A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' SHARED

EXPERIENCES OF RESTRUCTURING IN VIRGINIA SCHOOLS

by

Lisa Whitmore Rath

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after restructuring in Virginia. Restructuring is defined as the transition or movement from one setting to another. Schlossberg's transitional theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study, answering the essential question: How do assistant principals describe their experiences associated with being restructuring? The sub-questions explored the experiences of the assistant principal before, during, and after the restructuring. Sub-questions inquired as to what the experiences were before the restructuring, during the restructuring, and after the restructuring occurred. The research design used was the qualitative method of a phenomenological model with a transcendental approach. Assistant principals for this study were from multiple schools and multiple levels, such as elementary and secondary schools in Virginia. The 12 participants sample included criteria-based, purposeful sampling. Interviews for the collection of data included using open-ended, semi-structured interviews, a focus group with documented analysis, and journaling to identify themes that occurred. Data collected were analyzed by examining and reviewing answers given through interviews and document analysis by identifying common themes using coding and identifying patterns. Results indicated building relationships was meaningful and division consistency was an issue before restructuring; emotions and challenges were evident during transitioning, and after restructuring, all showed that growth occurred.

Keywords: phenomenology, restructuring, transcendental, transition theory

Dedication

First and foremost, this dedication must be to my creator, God Almighty. He is my ultimate source of strength, and it is his wings that able me to soar while running this race.

To the memory of my mom, Mae Darden Whitmore. She is the reason that I began this journey toward my doctoral degree in March of 2018. Although she is unable to see me finish, it is for her memory that I continued along with the continued support and encouragement of my father, Robert Bland Whitmore. My parents laid the foundation with their unconditional love and taught me the meaning of hard work through an example. Their desire for me to learn came with many sacrifices for a quality education. It is impossible to adequately thank them for teaching me life's lessons along with the Christian values, which were instilled in me at an early age. I am blessed to have been influenced by my mom and continue to be blessed by my dad daily. I would be remised not to mention the influence of my late grandmother, Helen Whitmore. She was my inspiration to continue education through undergraduate studies, and her spiritual influences resonate with me today. She taught me that there is a reason for all things, and we as Christians must have faith even as small as that of a mustard seed.

To my husband, David. He has been and continues to be the constant source of support and encouragement. He puts my schooling above all others in pursuit of the finish. He has pushed, supported, and even sacrificed throughout this journey, being my daily reminder to finish and keeping me supplied in Diet Coke and candy. And YES, you can now retire!

To others that have inspired and encouraged me: my camping family Willie, Lee, Becky, Keith, Rosa, and Pops- thank you for believing in me and being there to support and encourage. I am indeed blessed to call you all my FAMILY!

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To not only my boss, but my friend, Temesha Dabney. She restored me by transforming a broken spirit making me whole once again, building my confidence. As stated by the Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu, A good boss does more than manage people, "they lead by example and not by force." Temesha Dabney is more than a leader; she is an inspiration to others bringing out the best in them, leading by example, and creating a positive environment. Words that describe her are positive, kind, knowledgeable, honest, trustworthy, motivating, fair, understanding, and transparent. Words can neither qualify nor quantify what Temesha Dabney has meant to me. I am forever grateful and appreciate her in many ways.

I must thank my committee for being willing to work with me on my "fast track" and keeping me on track throughout this process. Many thanks go to my committee chair, Dr. Carol Gillespie, for your guidance and support. Your kind spirit and Godly heart helped me develop throughout this process. I knew the moment you accepted as my committee chair that God had chosen you to guide me throughout the operation of the dissertation. Examples of your encouragement are taken from your emails and include; "wonderful news, super, God bless you as you strive to do meaningful research for assistant principals, I am available for you, don't hesitate to call or text, onward and upward, happy to join you on your final phase, blessings, God will help us book a hotel-now, God will help you run the race, you are ok-not to worry, grace and favor, it will be worth the wait, and stay strong this process is not for the faint of heart! Also, thank you to Dr. David Vacchi, my methodologist, for your expert counsel and feedback. While I am completing my degree for the memory of my mom and my dad, it was Dr. Vacchi that reminded me that I am doing it to glorify our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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List of Abbreviations

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after their experiences with restructuring in Virginia. This chapter states the problems and experiences of restructuring linked to the central question and sub-questions. The research plan was detailed, including delimitation and limitations in guiding this study. Because there is very little research on assistant principals in general, the significance of this study allowed for the voice of assistant principals to be heard based on their lived experiences associated with restructuring in Virginia. This chapter provides the background of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research question because of this qualitative transcendental phenomenology study.

Background

The most relevant literature provides historical, social, and theoretical contexts related to the restructuring of schools. The problem with restructuring is that the constant changing of leadership among schools can disrupt the personal and professional lives of assistant principals with arbitrary reassignments, thus causing leadership changes, resignations, and reduced effectiveness. This change in school management occurrences can further lead to decreased student performance. Therefore, more studies are needed on the impact of the restructuring of assistant principals in Virginia, defining the pros and cons associated with the experiences. There is currently minimal research giving assistant principals a voice in restructuring. Administrators in K-12 education are responsible for ensuring quality teaching for students to learn (Clayton, 2014; Smith et al., 2017).

The importance of this study gives assistance principals a voice in the restructuring

process while sharing their experiences before, during, and after the restructuring. The ASCD (2017) defines the phenomenon of restructuring as the transitioning of new organizational patterns or styles of leadership and management to bring about a renewed, more effective school. However, restructuring does not always lend itself to a renovated, more effective school, but potentially leads to stress among all involved to include faculty, staff, and the new assistant principal.

Historical Context

The concept of leadership is studied by researchers as a complex phenomenon that is built on social interactions, effects on the culture, and includes common goals (Cansoy, 2018). Today's top priority in educational reform is to improve school leadership efforts, instruction, and scores through federal initiatives. One such action is Race to the Top, which espouses the ideology that effective principals and assistant principals can influence teachers and, in turn, their teaching, which increases learning (Bloom & Abel, 2015).

Historically, in the United States in efforts to improve education through teaching and learning, another federal legislation was put in place—No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB was implemented in January of 2002 to help raise the academic performance of students. Following that initiative, Race to the Top's implementation occurred in January 2010 and was the most significant federal investment in school reform to date. Race to the Top's incentive was to reward and motivate others in return for academic progress. The restructuring was necessary in improving school leadership and education. According to Podgursky and Ehlert (2016), restructuring is, at times, needed within the same district for the equitable distribution of leaders. Therefore, restructuring has historically taken place over time in education.

Social Context

The role of an assistant principal has become more and more complex, requiring strong leadership abilities, and calling for reshaping or restructuring to take place (Hunter, 2016; Neumerski et al., 2018; Sun & Shoho, 2017). According to Armstrong (2015), the role of assistant principals includes numerous tasks performing various jobs, significant leadership, and management roles in varied areas of supervision while being familiar with curriculum standards and maintaining a safe environment. The multitude of duties and responsibilities causes many assistant principals to lack control of their own time, resulting in feeling a sense of isolationism (Armstrong, 2015).

An ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, once described the change as being the only one constant in life (Higgins, 2019). Restructuring is a complex process transpiring in schools where there is a constant shifting and restructuring of environments (Higgins, 2019; Lewis, 1989). According to Kelleher and Levenson (2014), when districts transition leaders with similar values and beliefs, the process is more straightforward about the alignment of the culture. As with any life change, it is essential to look at the positive and negative issues associated with the change. Some of the positive aspects of restructuring include starting over or a fresh start, opportunities for change, growth associated with the change, opportunities to be exposed to others, and opportunities for success (Flitcroft & Kelly, 2016; Higgins, 2019). Some of the challenges associated with restructuring include the energy, time, and money that it costs a district. Also, new rituals, routines, and traditions; adaption to new roles and context; the feeling of ambiguity with the cultural shift; and sometimes professional change if the restructuring includes a fragmented environment create challenges (Armstrong, 2015; Flitcroft & Kelly, 2016; Higgins, 2019). Therefore, numerous problems result from the constant change with the restructuring process. In the social context of things, assistant principals need their voices heard

due to the experiences they encounter with restructuring emphasizing the process of before moving, during the move, and even after the transitioning has taken place.

When restructuring takes place, assistant principals go through a process of many thoughts and feelings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Change tends to be hard; however, there are times when change will end up being beneficial. Mindsets that have been associated with restructuring include feelings of resentment, hurt, frustration, and stress, to name a few (Cansoy, 2018; Higgins, 2019). After restructuring has taken place, and the assistant principal(s) have settled in their new placement, their emotions tend to fade as they are trying to learn new procedures in a new environment.

Theoretical Context

The theoretical underpinnings of this study will include the experiences of assistant principals who have experienced going through restructuring. The theoretical significance of this study will align with the transitional theory by Schlossberg (1981a) concerning the relation to the transition and effects of restructuring on assistant principals. The theoretical underpinnings also use Schlossberg's transition theory as the foundation of transformation as it relates to restructuring. The transition theory categorizes transitions in one of three areas, including individual, relationship, and working, along with the factors that influence the ability to cope with a change such as situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2012). There has been a lack of voice from assistant principals when it comes to restructuring and the effects that it can have on assistant principals, principals, students, schools, parents, and community. Dr. Nancy Schlossberg is known as an expert when it comes to transitions in and among adults. Schlossberg recognized the need to create a framework to aid adults in coping with developing transition and change associated with restructuring (Evans et al., 2010).

