact on students, staff, families, and communities. Though extensive research
has been conducted on principals, we continue to study, critique, question, and seek to improve the work that these leaders do. Novice principals have a steep learning curve. With culture being an omnipresent component of a school, novice principals must learn more than the importance of impacting the culture, but also how to learn about and understand it. If we learn more about how novice principals come to understand school culture, we may gain further insight into how that knowledge can be used to leverage aspects of the school culture that can improve schools and ultimately the quality of children’s learning environments and experiences. If we can gain further insight into how, when, and why novice principals learn about school culture, principal preparation pipelines/programs and school districts may have opportunity to develop more strategic supports for novice principals in their early years in the position.
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Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

My name is Shane Silpe and I am a Ph.D. student at the University of South Florida. My dissertation topic is how novice principals come to understand school culture. I am interested in your experiences as beginning principal and the means by which you learned about the pre-existing culture at your site. It is not my intention to look at how culture is changed, but rather learned and understood. Hopefully this information can be shared with aspiring principals as they prepare for their role. As a participant in this design process, I am interested in hearing what your experience of transition looks like. I too am a novice administrator and find the process of learning about culture at my new school of interest, but today’s conversations are about you and your experiences.

Your name, school, and community will be completely anonymous and will be substituted with pseudonyms in my writings. This interview will be recorded for later transcription and analysis. Additionally, I will share the transcription of this interview with you to confirm accuracy as well as allow you to reflect on your responses before the second round of interviews. I will also share my analysis with you prior to moving forward with the dissertation process, to ensure my analysis and discussion are an accurate portrayal of the information you share with me today and from any follow-up communications.

Interview #1

1. To begin, tell me a bit about what brought you to your current position as a principal and a bit about your career in education.

For the following topics, please tell me what the school culture is like at your school.

2. Collegiality. The way adults treat each other, (i.e., respect and harmony vs. disrespect and discord)

3. Efficacy. Feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions: (i.e., do people tend to live with or solve problems?)

4. High expectations of self and other. Excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated, supported, and shared.

5. Experimentation and entrepreneurship. New ideas abound and invention occurs.
6. **Trust and confidence.** Participants believe in the leaders and each other based on the match between creeds and deeds.

7. **Tangible support.** Improvement efforts are substantive with abundant resources made available by all.

8. **Appreciation and recognition of improvement.** People feel special and act special.

9. **Humor.** Caring is expressed through “kidding or joking in tasteful ways.

10. **Shared decision making by all participants.** Those affected by a decision are involved in making and implementing the decision.

11. **Shared vision.** Participants understand what’s important and avoid trivial tasks.

12. **Traditions.** The school has identifiable celebrations and rituals that are important to the school community.

13. **Open and honest communication.** Information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels. (Everyone receives information on a “need-to-know” basis).

14. **Metaphors and stories.** There is evidence of behavior being communicated and influences by internal imagery and storytelling.

Interview #2

For the following topics, please tell me how you learned about the identified element of school culture at your school.

2. **Collegiality.** The way adults treat each other, (i.e., respect and harmony vs. disrespect and discord)

3. **Efficacy.** Feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions: (i.e., do people tend to live with or solve problems?)

4. **High expectations of self and other.** Excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated, supported, and shared.

5. **Experimentation and entrepreneurship.** New ideas abound and invention occurs.

6. **Trust and confidence.** Participants believe in the leaders and each other based on the match between creeds and deeds.

7. **Tangible support.** Improvement efforts are substantive with abundant resources made available by all.

8. **Appreciation and recognition of improvement.** People feel special and act special.

9. **Humor.** Caring is expressed through “kidding or joking in tasteful ways.

10. **Shared decision making by all participants.** Those affected by a decision are involved in making and implementing the decision.

11. **Shared vision.** Participants understand what’s important and avoid trivial tasks.

12. **Traditions.** The school has identifiable celebrations and rituals that are important to the school community.
13. **Open and honest communication.** Information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels. (Everyone receives information on a “need-to-know” basis).

14. **Metaphors and stories.** There is evidence of behavior being communicated and influences by internal imagery and storytelling.


15. **Learning source.** How did you learn about your school’s culture? What were your sources of information?

16. **Place.** How did you learn about the school context, including the people and issues that the school faced?

17. **People.** How do you handle the wide range of interactions on a day-to-day basis? Specifically, how do the wide variety of issues presented by staff members impact these interactions?

18. **System.** How has the district helped and/or hurt your success in learning about your school organization and its culture?