Assistant principals need to have a voice when it comes to restructuring. They go through numerous changes, both physical and emotional, where the difference is a complicated process. Also, there is little research that allows for the voice of assistant principals to be heard based on their experiences with restructuring. This study uses a transcendental phenomenological design to allow assistant principals to describe their experiences with the redesign (a) before the restructuring occurred; (b) during restructuring; and (c) after restructuring occurred. This research study allows assistant principals to share their experiences associated with before, during, and after the process of transition. This knowledge gained from transitional experiences may benefit multiple departments and superiors in understanding the experiences that the assistant principal goes through because of a restructuring. Restructuring experiences, as told from the voice of assistant principals, may provide district leaders with the data needed to consider whether the transition would be sufficient.

Situation to Self

My motive for this research comes from my own experience as an assistant principal who experienced restructuring, including the difficulties associated with change while going through a transition. I have been employed in this school district for 28 years, with three and a half years as an assistant principal. During the 2017–2018 school year, I experienced a major restructuring and was reassigned to another school within the same district at the same level of elementary education. Even though the restructuring was most beneficial, it was still tricky going through the transition process of switching schools. Reflections, based on my own experience with the process of change and restructuring, allowed me to be able to gain an understanding of both the pros and cons associated with the transition of restructuring. Even though the transition phase was difficult, the overall effect was beneficial. As a result of my restructuring assignment, I have

been given the opportunity for a prodigious leader in teaching me how to handle stressful situations, trust without second-guessing, and allow me to be myself. Together, we accept each other's strengths and weaknesses, work together without jealousy, and have an open, honest relationship with aligned leadership styles that are synchronized. Together, my principal and I have mutual respect and support each other. My transition has resulted in being a capable team while making a difference in our school.

Change is difficult, yet necessary for people to grow as in my experience with Schlossberg's unanticipated change. As I reflect on my own experience, I was astonished I was going to change schools. Therefore, my experience "before" transition was that of shock, sadness by leaving my comfort zone, and a sense of loss as I had to leave those whom I had worked so hard to build relationships. My process "during" was the most difficult. It took place during the summer of 2018 and in conjunction with grieving the loss of my mother the first week in June. Weeks of sadness and despair consumed me, along with questioning being transitioned to another school. I felt broken. The "after" experience provided me with growth, improved self-esteem, and confirmation. Hence, my experience moving in, moving through, and moving out aligns with Schlossberg's transitional theory as an adult experiencing transition due to restructuring.

Restructuring seems to be an ongoing process and experienced by numerous assistant principals; hence, capturing other experiences may provide insight into the perspectives of other assistant principals. Anticipation associated with restructuring may cause fear of the unknown; however, as in my experience, the move resulted in being a blessing. While going through the process of change, it can be difficult at the time but may turn out for the best.

I approached my research from that of an ontological view in which other assistant principals could describe their experiences associated with the nature of reality. This research was grounded in a social constructivism interpretative framework. This research also served as a guide for districts undergoing restructuring (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) describe philosophical assumptions in the analysis, which will allow participants to have the opportunity to share their real-life experiences by embracing their experiences before, during, and after restructuring. Assistant principals could share their experiences and have a voice about restructuring and, in turn, were able to release emotions.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the paradigm of social constructivism allows assistant principals the opportunities to seek an understanding of the world while constructing the meaning of the situation, restructuring, allows the opportunity for the assistant principal to discuss while interacting with others. "The basic tenet of this transformative framework is the knowledge is not neutral, and it reflects the power and social relationships within the society; thus, the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people to improve society" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 25). This ontological viewpoint allowed assistant principals the opportunity to reflect based on their own experiences throughout the process of restructuring.

Problem Statement

The problem associated with restructuring is that constant changing leadership among schools can disrupt the personal and professional lives of assistant principals with arbitrary reassignments, causing leadership changes, resignations, and reduced effectiveness. This change in school management occurrences can further lead to decreased student performance. The gap requires more studies needed on the impact that restructuring can have on assistant principals, and the voice of the assistant principal needs to be heard. Restructuring can cause feelings of

abandonment and isolation, along with many other anxieties before, during, and after transition; therefore, it is imperative that the assistant principal that is experiencing the shift meet with the new administrator or administration to identify the most highly valued practices (Pont, 2014; Strickland-Cohen et al., 2014). Assistant principals need to have the opportunity to generate a school identity to develop a sense of belonging (Flitcroft & Kelly, 2016). We live in an era filled with constant and complex change, where leaders such as principals and assistant principals are responsible for handling high levels of complexity with governance and policy implementation (Jayapragas, 2016; Pont, 2014). In leadership roles, there are increased responsibilities that are complex and have led to multiple layers of responsibilities (Eckman, 2018; McClellan, 2015). The more significant issue associated with restructuring was the emotions along with the process that one may experience throughout the process of transitioning, and the changes in culture they experience in an educational setting before, during, and after a transition takes place. Restructuring can be problematic in education because of the lack of consistency when changing leadership. According to literature and research, transformation and change cause many feelings and emotions, such as fear of the unknown and change (Schlossberg, 1981b, 2011). Each school is different based on a multitude of factors ranging from culture to operational procedures along with the families that are within that school district.

Therefore, according to McClellan (2015) statistics from 2007–2008 revealed a total of 20% of leaders leaving administration due to a high number of transitions within their district. Any change among administrators when changing schools requires self-awareness, personal-awareness, and the ability to adapt to new situations (Eckman, 2018). While there is minimal research on assistant principals and transitions, assistant principals outnumber principals as many larger schools could have multiple assistant principals and only one principal (Pont, 2014).

There is currently little to no research giving the assistant principals a voice based on their experiences with restructuring. There is the mindset or belief by educators, that frequent transitioning causes a lack of consistency within the school culture (Brooks, 2018). By being given a chance for assistant principals to tell their stories, many benefits can result from voicing their experiences before, during, and after the process of restructuring took place. This voice of assistant principals will also allow for others such as school administrative leaders at the district level and principals to be able to understand the various steps of this transition and the human resource (HR) department to realize the impact on others. Therefore, assistant principals need an opportunity to voice how constant changing of leadership among schools disrupts their personal and professional lives with having to start over and emotionally deal with reassignment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after their experiences with restructuring in Virginia. At this stage in the research, the phenomenon of restructuring defined by the ASCD (2017) as the transitioning of "new organizational patterns or styles of leadership and management to bring about a renewed, more effective schools" (ASCD, 2017, Restructuring) The theory that guided this research study was Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory as it describes experiences that can start before the event and has an ending point while promoting the well-being of others (Evans et al., 2010). "The process of a transition occurs in phases and involves leaving behind the old and moving on to the new through an emergent growth process" where new roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions established over time (Schlossberg, 2012, p. 49). The transition theory was used by having assistant principals describe their experiences before, during, and after transitioning from one school to another through interviews

and participation in a focus group. This phenomenon allowed for assistant principals to have a voice in sharing their own experiences caused by restructuring. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a phenomenology approach uses an interpretive framework within the research process as a research method to collect and analyze the data, which will be done in this study using interviews and the focus group.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

This phenomenological study of assistant principals' experiences with restructuring involves empirical, theoretical, and practical relevance with a focus on the effects of restructuring through the voices of those who have lived the experience(s).

Empirical Significance

The empirical significance gave assistant principals the opportunities to voice their transitional experiences through this transcendental phenomenological study. Empirically, this study used level one and level two data from experiences of assistant principals through naïve descriptions, open-ended questions, dialogue, description of formative experiences, and interpretation of the participant's account (Moustakas, 1994). Results from this study likely revealed how change is difficult for most people and only welcomed once the process was over, and they felt as if they were a part of the team when relationships and trust were formed (Lee-Colvin, 2018).

Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, assistant principals had the opportunity to share their before, during, and after experiences through their lived experiences. The transition theory's significance included the experiences that the assistant principals went through during the restructuring phase and the transition. The theoretical importance of this study expanded on the transitional theory by Nancy

Schlossberg and referenced the social cognitive theory of Bandura, where people share their knowledge, skills, and synergy. The results of this study used Schlossberg's transition theory lens by describing experiences associated with restructuring as assistant principals experience the "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" during the transitional phase of restructuring. Transition and restructuring theoretically caused unexplained confusion, complex transitions, the changing structure of the job descriptions based on the culture, and changes to one's life in general (Schlossberg, 2011). According to Schlossberg (2011), any job-related transition alters our lives based on our roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions.