19. **Self.** How do your experiences and your opinions/perspectives impact the way in which you learn about the culture at your school?

20. **Open-ended.** Is there anything that you would like to share with me that we have not discussed, as it relates to school culture and the way in which you came to understand it, at your school site?
Thank you for your time. I will transcribe this, share it with you, and schedule our follow-up interview shortly. **For the second round of interviews, I will ask you to talk about how you learned about each of these topics.**
Appendix B. Novice Principal Recruitment Letter

To whom it may concern,

You are being invited to participate in the research study titled A Cross-Case Analysis of Strategies Used by Novice Elementary School Principals to Understand School Culture (IRB study # 00037261). This research is being conducted by Shane Silpe (the principal investigator), who is in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at the University of South Florida (USF). This research is being conducted as the final dissertation in partial fulfillment of the needed components of a Doctorate of Philosophy from USF.

It has been found that you match the research criteria. That criteria includes:

- Novice principals being in their first three years at their site
- Never having worked at their site prior to their placement
- Elementary level
- Traditional public school

Of particular interest to me are the experiences of novice elementary school principals, stepping into new leadership roles in new schools. This process of participation in cultural meaning making, while being a novice, offers a unique opportunity for supporting aspiring leaders. The purpose of this study is to identify the approaches that novice principals use to identify and understand the culture at their school site.

As a participant there are a few key components that you will be asked to complete. There will be two rounds of interviews. Each round should take no more than 60 minutes. Both will be conducted one on one at your school site, during a scheduled time that works best for you. Both interviews will be transcribed and then shared with you to ensure accuracy. All names, schools, districts, etc. will be coded with pseudonyms. The analysis of data will be shared with you, to ensure accuracy at the end as well. It is expected that between February and April, there will be a total time commitment of about 3-4 hours, including interviews, transcription review, and data analysis review.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate, and we will set up a time to discuss next steps. You can reach me by email at shane.silpe@mail.usf.edu or by phone at 516-361-8222.

Thank you,

Shane Silpe
Appendix C. Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study
Title: A Cross-Case Analysis of Strategies Used by Novice Elementary School Principals to Understand School Culture
Pro # 00037261

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Shane Silpe who is a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Judith Ponticell. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at your respective school site and is under the direction of a dissertation committee at USF. Many have identified the principalship as a “sink or swim” role (Rooney, 2000, p. 77) in which new leaders address a multitude of tasks daily (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 433) with feelings of ultimate responsibility. Given the ongoing negotiation, novice principals must actively engage in meaning-making and critical reflection of their broad range of experiences. The understanding of this on-going negotiation of cultural meaning-making during the most formative time of a principal has potential of informing multiple audiences such as preparation programs, certification curriculum, district leaders, and novice principals themselves. This research dives into this transitional development, as it relates to school culture and the means that novice principals come to understand it. The purpose of the study is to learn how novice principals come to understand the school culture at their site. Through two rounds of interviews, a variety of questions will be asked that offer insight into the approaches used to understand school culture at your site. Each interview should last around 45 minutes, will be conducted at your school site, and will be schedule during a time that works best for you.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because the insight and experiences you have as a novice principal and navigating the pre-existing culture at your site has the opportunity to help other aspiring principals learn about how they can come to understand the culture at their future sites.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start. Alternatives to participating in the study include: Your decision to participate or not to participate will not
affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. There is no cost to participate. You will not be compensated for your participation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Why are you being asked to take part?
We are asking you to take part in this research study because your experiences as a novice principal and how you learned about the school culture at your site matters. Much of what novice principals do is experiential learning. By sharing your experiences, aspiring leaders and current principals will be able develop their own skills based on your learning and experiences. This is a great way to pay it forward as well as reflect and solidify your own learning too!

Study Procedures:
During the study, the principal investigator will meet with you at your school site on two separate occasions. Each visit will be as efficient as possible in order to not intrude on your time. The time-tables and protocol is as follows:
If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

• Interview Protocol: Meet with the Principal Investigator for two face to face semi-structured interview (February – March)
  o This should take approximately 45 minutes for each conversation
  o It will occur at your work site
  o These sessions will be audio-recorded. You have the option to agree to this recording. Audio recordings will be safely stored (See Privacy and Confidentiality below) in a Box Database, per the recommendation of USF’s IRB and will be held for 5 years after the Final Report is submitted to the IRB and will then be permanently deleted

At each visit, you will be asked to:

• Answer the Following Interview questions: For the following questions, please tell me what the school culture is like related to the topic. The follow-up interview will include the same topics but more specifically how you learned about each.
  o The way adults treat each other, i.e., respect and harmony vs. disrespect and discord
  o Feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions: i.e., do people tend to live with or solve problems?
  o Excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated, supported, and shared.
New ideas abound and invention occurs.
Participants believe in the leaders and each other based on the match between creeds and deeds.
Improvement efforts are substantive with abundant resources made available by all.
People feel special and act special.
Caring is expressed through “kidding or joking in tasteful ways.
Those affected by a decision are involved in making and implementing the decision.
Participants understand what’s important and avoid trivial tasks.
The school has identifiable celebrations and rituals that are important to the school community.
Information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels. Everyone receives information on a “need-to-know” basis.
There is evidence of behavior being communicated and influences by internal imagery.
Are there any other specific strategies or methods you used to learn about the school culture at your site?
Where did you learn about how to understand school culture?
How did you learn about the school context, including the people and issue that the school faced, upon your beginning months on the job?
How do you handle the wide range of interactions on a day-to-day basis?
How has the district helped and/or hurt your success in learning about your school organization and its culture?
How do your experiences and your opinion/perspective impact the way in which you learned about culture at your school?
Is there anything that you would like to share with me that we have not discussed, as it related to school culture and the way in which you came to understand it, at your school site?

- Be available for follow up questions for clarification and elaboration via email or phone, as needed (Feb. – April)
- Read and review interview transcriptions to ensure accuracy (Feb. – Mar.)
- Review analysis and findings for accuracy (Feb. – Apr.)
- Upon completion of the Dissertation, you will be provided a digital copy, once published

**Total Number of Participants**
Three to six individuals will take part in this study at USF. A total of 6 individuals will participate in the study at all sites.

**Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**
You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time.

**Benefits**
The potential benefits of participating in this research study include:
• Supporting aspiring principals with your shared experiences
• Paying it forward to other novice principals looking to develop their own skills
• Providing information for principal preparation programs based on your experiences

Risks or Discomfort
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation
You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs
It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement
Based on the conditions present in this study, there is no requirement for a COI statement. The researcher is not seeking any financial gains for self or others while conducting this work.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

• The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.
• Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
• Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
• The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.
What if new information becomes available about the study?
During the course of this study, we may find more information that could be important to you. This includes information that, once learned, might cause you to change your mind about being in this study. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Shane Silpe at 516-361-8222. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in Research
I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

____________________________________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

_______________________________
Date

____________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent and Research Authorization
I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research participant speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research participant has provided legally effective informed consent.

____________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

_______________________________
Date

____________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix D. IRB Exemption Letter

2/11/2019

Shane Silpe
College of Education
4445 Seawater Street
Orlando, FL 32812

RE: Exempt Certification
IRB#: Pro00037261
Title: A Cross-Case Analysis of Strategies Used by Novice Elementary School Principals to Understand School Culture

Dear Mr. Silpe:

On 2/8/2019, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that your research meets criteria for exemption from the federal regulations as outlined by 45 CFR 46.104(d):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted as outlined in your application and consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report and with USF HRPP policies and procedures.

Please note, as per USF HRPP Policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in ARC. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated changes to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB
oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant an Amendment or new application.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subjects research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D.,
Chairperson USF Institutional Review Board
Appendix E. Researcher’s Journal Sample

Participant: Mary Miller  
Interview Number: One  
School: Bunker Elementary  
District: Bungalow Bay Public Schools  
Interview Date: March 1, 2019  
Reflection Date: March 1, 2019

Thoughts and Reflections

This has now been my second interview for this study, and I can already see a drastic difference in depth of responses from Teddy to Mary. I think it’s interesting how convenient and seamless it was to meet with Teddy during our scheduled time, but I waited about an hour for Mary to meet with me. Once arriving, her secretary came out to let me know the Area Superintendent just popped in and it will be a bit. I wouldn’t be surprised if that happens more often than not for first year principals.

One response that struck me as very interesting was Mary’s response to the question about traditions. She paused for quite some time, re-stated the question, identified that she had to think about it, and then stated that aside from night events, she can’t really say there are any traditions. I am interested to see how she responds to this same question during the second round of interviews.

Another question that stood out to me was the question about metaphors and stories. Mary identified some aspects what she knows about the stories of the school, and alluded to negative conversations she picked up on. I attempted to probe her to elaborate, but it still felt a little vague and distant. Mary did identify various components that were pertinent for her, but failed to be specific. Maybe I should have probed differently or better.