Practical Significance

The practical aspect allowed for an understanding of the numerous individuals that were affected due to restructuring. Individuals affected include principals, assistant principals, school staff, students, parents, and division positions, including directors, human resources, and district-school liaisons. According to Lyons et al. (2016), restructuring affected both principals and their assistant principals in variables such as developing a clear vision, the value of each other, offering comprehensive supports, collaborating with teams, offering professional development, being flexible, and providing supportive leadership. For the faculty and staff of both schools- the one that lost their assistant principal and the new school that gained a new assistant principal, the leadership style could be that of significance.

According to Cansoy (2018), faculty and staff must get accustomed to a new leadership style(s), including transformational, distributive, instructional, interactive, or authoritative in leadership. Students and parents are both affected by restructuring due to the responsibility of the school administration to ensure that quality teaching is taking place, and students are learning-academic achievement (Cansoy, 2018; Smith et al., 2017). According to Armstrong (2015),

leaders need to work with community stakeholders and parents before, during, and after restructuring occurs. One possible way is by having community partners at each school and offer parent involvement nights to allow stakeholders and parents an opportunity to get to know the new assistant principal. Additionally, district-level personnel, including the human resource department, may also be affected by restructuring in hearing the positive and negative aspects that result from restructuring.

Too many assistant principals in Virginia experience transitions through restructuring; therefore, this was a phenomenon worth looking at through the eyes of those who experienced the same situation (Moustakas, 1994). Every year between May and June, in my district alone, assistant principals and principals are on edge, wondering if shifts in structure are going to take place and who will be affected by the restructuring.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the experiences that assistant principals have had because of restructuring. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the intent of questions is to narrow down the purpose of the content addressed. The transcendental phenomenological research design used as well as the theoretical framework of Nancy Schlossberg in association with her transition theory. Data were collected from assistant principals who had experienced restructuring using open-ended, semi-structured interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended a single central question along with several sub-questions. Follow-up focus groups were conducted as a part of this research as well.

Central Research Question

How do assistant principals describe their experiences associated with restructuring? Many assistant principals experience restructuring at some point in their careers either due to

transition, restructuring, or change in job status. Giving assistant principals a voice, in which they can share their own experiences, may provide support to other assistant principals facing similar situations due to restructuring or transitioning to a new school and give valuable information to those that are in upper management, making changes on a yearly basis. Throughout the process of restructuring or transitioning, many emotions capture one's feelings, such as isolation, abandonment, fear, and even rejection (Armstrong, 2015; Higgins, 2019; Strickland-Cohen et al., 2014). While there are several emotions associated with transition or restructuring in education, these emotions experienced by assistant principals throughout the process have profound effects.

Sub-question One

What were the experiences of assistant principals before restructuring took place? This question allowed for the assistant principal to share with the researcher their experiences concerning their role at the school in which they served before the process of "moving out" occurred. By sharing the skills from the former location, it was possible to be able to assist the person that would fulfill that role as far as the leadership style of that principal. Consoy (2018) defines different leadership styles to clarify the type of leader. This question provides shared experiences within the transitional theory lens that describes the "moving out" (after), followed by the experiences of "moving through" (during), and the "moving in" (before) as described by Schlossberg (2011).

Sub-question Two

What were the experiences of assistant principals during restructuring? As the central research question, many emotions began to surface during the transition period. According to Schlossberg (2011), this is the "moving through" (during) stage of the transitional process. The

moving through or during stages allow the assistant principal to relocate their belongings from one location to another and is followed by setting up their new area in the new site. At this stage of the transition, the assistant begins to seek out the new expectations and challenges that lie ahead. Each school has a defined leadership style with different levels of structures within the building and includes a specific mission and vision, along with a new leadership style and expectations (Lyons et al., 2016). External factors associated with change included policy and procedural shifts, redefined roles and responsibilities, accountability and support modifications, and new challenges that are all associated with transitioning (Armstrong, 2015).

Sub-question Three

What were the experiences of assistant principals after restructuring occurred? This question was addressed in the "moving in" (after) part of the restructuring (Schlossberg, 2012). Moving in is the stage of the transition where the new administrators, principal, and assistant principal, begin to build and develop a working relationship with each other. This question further described the culture and climate established with the shift in administration. Any job-related transition takes time due to the alternating of roles, relationships, and routines while trying to build relationships with new people (Schlossberg, 2011) and is a complicated process. While education is continuously changing and administrators are viewed as agents of change, restructuring those in the administration can be problematic in the areas of leaving and adapting to a new environment (Eckman, 2018; Lee-Colvin, 2018; McClellan, 2015).

<div align="center">

Definitions

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The following definitions are pertinent to this study in defining the theoretical framework designed for this research. The literature supports all definitions in this section.

1. *Assistant Principal* - Those individuals (vice principals, assisting principals) who support the principals in running the day-to-day operations of the school. Assistant principals multitask and function in a high-paced speed while interacting with students, parents, teachers, staff, and community members (Grissom et al., 2018).

2. *Coding* - Coding interviews are essential with research and finding meaning. Concepts stand for purpose as the researcher moves between the abstract and the concrete in the study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Data analysis between data collection and the account of findings takes place within a spiral, including managing and organization of data, reading for new ideas, classifying codes into themes, developing interpretation, and representing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3. *Moving in* - This is the point of moving into a new transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Moving in is where assistant principals experience changes and challenges associated with their original position.

4. *Moving out* - This is the stage that marks the end of the previous experience and begins with a new phase of moving into a new transition (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1989). Moving out is where one may need closure, as it is the end of an era.

5. *Moving through* - This is the stage of transition where Anderson et al. (2012) identifies the person transitioning as being at the point of "knowing the ropes" (p. 57). Therefore, at this stage, assistant principals undergo extensive training to understand the expectations associated with their new role. Generally, it takes a full academic year to understand the culture and climate of a school completely.

6. *Qualitative research* - Qualitative research is the process of investigative research through description and interpretation related to personal and social issues by collecting

data in a natural setting utilizing inductive and deductive data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

7. *Restructuring* - The changing and re-visioning of the school where students' needs are met by making shifts to empower healthy, redesigned schools in aligning strong leadership teams (Miles, 2019).

8. *Transition* - Schlossberg (1981a) defines a transition as an event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and requires a change in behaviors and relationships.

9. *Transcendental Phenomenology* - This is the qualitative research methodology where the researcher does not make prejudgments. Prior knowledge associated with lived experiences uses unbiased descriptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) through a process known as "epoché," or bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

10. *Transitional Theory* - The impact from anticipated or unanticipated transitions that impact, is one daily life and identified as factors such as situational, self, social, and strategies, all of which are necessary for coping (Schlossberg, 1981a).

Summary

Restructuring is a complex process that impacts schools and often occurs in many districts for various reasons (Lewis, 1989). When restructuring takes place and transitioning occurs, assistant principals experience multiple emotions and feelings of starting over (Sutton & Austin, 2015). There is currently little to no research giving assistant principal is a voice-based on their experiences with restructuring. Assistant principals experience the difficulty of change throughout the process of restructuring. Allowing assistant principals an opportunity to share

their experiences better educates department heads or superiors that are making these changes regarding change by giving insight into individual schools.

Schlossberg's transition theory guided this study allowing assistant principals to have an opportunity to describe their own experiences. Changes due to restructuring have adverse as well as positive outcomes. For example, adverse outcomes include change within the school that will occur, and positive results could consist of different approaches from the administration level. Schlossberg recognizes that differences are associated with transitions and require analysis of individual characteristics with external occurrents (Armstrong, 2015). Therefore, the use of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after their experiences with restructuring in Virginia by identifying the effects associated with change.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after their experiences with restructuring in Virginia. Allowing assistant principals, the opportunity to explain their shared experiences through their voice will provide insight to other administrators and school district officials. This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework associated with the restructuring of assistant principals and followed by a literature review. The literature review provides an in-depth study of leadership including the following topics: (a) building relationships, (b) climate and culture, (c) types of leaders, (d) the role of the administrator, (e) the role of the assistant principal, (f) care and trust, (g) principal turnover, (h) connection to student achievement, (i) the principals' impact on teachers, (j) stability and sustainability, (k) restructuring and district support, (l) an effective leader(s), (m) change, and (n) trends of the 21st century. This chapter concludes with a summary of content and establishes the gap in the literature; this study will attempt to close.

Theoretical Framework

Academics that have studied education in the 20th century are most likely familiar with the work from Jean Piaget and Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky when it comes to the study of social development and developmental psychology. Vygotsky was an activist for socially meaningful activity serving as consciousness built from the outside through relationships with others (Vygotsky, 2012). Vygotsky's philosophy shaped theory where real-life experiences, defined as drawing from experiences, were examined within the theoretical framework of the social constructivist approach and related to the concept of the feeling to belong (Du Plessis, 2015).

The social constructivist framework is the first theory associated with the restructuring of assistant principals. Primarily, this could associate with this study as far as the lens relating to the concept of belonging. Challenges are faced when adjusting to a different placement in administration (Lee-Colvin, 2018). Lacking a sense of belonging is one of many emotions that results from restructuring and transition as an assistant principal. Therefore, the social constructivist theory supports leaders' perceptions related to the need for a sense of belonging as a real-life longing (Du Plessis, 2015). Transitions and restructuring in education are those lived experiences where the person affected by transitioning tries to figure out the underlying reason as to the purpose of the restructuring. Once the assistant principal understands the meaning or reason for the redesign, they can begin to process while going through the transition of change.

Research has shown that leaders impact a school's effectiveness and the achievement of students (Du Plessis, 2015; Hattie, 2009). Research conducted by both Vygotsky (1978) and Hattie (2009) notes that there are interrelationships between individuals and the social world that are evident in the environment and require self-esteem and confidence. Bandura (1986) adds to the student achievement findings stating because of the social constructivist theory, there is a direct link between students' achievement and collaborative leadership. The social constructivist theory suggests that strong leadership leads to teachers working harder to order to strengthen their beliefs systems as a result of increasing student learning and connecting with teachers and staff on a social level as well as a professional level (Bruner, 1966; Du Plessis, 2015; Goddard et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, research by Du Plessis (2015) links the quality of the school to the quality of leadership, including the principal and the assistant principal. Therefore, social constructivist theory relates to the transition because of its link to the need for strong

leadership. The transition theory allowed the process to focus on the beginning, middle, and end of the transition.

However, Schlossberg defines the transition theory, which best aligns with the question asked by multiple assistant principals when restructuring occurs, which is how to view and cope with the transition. Schlossberg (1981a) defined transitions as an "event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). Change brings about unexplained confusion and angst throughout the process. Schlossberg (2012) stated that work transitions can be particularly complicated because of the number of times people change jobs; therefore, it becomes critical to understand the effects of change in our own lives. Schlossberg's transition theory fits within the constraints of the movement of assistant principals when restructuring occurs and aligns with the reorganization of assistant principals. Change can be difficult; therefore, the transition theory suggests resources and breaking down the transition in small increments to help cope with the transition from one school to another.

Through her work, Schlossberg (2011) described transitions related to work as being particularly complex because individuals will change jobs and careers many times throughout their career, and amust understand the structure of work itself is always changing. We must know change—how it affects us individually and how we can apply knowledge to our own lives as individuals. The transition model includes being able to understand transitions, coping with transitions when they occur, and using the model to work through life transitions. The first step in dealing with change requires understanding different types of developments. Anticipated shifts include major life events we usually expect, such as graduating from high school or college, getting married, becoming a parent, starting a first job, changing careers, or retiring.

Unanticipated transitions include the often-disruptive events that occur unexpectedly, such as surgery, a severe accident or illness, or a surprise promotion or business closing. Nonevent transitions are those expected events that fail to occur, such as not getting married, not receiving the promotion you expected, or not being able to afford to retire.

Everyone experiences transitions, whether they are events or nonevents, anticipated, or unanticipated. These transitions alter our lives—our roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions throughout life. Developments such as beginning one is the first job, changing jobs, or taking early retirement appear to have little in common with other transitions; however, all changes affect the lives of people. It is not the transition that is critical, but how much it alters one's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Schlossberg, 2011).

When relating transition to the movement of assistant principals through restructuring, most assistant principals would not anticipate the shift and the factors that accompany this change. Also, when viewing the context of transitioning, Schlossberg categorizes the movement process into three areas: individuals, relationships, and work (Anderson et al., 2012). The transition theory incorporates the 4S system, which applies coping purposes associated with transitions- situation, self, support, and strategies. (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989).

"Situation" denotes the time of transition, factors that led to the transformation, the level of control at the time, and whether the change is considered positive or negative. "Self" refers to one's ability to cope with the transition. Self also includes factors such as demographics such as gender, socioeconomics stage, one's stage of life, stage of health, ethnicity, and age. Thus Schlossberg (2012) identified age not by one's birthday but by where people are in life based on function, social, and psychological age (Evans et al., 2010). "Support" refers to the support that

is available to the person at the time of transition and can include but is not limited to training, mentoring professional development, or support as needed. The support stage could also be a time for reflection so that one can learn based on experiences. "Strategies" are the responses to the transition, which can modify the situation, control the meaning of the problem if one exists, or manage stress related to the transition.

The transition theory aligns with three steps in which transition occurs: moving in, moving through, and moving out (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1989). When an assistant is notified they will be moving to another school, this is when they move in to Schlossberg's transition period. Moving through would include the transition period leaving one school and heading to another and getting adjusted to the new school environment. Finally, moving out refers to completing the transition successfully, or unsuccessfully in some cases.

About assistant principals experiencing restructuring within a division, Schlossberg's transition theory best applies to events associated with transitioning. Evans et al.'s (2010) claim that Schlossberg and other researchers have developed what seems to be an excellent model to facilitate understandings and actions that are related to transitioning for assistant principals and others who face the same kind of change. The framework is an overall comprehensive guide for those that were affected by the restructuring. When assistant principals go through change due to restructuring, they need opportunities to understand the change they are going to experience and an idea of the event(s) leading up to the reorganization, emotions while going through the process of change, and how to "fit-in" to a new environment. Therefore, the research done by Nancy Schlossberg through the transition theory, best emphasizes the specific situations and perceptions that one may experience through restructuring. Schlossberg has provided

explanations of the process that people go through when restructuring occurs. Overall, until further research, the transition process, as outlined by Schlossberg and her colleagues, is the best framework theory related to the restructuring of assistant principals. Therefore, Schlossberg transition theory is the most appropriate theoretical lens to view assistant principals in transition or those who have been affected by transitioning.

Related Literature

The leadership within the school sets the culture and climate with direct impact linked to learning (Bloom & Abel, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; McCarley et al., 2016; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). Assistant principals, just like principals, ensure learning is taking place in a building through evaluations and observations of students and staff along with monitoring data firmly. Effective leaders- including the principal and the assistant principal are those that effectively define a mission and vision as the guiding aspects of the school. Principals and assistant principals are those responsible for working as a team to set the purpose and intuition, all while leading with consistency (Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). When assistant principals are experiencing constant movement associated with restructuring, it does not allow for consistent feedback to both students and staff about the reference to academics and personal growth, and the result leads to a culture and climate that is incongruous.

Leadership is motivating others toward accomplishing a common goal. In the realm of education, the common goal is student achievement. According to Sun and Leithwood (2015), 30 years of research has conceptualized school leadership in a diverse way identifying the establishment of clear goals as the key to leadership practices that are the responsibility of both the principal and the assistant principal. The established goals that are set forth by leaders, principals, and assistant principals, are then used as a framework for creating a mission and

vision for the school (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Allowing assistant principals an opportunity to build relationships and lead others toward a common goal takes time; therefore, continuous restructuring within a school division can be very disruptive.

Building Relationships Takes Time

How can relationships be built and cultivated if change through restructuring is taking place often? When answering this question, Hindman et al. (2009) stated that leadership is all about building relationships and setting a course through vision resulting in positive effects within the school. In contrast, there are times when change is welcomed and needed with new energy, new life, and new ideas; however, constant change never allows for leaders to build relationships among the staff (Hindman et al., 2009; Lee-Colvin, 2018). Those in leadership roles are responsible for the following; building relationships, ensuring teamwork takes place, creating a culture within the school, monitoring student achievement, disciplining students and staff as needed, working with teachers, serving as instructional leaders, coaching those that need additional assistance, monitoring the data, conducting observations, working with other stakeholders, attending meetings, managing the building, and any other task given as a directive from the central office. It is a fact that the principal cannot accomplish all these tasks without assistance. Therefore, researchers and practitioners stress the importance of building trust and respect in successfully building relationships and managing change to create a positive learning environment between and among the roles of leadership (Hindman et al., 2009; Lee-Colvin, 2018). Likewise, change is difficult in building relationships along with trust, developing teamwork, and collaboration among the staff when those in leadership positions are being changed often because of the transition. When assistant principals go through restructuring many

times, they feel a sense of isolationism and a challenge in adjusting to a new principal and staff (Lee-Colvin, 2018).