Listening to Mary identify aspects of culture has left me on the edge of my seat, as I ponder how she learned about each aspect. I am eager to find out if she (and others) are able to pinpoint the specific approaches she used. I also felt as if many of the responses eventually transitioned to what was being done now, what her intent was, and what her team was trying to accomplish through her vision for the school. It’s possible that my expectations weren’t clear, so I will ensure when I send my follow-up
email with the transcript that I re-iterate what it is I am looking for, providing the opportunity for her and the others to adjust, if they identify this same transition. If not, I will not push it, as I believe it holds great value and may speak to the participants reflections.
Appendix F. Transcription Coding Sample

Participant: Charlotte Champagne
Interview Number: Two
School: Archo Elementary
District: Bungalow Bay Public Schools
Date: March 8, 2019

• Shane – Tell me about how you came to understand the school culture at your site as it relates to **Tangible support**.

• Charlotte – I had to ask questions. Like, “what motivates them?”. Like, “what do they like?”. It’s those questionnaires. At the beginning of the year, during pre-planning, when they give me their address, their information. There is a little survey questionnaire they fill out for me, telling me: what do they like? How do they like to be recognized? What is their favorite restaurant? So, I have ideas on what they personally like…to try to help motivate them. And then you just trial and error. You try different things and see if they work. Like, I know now, my staff now likes to eat. So, I buy food for everything.

• Shane – Tell me about how you came to understand the school culture at your site as it relates to **Appreciation and recognition of improvement**.

• Charlotte – When arriving, I had to again, sit back and watch and ask questions. I had to ask people what did it look like for students, what did it look like for teachers. And then in their personal survey, how did they want to receive things. And then I just started doing what I know to do. Like, just my way. My language is to give accolades and notes. And so, I just started doing them. And they were received very well. And I know teachers received them well, because teachers hung them up in their rooms. And it seemed to become like a collection. How many? And to this day, they still do that. So, when I see one, not having as many as another room, I make sure to give that teacher some, so they can build their little signature.
• Shane – Tell me about how you came to understand the school culture at your site as it relates to **Humor**.

• Charlotte – When I came, they were very serious. But I think the seriousness came because it was a new staff. Like half and half. Like half were established, they were already here. And then half were new. And out of the new, I only hired like two of them. So, even the new people didn’t know who I was. Because of the way the district moved us in and out. So, they were just really serious. They didn’t know me, I don’t know them. So, I just had to become me. I just, I smile every day, I’m upbeat, I’m a cheerleader type personality. And I just had to be me. And that kind of rubbed off on them. And I tell them very transparently, I laugh at everything. Even my personal life, we laugh. In business life, we just try to find humor. I can run into the wall, and literally start laughing, because I literally start laughing just because I can’t believe I really ran into the wall. Like I did, like look, that’s going to hurt. That’s just who I am. So, I just carry on. The same person you see me in school is the same person you would see me in the outside world.

• Shane – Tell me about how you came to understand the school culture at your site as it relates to **Shared decision making by all participants**.

• Charlotte – That was by getting into the work with them. So again, at first, by observing just the way of work that was here prior to me. It seemed to be more of a dictatorship. The principal said to do it, and you just did it. There was not a cohesive buy-in group. So, it was more out of compliance that they were buying into things. So, through our expectations, we are collaborative, we are going to do things together. And therefore, we had to build a schedule to make that happen. And then I have to be a part of it. It’s how we started to build. We did it together. I modelled it. And I was a part of it. And only up to this year, I was able to release it, and now it is driven by the teams. But it has taken us three years to get there.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raised in the North and refined in the South, I am originally from Lido Beach, New York and currently live in Orlando, Florida with my fiancée, Stephanie, and dog, Meeko. With an interest in education, I pursued my Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from the College of Charleston in South Carolina. After graduating, I decided I wanted to work in populations that are often under-served which led me to joining Teach for America and working in the Louisiana Delta. During my time there, I completed my Master of Education degree with a focus on Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Louisiana Monroe. Rural education presented a variety of challenges which was eye opening for me, shedding light on the need for great educators for all students, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or zip code. After my time in the Delta, I moved to Tampa to continue to work in Title I schools, and pursue my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of South Florida. With an eagerness to effect change beyond the four walls of my classroom, I wanted to expand my knowledge of educational leadership, policy, and organizational competencies.

I currently serve as an Assistant Principal in Orange County Public Schools at a school that is 100% free/reduced lunch. I love working with kids, I love working relentlessly to improve outcomes and opportunities for all children, and I am truly fortunate to have the opportunity to do so.