Climate and Culture

According to Harris and Kemp-Graham (2017), "Culture is the nucleus of the school" (p. 54) and is believed to be the area where schools develop their own identity (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). The "support of school administrators is considered to be one of the most important factors in the development of a suitable culture" within a school setting (Demir, 2015, p. 623). Therefore, the leadership within the school sets the culture and climate which has a direct impact on learning, effects structural changes for school improvement, and helps with structural changes within the school (Demir, 2015; Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017; Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lee & Li, 2015; McCarley et al., 2016; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Through examination, McCarley et al. (2016) found leaders and administrators build teams to create high expectations while creating a mission and vision to instill pride, gain trust, build mutual respect, and enhance the feeling of success. Harris and Kemp-Graham (2017) stated that building leadership among teachers is the responsibility of the principal with the assistance of the assistant principal. A mixed-methods research study conducted by Harris and Kemp-Graham (2017) found a statistically significant relationship between teacher leadership and the culture of the school in a large effect size. Culture and strong leadership are factors that benefit all schools (Lee & Li, 2015). Should administrators seek to change the culture rather than understand and respect it? According to Fraise and Brooks (2015), research helps administrators recognize the complexity of culture and its ever-changing nature. According to Sun and Leithwood (2015), the key to leadership is establishing clear goals and keeping these goals at the forefront of the school. However, when comparing goals, missions,

and visions, the vision and mission have broader meanings with the concept relating to the leader's view of education (Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

How does the principal or assistant principal affect the school's culture regarding the teachers? According to a case study conducted by Lee and Li (2015), the key to the success of the school's education depends on a good quality of school culture where people are influenced to pay attention (focus), identify with others (commitment), work hard (motivation), and achieve goals (productive). Teachers have shared their ideas about what makes a good administrator and their ideas include having practical communication skills between the administrator(s) and the teacher(s), taking time to listen to all faculty and staff, changing the culture by shifting mindsets, and being an inspirational leader who recognizes, rewards, and encourages, and develops relationships with teachers (Lee & Li, 2015). Principals and assistant principals can also develop a positive climate and culture when building trust with and among the staff. Lee-Colvin (2018) described the trust that leaders build with a team as building capacity, instilling confidence in others, and creating an exciting environment in which to work. Therefore, building trust takes time, and if restructuring is often happening, trust is difficult to make between staff, students, parents, and administrators.

Educational leaders are responsible for the teaching and learning aspect of education. Therefore, the learning environment must be one in which school culture leads to student success. It is the role of the principal to develop a productive culture. School culture defined as the persona of the school where influence is through the norms of values, beliefs, rituals/ceremonies, routines, symbols, and stories. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) found some strategies can help build a thriving staff culture if enforced or implemented by the school's administration team. These strategies include setting a vision, getting the right people for the job,

developing strong staff relationships, watching for signs of negativity through morale, and keeping open the lines of communication (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). Blackaby and Blackaby (2011) stated that people perform better when they enjoy their work; therefore, it is imperative to build an influential school culture within the building. Once principals, along with the assistant principal(s), recognize the schools' culture and morale of the employees of the school, changes can be made as needed through proactive actions. However, if the school's administration team is continuously changing, consistency is not present.

The standards for the professional practice of school leaders were established in 1996 by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). These standards designed to provide expectations for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of school leaders, including both the principal and the assistant principal. The ISLLC standards have increasingly influenced the design of administrator preparation programs; however, the degree to which they are incorporated into state statutes, policies, and credential programs vary from state to state (Davis et al., 2015). According to Davis et al. (2015), there are essential elements associated with good leadership, which is attributed to effective school leadership when implementing the organizational process. Research suggests there are core leadership practices that include developing teachers and staff to do their jobs effectively, setting directions with the development of shared goals, and redesigning the organization by creating a positive school culture in building a process of collaboration (Davis et al., 2015).

Good leadership is also related to professional development. The role of the school leader is to provide the faculty/staff with active professional development to order to grow professionally and build capacity. Ringler et al. (2013) completed a yearlong professional development where data were analyzed using a framework to evaluate the fidelity, perception of

instructional leader, teacher leaders, and academic achievement. Throughout this yearlong professional development, data were used to evaluate the coaching process, organizational support, and participant implementation as related to student outcomes. Additionally, it is through monthly meetings, peer observations, and instructional dialogue with the use of a leveled framework including participants reactions, learning, organizational support, application of knowledge, and student learning outcome required administrators to know how the school and staff was functioning (Ringler et al., 2013). In conclusion, a principal's understanding of professional development is essential in leading teachers in the implementation of innovation and facilitating school change and improved student learning (Ringler et al., 2013).

A case study among elementary schools emphasizes stability and professional development based on staff needs that are determined without constant transition. Lawson et al. (2017) found all six of the poor schools scored higher on state assessments as compared to the three typical performing schools. What factors contribute to this successful data? Lawson et al. (2017) explains that trust and communication tie to the common thread of success where the leader emphasizes professional development along with public relations, with the result being academic achievement. Another factor included the administration being familiar with what the school needed and specific area(s) of focus. This knowledge would not exist if restructuring were the norm.

Types of Leaders

Numerous characteristics describe leaders in today's education system; however, the most common types of leaders are those that are delegative, autocratic, democratic, transactional, and transformational (Lee-Colvin, 2018). Most recently, culturally responsive leaders have become more and more critical in the areas of reform and social justice (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Delegative leadership is best known as laissez-faire, where the leader is invisible and does not intervene when they should (Bloom & Abel, 2015). Autocratic leaders tend to be interventionist, speaking without listening to others. This type of leader discourages others and affects morale. The democratic leader is one that is known to lead and is sensitive to feedback from others. Transactional leaders focus on objectives and tend to provide rewards and enforce punishment. Transformational leadership encourages, inspires, and motivates others while leading by example- are viewed as being committed, compassionate, and confident (Khalifa et al., 2016). According to McCarley et al. (2016), when administrators change position (restructuring), leadership is redefined depending on style.

Transformational leadership creates an environment where there is shared decision making, a team approach, and high expectations between the principal and assistant principal(s) (McCarley et al., 2016; Meyers & Hambrick, 2017; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Transformational leaders often engage others to increase motivation or morale within the school. McCarley et al. (2016) divided the multidimensional constructs into factors including charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration and with an appeal is further broken down into two elements: idealized attributes and idealized behaviors. A new concept in literature has surfaced under the umbrella of transformational leadership, and that is authentic leadership (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). According to Cherkowski et al. (2015) and Karadag and Oztekin-Bayir (2018), authentic leadership includes up of four components: awareness, unbiased, behavior, and relational orientation where mistakes are accepted and recognized together, and choices are determined to rectify using a teamwork approach. Cherkowski et al. (2015) stated that links between moral agency and moral leadership is transformational leadership, where connections in social implications of moral imperativeness is

the heart of both constructs. Cherkowski et al. (2015) embedded Starratt's (2005) five domains

of ethical responsibility as the framework for moral, educational leadership and include engaging

as an ethical person, respecting civil rights and act in the public trust, understanding, knowing

how to use, and applying curriculum, develop and manage organizational structures, and

transform the school into an authentic learning community. Podgursky (2016) stressed

transformational leadership as being a positive influence on teacher's job satisfaction and

organizational commitment, school effectiveness, and student achievement and displaying

ethical behaviors including justice, tolerance, honesty, democracy, and respect. Transformational

leaders collaboratively work to identify the purpose of the school while empowering the entire

school community to collaboratively work together to achieve the goals of the school (McCarley

et al., 2016). However, if restructuring is happening too often, administrators are not allowed to

bring about the change that may need to take place.

  Due to educational reform and social justice, culturally responsive leadership has

surfaced where an environment where all students are accepted, trusted, have a vision, and goals

are clearly defined. Responsive leadership develops a sense of community among the staff

(Khalifa et al., 2016). Again, culturally sensitive leaders fall under the umbrella of

transformational leadership where leaders self-reflect to grow, develop teachers that are

accepting toward all students, and promote an environment of trust with students, parents, and

stakeholders (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive leaders critically self-reflect on their

leadership behaviors, develop culturally responsive teachers, promotes a culturally sensitive

environment, and engage all stakeholders (Khalifa et al., 2016; Podgursky, 2016).

  Authentic leadership makes up components of awareness of thoughts, feelings, and

values; unbiased processing with aspects and prejudice; behaviors pleasing others by acting in

ethical ways, and relational orientation by being honest (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). For an

organization and one that is in a leadership role to thrive, trust is an essential factor. According to

Karadag and Oztekin-Bayir (2018), organizational trust comes from the formation process of

self-awareness in seeking feedback for improvement and accuracy, transparency by admitting

mistakes and saying what you mean, balance in evaluating and analyzing data, and ethically by

valuing high-ethical standards. Therefore, leaders who are successful ensure the well-being of

students, staff, and the community. Louis et al. (2016a) stated that scholars have found that

effective leaders focus on course rigor, higher standards, evaluating and monitoring, and testing

as well as social promotion. Putting theory into action requires transforming schools into

professional learning communities that nurture the innovation of students and teachers with the

assistance of the assistant principal(s). Through empowerment and team building becomes an

important aspect in being what is considered an effective leader with excellent leadership

qualifications (Jayapragas, 2016; Louis et al., 2016b; Meyers & Hambrick, 2017). Twenty-first-

century leadership is rewarding and challenging, all at the same time requiring at least a

minimum of three years to make a difference within a school.

Role of Administrators

Leadership responsibilities have increased over time with growing liabilities and

demands (Eckman, 2018; Ellis & Brown, 2015; McClellan, 2015). According to Khalifa et al.

(2016), educational reform claims that school leadership is the crucial component, secondary to

teaching. Research provides us with the data that good teachers will leave the school in which

they teach if there are ineffective leaders or constant changing of leadership, resulting in

instability (Eckman, 2018). Therefore, we need to define the roles and effectiveness of school

administrators, including both the principal and assistant principal(s), since they are the most

recognized positions in the school and the most empowered to follow policy and protocol set forth at the district and state level. Principals and assistant principals catalyze enhancing and transforming schools positively and progressively (McKinney & Labat, 2015). Leadership works with district administrators on the model, compensation, and evaluation of the physical school building, including the staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders (Eckman, 2018). Highly effective schools are those that are characterized by high-level stability, including little to no restructuring among administration and school leaders depend on support from both state and district leaders (Jayapragas, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004). Instructional leaders prioritize to ensure continuous learning is taking place. Principals contribute to the effectiveness and improvements of schools (Harris & Jones, 2018).

Another factor that is essential to school leadership is ensuring that safety is a crucial priority (Armstrong, 2015; Ellis & Brown, 2015). Security is one of the most critical components associated with school leadership. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) states that the job of the principal, in conjunction with the assistant principal, is that of school safety with strong leadership. It is the responsibility of the administration to ensure precaution prevents a crisis from occurring. Therefore, constant change in the direction or the administration team poses a breakdown in safety.

Hattie (2011) argued that educators do not become experts by merely relying on specific teaching strategies; instead, their success as teachers comes from constant self-evaluations and the small improvements, they make in their everyday classroom work. Administrators need to ensure that the school is stable, and they recognize staff needs that are essential in the success and growth of a school. Ellis and Brown (2015) added that effective leaders are characterized with the impact on student achievement, addressing managerial tasks, securing the building for

the safety of all students and staff, ensuring bus issues are taken care of, scheduling, and day to day management tasks. Those leaders who make changes, all while making improvements to the school, are viewed as highly effective.

According to Jacobs (2015), the impact of leadership for effective leaders includes a framework including shaping the vision, creating a productive climate, cultivating others to lead, improving instruction, and managing school improvement measures. Other researchers point out aspects that are related to the same impact of leadership. Leadership also impacts student achievement and should seek to avoid micromanagement, which leads to a lost sense of purpose and progressive culture (Jacobs, 2015; McKinney & Labat, 2015; Thompson, 2019). Leadership introduces and implements reform as needed, impacts teaching while learning takes place, and develops teacher quality, all while improving schools with continuous training and monitoring (Jacobs, 2015; Pont, 2014). According to Thompson (2019), leaders need to create enthusiasm, which is contagious. They should adopt a team approach and support believing in the value of each person, all while ensuring staff is there for the right reason. Administrators have a profound impact on the people they lead, and research shows that this impact is evident through the teacher's perception of the environment (Burkhauser, 2017; Jacobs, 2015).

It is a given that administrators have a profound impact on instruction and student learning (Demir, 2015; Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017; Jayapragas, 2016; Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lee & Li, 2015; McCarley et al., 2016; Pont, 2014; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). According to Pont (2014), the traditional role of the principal has moved away from administrative leadership and more to a focus on student outcomes. Also, the principal has more autonomy and accountability and responsibility in the implementation of policy reform. Therefore, the role of the assistant principal is vital in assisting the principal in

administrative duties and responsibilities, requiring the principal and the assistant principal have alignment in their leadership. Khalifa et al. (2016) stated that principals can "shape the growth-enhancing climates that support adult learning as they work to manage challenges while establishing strong relationships of trust, vision, goals, and a sense of community" (p. 1275). The job of administrators is comprehensive and includes the following: teacher and staff selections, retaining faculty, dismissing employees when needed, driving instruction and the instructional agenda, being emotionally supportive, creating a sense of direction, setting school priorities, allocating resources, and guiding change as needed, requiring one to know the needs of his or her staff (Lambersky, 2016). According to Jayapragas (2016), principals must be able to handle high levels of stress in this era of constant change by being visionaries, instructional leaders, supervisors of policy mandates, and initiatives for community building to order to promote inclusive schools. The Wallace Foundation, along with the ISLLC, seeks federal efforts in emphasizing Race to the Top guiding leaders in the areas of effectiveness while boosting teaching and learning (Simpkin et al., 2013). Historically, traditional leaders in the 1950s were those that oversaw busses, boilers, and books. Today of education, leaders focus on standards-based reform and accountability requiring stability (Davis et al., 2015). The Wallace Foundation (2000) suggests five critical responsibilities for administrators, including:

1. Shaping the vision of academic success for all students based on high standards for all students.

2. Creating a climate hospitable to education in a safe, cooperative spirit, as well as other foundations where fruitful interactions occur between everyone in and outside of the building.

3. Cultivating leadership in others where teachers and other adults assume responsibility in creating the school's vision.

4. Improving instruction where teachers teach to their highest potential so that students learn.

5. Managing people, data, and processes that foster school improvement by knowing what is needed.

Role of the Assistant Principal

Assistant principals are those that are in leadership positions and complete many of the same tasks as principals. As second in command, assistant principals run the school and assume the responsibilities of the principal in their absence (Ellis & Brown, 2015). However, they tend to encounter multiple factors that hinder their ability to achieve their leadership goals, including obstacles with ambiguous legal and institutional configurations, inadequate preparations for challenges, managerial and disciplinary roles, and transitional support (Armstrong, 2015; Ellis & Brown, 2015).

Armstrong (2015) defined these leadership and administrative positions as those in personnel supervision and evaluation, curriculum support, student discipline, and supporting families and communities. Assistant principals experience many of the same stressors that principals experience daily. These stressors include being on the frontline location between teachers and upper-level administrators, differences between teaching and administrative roles, responsibilities, heavy workloads, and the lack of ongoing support with scaffolding (Armstrong, 2015; Davis et al., 2015). A qualitative study by Armstrong (2015) revealed frustrations from assistant principals as they shared their experiences in the following areas. Higher significant levels of scrutiny and expectations from teachers with teachers complaining about issues they expect the assistant principal to solve. Teachers are also frustrated with increased workload, managing ongoing crises, and solving problems. Teachers state frustrations with the pace of new

information and emails, lack of control over personal schedules, and added pressure is maintaining the safety of students.

 Eckman (2018) defined the role of the assistant principal as providing stability through leadership, problem-solving coupled with shared decision making, and providing multiple layers of responsibility with the principal. There are implications and strengths associated between the principal and the assistant principal. Problems arise when there are challenging personalities, ego, time management, compensation, different leadership styles, and jealousy (Armstrong, 2015; Eckman, 2018). What makes adequate working conditions between a principal and assistant principal(s)? Eckman (2018) made the following suggestions for the definition of effectiveness: acceptance of each other's strengths and weaknesses, honesty, trust, shared roles with similar styles, and communication. According to Ellis and Brown (2015), districts in Virginia continue to face the dilemma of finding and retaining qualified and certified administrators. What about the assistant principal? Many assistant principals recognize the demands of the building principal, including time and stress, and feel as if there is a lack of professional development offered to order for them to resume a building leadership position even though they have served as an assistant principal (Ellis & Brown, 2015).

 The job of the assistant principal is also continually changing and has higher demands that previously encountered within the role of the administration. Best (2016) describes the role and responsibilities of an assistant principal to include multiple and demanding job descriptions along with managerial processes, vague job descriptions at times in some cases, and the lack of opportunities for professional growth. Many times, the value of the assistant principal tends to be overlooked. Assistant principals are essential and valuable in being able to help bridge the gap in

operational and leadership responsibilities within the school if given the opportunities (Best, 2016). Assistant principals are also responsible for the building along with the principal.

Care and Trust

Care and trust are essential components in school administration. An empirical analysis was done during years and included forty districts across nine states where there was a significantly positive relationship between principals and teachers where principals were caring (Armstrong, 2015; Louis et al., 2016a). The essence of caring identified through social relationships with students, teachers, and leaders with a direct reference to caring (Louis et al., 2016a). Core elements of caring include attentiveness, motivational displacement, mutuality, and authenticity (Louis et al., 2016a). According to Louis et al. (2016b), to be considered as having the leadership of caring, the following three conditions must be met:

1. Leaders have a basic knowledge and understanding developed out of attentiveness.

2. Caring actions are motivated by advancing success and personal wellbeing.

3. Caring is recognized and acknowledged.

Generally, with a caring leader, trust is evident. Trust is essential for effective leadership between the principal and the assistant principal(s). The essence of caring builds social relationships among students, teachers, community, and parents, where positive outcomes take place because of caring and trust (Demir, 2015; Louis et al., 2016).

There are strong relationships where trust is promoted (Demir, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016). Demir (2015) and Kalkan (2016) both found that trust levels have a high correlation on relationships between each other, administration, and students while everyone is working together for a common purpose. Demir (2015) stated that "trust due to its significant role in terms of interpersonal solidarity and cooperation is regarded as one of the underlying conditions

of stable, social relationships (p. 624). Kalkan (2016) stated that bureaucratic structures directly affect the professional learning environment all through organizational trust. Leading and trusting are evident when the leaders earn the trust of the families and the community while becoming one with credibility (Khalifa et al., 2016). According to Ross and Cozzens (2016), leadership catalyzes school improvement by historical and current conditions within the schools. Principals who sought to improve the entire structure of schools attempted to build trusting relationships and shared leadership practice, exhibit effective research-based leadership, and focused on the collective evidence of student learning. Building trust is one of the variables that are mandatory and deeply woven into the school itself (Kelleher & Levenson. 2014). Teachers need to be able to trust their administration just as the administration needs to be able to trust their teachers. Trust is an essential component in building relationships and the feeling that someone "has your back." It is a process that allows for honest and open communication where relationships must be made for trust to develop. Trust makes for social interactions with others and powerful collaboration, allowing for a supportive working environment (Demir, 2015). There are many levels of trust in schools where trust becomes the antecedent of the level of support. Trust must be present throughout the school between administrators and staff, staff trust between each other, and where students and parents can trust employees of the school.

Principal Turnover

Principal turnover is a challenge facing public schools today and caused by many factors such as career transition, retirement, and unforeseen circumstances. According to Brooks (2018), Snodgrass Rangel (2018), and Leithwood et al. (2004), the reason for the concern is because of the pivotal role which principals play in a process that can ensure school improvement, which can take between five to seven years. A constant change in principals makes it hard for schools

to implement new programs for improvement purposes. Understanding principal turnover has been defined and measured in existing research. The most basic understanding of defining turnover is when the principal does not return to the same school the next year. Questions associated with principals not returning to their job include: Was the principal satisfied? Did they choose to leave? Where did the principal go? (Snodgrass Rangel, 2018, pp. 88–89). Several studies done by Farley-Ripple et al. (2012) found that principal turnover is related to general categories such as mobility and stability, being operationalized, and measures by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of approaches (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). Snodgrass Rangel identified a comprehensive list of characteristics as possible reasons for principal turnover. This extensive list includes demographics, experience, education, satisfaction, position, school and student population, school performance, school conditions, school level and size, school urbanistic, student characteristics, policy, salary, accountability, district expenditures, challenges associated with hiring and firing, teachers, school type, district retirement incentives, and professional development initiatives.

According to research, principals should remain in the same environment for a range of five to seven years for student achievement to be impacted and to ensure that school improvement takes place as previously stated (Leithwood et al., 2007). Jacobs (2015) encouraged limited movement for administrators because knowing the need of the school and staff and professional development needs reduces teacher turn-over, cost incurred the division, and lower student achievement incur that. The Minnesota-Toronto school district conducted a study and found that approximately 80% of principals stay in the same school for an average of 3.6 years (Leithwood et al., 2007; Podgursky, 2016). Therefore, schools that experience rapid principal turnover often suffer from a lack of shared purpose, cynicism among staff, and the

inability to maintain a school improvement focus long enough to accomplish meaningful changes (Burkhauser, 2017; Leithwood et al., 2007).

According to McCarley et al. (2016) and Podgursky (2016), the cost is a factor when principals move from school to school or are restructuring throughout the school division. Therefore, principals tend to stay in their current buildings as a way in which districts can save money. Budgets of the school district are affected when restructuring occurs on any level throughout the division. While research focus is on the implementations of principal turnover, many of the same effects are present when assistant principals shift around from school to school. Research shows that occurring turnover year after year is harmful to districts, the school, and the students.

Student Achievement

How is leadership linked to student achievement? According to Rangel (2017), leaders indirectly impact student achievement based on hiring effective teachers, offering professional development for teachers as needed, and supporting teachers in their professional learning. According to Ross and Cozzens (2016), researchers suggest that there is both a direct and indirect relationship between principals and student outcomes by ensuring that teachers are using Marzano's strategies and engaging students in learning while teaching. Ross and Cozzens (2016), also reference Crane and Green's (2012) 13 competencies as ways in which teachers' perception of their principal helps students achieve including professionalism, curriculum and instruction, collaboration, unity of purpose, learning community, and professional development. Finally, as Ross and Cozzens (2016) concluded:

School leadership has a significant effect on student achievement, which promotes academic growth. Strong educational leaders bring clear and compelling plans to

achieve goals and capital needed to ensure that student's IQ increases. Therefore,

leadership and learning are so important. Effective leaders support their teams of teachers

to do their very best through data-driven collaboration and the collection of authentic and

accurate data. (p. 172)

McKinney and Labat (2015) conducted a study to identify the concrete strategies that

allow principals to have a direct impact on student learning. Leaders motivate his or her faculty

where they, in turn, produce positive results through student achievement. According to

McKinney and Labat (2015), a principal's ability to monitor student progress carefully is an

indicator of high-yielding performance. Other variables that influence a principal's impact on

students include frequent team meetings, frequent classroom visits, and consideration of teacher

and staff impact when deciding. An administrator that communicates high expectations for their

school and emphasizes teamwork generally fosters progressive student achievement (Louis et al.,

2016b; McKinney & Labat, 2015; Lee-Colvin, 2018; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Therefore, studies

show that there is a direct link between effective leadership and student achievement.

Principal Impact on Teachers

Findings, according to Lambersky (2016), suggest that principals have much influence

over the emotions of teachers. Teachers want their voices heard. Morale is affected by the

principal, and teachers' emotions are the heart of school leadership. Teachers have shared that

simple gestures such as a kind word, small note, or a brief thank you in the hall or passing is

enough to let teachers know that their efforts are noticed and appreciated (Lambersky, 2016).

According to Lambersky, "a motivated staff is an effective staff" (p. 387). Just as the workload

has increased for teachers, this also applies to teachers as their workload has also increased

because of high stakes testing (Demir, 2015; Lambersky, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004;

Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). When teachers feel a harmonious attitude with administration, they, in turn, display high- degrees of dedication, loyalty, and efficient work habits (Lee & Li, 2015). According to Demir (2015), "teachers who trust their superior will work beyond what is formally required" (p. 626).

Teachers report that their sense of engagement and commitment shows improvement when principals allow them to have a "voice" (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017; Lambersky, 2016). According to Eckman (2018) and Harris and Kemp-Graham (2017), developing teachers as leaders depends on the administrator's ability to develop these leaders from their existing school level staff. For example, if administrators allow teachers to serve in the role of grade-level or department chairs, they are giving them the opportunity needed to develop leadership skills. Administrators choose teachers to grow as leaders from those that exhibit leadership potential (Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017). According to Eckman (2018), when principals are developing teachers into leaders, it is best practice to make decisions based on individual strengths and interests. School administrators that develop teachers as leaders provide for empowerment (Cherkowski et al., 2015).

Another way that principals influence teachers is by building and maintaining strong personal relationships (Cansoy, 2018; Demir, 2015; Eckman, 2018; Lambersky, 2016; Lee & Li, 2015). Principals impact teachers by motivating them, displaying emotions, developing a community atmosphere, engaging in inquiry, fostering creativity, encouraging practice, identifying their vision, and finding time (Lambersky, 2016). Teachers report that they like to see administrators in action by walking the halls and engaging with both students and teachers with a positive attitude of enthusiasm (Lambersky, 2016).

According to Lee and Li (2015), even when teachers are tired and burned out, the administration can make a difference. When teachers have good relationships with the administration, they still feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in being a member of the school. Teachers tend to operate more effectively when they feel they are supported and can collaborate with colleagues and administration (Demir, 2015). According to Cansoy (2018), teachers identified as having a productive working relationship with the administration were satisfied with their job, and those teachers who lacked this working relationship with administration tend to struggle. Leadership is a phenomenon that builds upon social interactions (Cansoy, 2018). McKinney and Labat (2015) correlate rapport among principals and teachers in the areas described as modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging when appropriate, encouraging others to act, and encouraging the heart. Leaders make a difference in the perception of the work environment.

When leaders and administrators take the time to serve teachers, they, in turn, effectively teach the teacher or train the trainer so that learning can take place (Lee & Li, 2015; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). According to Hughes et al. (2015), effective teachers that feel as if they have a relationship with their administration tend to stay with that administration and not move schools by choice. When schools incorporate teachers and staff into developing their shared vision within the school, in turn, teachers and staff members commit and make extra efforts in both private and public sectors (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). According to McKinney and Labat (2015), A decisive leader motivates his or her followers so they will produce more significant results with students academically.

Louis et al. (2016a) stated that "school leadership is, therefore, at its core a social relationship" (p. 312). Finally, Louis et al. (2016b) concluded that leaders are motivated by

advancing the success and personal well-being of school leaders' and caring is recognized by acknowledging others. Therefore, those in leadership roles must exhibit characteristics, including caring, attention to detail, and identifying the needs of others.

Good Leaders Making Good Schools

There is an old saying that states you are only as good as your leader, and that is so true. There are several areas, including Washington, New Orleans, and Chicago, making a difference in education based on implementing good leadership in the public schools (Brooks, 2018). The successes these areas have experienced range from increased graduation rates increased the number of students attending college, success in national standardized test scores, expanded early childhood educational programs, and overall student improvement (Brooks, 2018). This success attributed to excellent leadership, along with what good leaders implement. Through research Brooks (2018) found success linked to building the culture of the school by changing student and staff mindsets, welcoming community members into the schools, display throughout the school the values of the school, distribution of power, celebration of small accomplishments, quality of trusting relationships, high expectations, and administrators who are visible in and out of classrooms daily.

Leadership Trends of the 21st Century

Before moving forward and looking at trends of the 21st century, it is essential to understand what events preceded where we are today in education. Politics have made an impact on and in education starting as far back as 1965 with President L. B. Johnson. He established the focus needed to be on improving education. President Johnson created the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, implemented in 1965. This was part of an effort to keep up with the Soviet Union in technology—hence the launching of Sputnik (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran,

2003; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). Other educational reform platforms included the implementation of NCLB in 2001 by George Walker Bush with an emphasis on accountability. The most current restructuring in education was Race to the Top, implemented by Barack Obama.

Even after the implementation of NCLB, school improvements remain a significant concern for mandated school reform, which is needed. According to Yoon and Barton (2019), leaders need to focus on agendas that improve staff morale, improved instructional practices, increasing rigor and student learning of academic standards, and ensuring equity among social and racial classes. Through research, school leadership is the focus, and complications tend to occur when movement among principals takes place often where leaders are not familiar with the school and settings within the school (Yoon & Barton, 2019).

The principalship is at a crossroads according to recent literature with various concerns and conditions that are causing alarm due to the demands increasing on leaders today (Brooks, 2018; Lee-Colvin, 2018; Yoon & Barton, 2019). According to a study by DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003), the conditions and concerns of principals in Virginia are in the shortage of effective principals due to over half of principals intention of retiring in the next couple of years and the stress associated with responsibilities in the implementation of new laws, and addressing student behaviors. The National Center for School Leadership identified five key aspects of effective principals as defining and communicating a school's mission, coordinating curriculum, supervising and supporting teachers, monitoring student progress or achievement, and nurturing a positive learning environment for all (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Yoon & Barton, 2019). According to DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003):

> Convincing policymakers to question the assumption that principals can do more and be
> more and allocate the necessary resources needed for a more realistic job description will

be difficult. Nevertheless, the best hope for improving school leadership will be for all

educators to insist that states increase resources. Only then will the principal's role

benefit from the wisdom of leaders. (p. 60)

Effective leadership is the starting point in answering that question. Successful leaders,

including principals, assistant principals, or deans, need to emphasize transparency in decisions

to promote leadership, accountability, and collaboration. For 21st century learning to take place,

those in leadership roles need to understand the importance of student achievement and acquiring

new skills toward advanced learning and requires one to know and understand their staff (Best,

2016). According to Ross and Cozzens (2016), effective leaders yield high achievement

outcomes of student successes, school climate, leadership skills, and best practices. Education

today encompasses so many factors from assessments, collaboration, curriculum and instruction,

diversity, inquiry, leadership, learning communities, organizational management, professional

development, reflection, unity of purpose, and the list could go on and on. However, Ross and

Cozzens (2016) developed four core competencies in which institutional factors could go under,

including student-teacher relationships, professionalism, environment, and student feelings. For

assistant principals to make a difference, just as principals, it requires them to be comfortable in

decision making, which can only happen if they know the staff and needs of the school. As a

first-year administrator, one will not have the required knowledge needed to make an impact and

difference in the school. Globalization, economics, and labor shifts require a higher skill set

among leaders and teachers due to the change in socio-demographics. In schools across our

nation, more effective and efficient leaders are in demand. According to Pont (2014), increased

non-routine interpersonal or analytical skills require the migration of people. School leadership

has found to be an essential factor in improving schools and their outcomes; therefore, making a

case for restructuring to be limited for the assistant principal to know and understand the clientele in which they are leading. Stability is, primarily, essential, and necessary because many people are moving from place to place while demographics are rapidly changing.

Change

While there are times, change can be beneficial; most of the time, change means starting all over. It is human nature for people to resist change because of its difficulties and causes unexplained confusion (Schlossberg, 2011) in different ways. Change requires adapting to new people and a new way of doing things such as completing tasks (Brooks, 2018) or by doing things differently. Therefore, in education, when it comes to change, especially in a leadership role or position, it is beneficial if the person and persons being affected by the change had a voice or said so in the decision-making process.

There are times where the pros and cons need to be thought through before the restructuring occurs. In education, change can happen very quickly or suddenly. When there is a change in leadership, the old ways of doing things are sometimes changed, causing people to have anxiety or stress over the unknown or new ways. Transitions alter one's life with change in relationships, routines, and assumptions (Lee-Colvin, 2018; Schlossberg, 2011). In conclusion, change regardless is hard and challenging to adjust.

Why Assistant Principals Need a Voice: The Gap

Many times, assistant principals are affected by restructuring, and there is mostly little to no research giving assistant principals a needed voice where restructuring occurs. When transitioning or restructuring occurs, it requires a sense of self-awareness in being able to adapt to new situations with role identification (McClellan, 2015). Often, assistant principals marginalized with their voices not being heard (Armstrong, 2015). Assistant principals

outnumber the number of principals in districts where some schools have one principal and multiple assistant principals; however, they are overlooked when in fact, they are the main entry point in administration (Armstrong, 2015). The job of the assistant principal requires personal awareness, adaptation, willingness, reflection, and growth (Armstrong, 2015; McClellan, 2015). Just as restructuring with principals, assistant principals learn from experiences developing their skillset and perspectives to adapt to change when it takes place.

Summary

In conclusion, several theoretical frameworks could relate to the restructuring of assistant principals; however, the best theory for examining this problem of the restructuring impact on assistant principals is the transition theory. The phenomenon of assistant principals' experiences occurred during restructuring by using the lens of the transition theory. Schlossberg (1981a, 1981b) explains those events that we experience associated with transitions as anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event transitions. Regardless of which one of these transitions experienced, people will have different impacts associated with them as individuals. Some assistant principals may anticipate restructuring while others may be caught off guard with the restructuring. This process of restructuring through the transition will require change associated with one's roles, routines, relationships, and even assumptions. Therefore, Schlossberg et al. (1989) identifies the four sets of factors—situation, self, supports, and strategies—as influences that can assist in the adjustment that comes along with restructuring.

Literature is abundant in principals and movement; there is a gap found in the literature relating to the role of the assistant principal- a role that is vital as far as being the second in command. Therefore, this study allows for assistant principals to share their experiences with restructuring in Virginia. A review of the literature revealed types of leaders, the role of the

principal, principal turnover, and the principals' impact on teachers from multiple sources and studies. Student achievement, climate/culture, and care/trust are other areas where literature relates to the job of the principal. The assistant principal serves as the second in command and completes many of the same tasks in which principals complete. Armstrong (2015) described the multiple factors that assistant principals expected to carry out as a part of their leadership responsibilities and duties. Currently, there is very little research addressing the importance of assistant principals and how the transition can affect those in education, causing a gap in the restructuring of assistant principals in Virginia.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to allow assistant principals to describe their experiences before, during, and after restructuring in Virginia. The problem associated with restructuring is that continually changing leadership among schools can disrupt the personal and professional lives of assistant principals with arbitrary reassignments, causing leadership changes, resignations, and reduced effectiveness. This change in school management occurrences can further lead to decreased student performance. This research study allowed the opportunity to share experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after restructuring in Virginia. Chapter Three of this study provides comprehensive descriptions related to the research design, the process of selecting participants, research questions, the setting for interviews, and the role that I will play as the researcher. This chapter also includes procedures, including detailed descriptions of the data collection process and measures to analyze. This chapter describes the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness. This chapter concludes with a description of the ethical considerations that are instrumental in this research.

Design

Based on experiences that assistant principals describe as their lived experiences in association with restructuring, a qualitative method was the best fit. Qualitative research is better suited for this type of study where the voice of the assistant principal needs to be heard and allows for experiences throughout the transitional phases. Assistant principals descriptively told their stories in qualitative instead of quantitative, where the focus was to be relationships between variables and numerical emphasis. This qualitative research was used as a phenomenological research design to allow for assistant principals to share their lived

experiences associated throughout the process of school district restructuring in holistic descriptions derived from textual descriptions in data analysis and is most appropriate for this study to seek truth in this phenomenon through the eyes of the participants-the assistant principal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) describes a phenomenological research design as one that allows for the concentrated study of experiences along with being able to share and "reflect powers of self" (p. 25), which is what this design seeks to reveal through the voice of assistant principals'. The use of a reflective journal throughout each stage of research included logistics and methodology in understanding the meaning (Moustakas, 1994). This transcendental phenomenology study allowed for phenomenological descriptions with consciousness and intended analysis (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental design, in which assistant principals share their lived experiences with restructuring, was associated with learning that comes from "imagination and reflection" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). Therefore, this qualitative transcendental phenomenological design best conforms when studying the experiences before, during, and after restructuring allowing assistant principals the opportunity to share and understand their lived experiences associated with the process of restructuring.

Procedures illustrated by Moustakas (1994) consist of first identifying a phenomenon to study, reviewing the literature, finding a gap in the literature, bracketing one's own experiences, or epoché, analyzing data to order to reduce information to significant statements, and developing quotes that combine information into themes. The theoretical underpinnings of this study are related to the assumptions or concepts of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997). According to Flick (2018), qualitative research is characterized by the social constructs of realities and the interest from the perspectives of the participants.

Schlossberg's transition theory explained transitions associated with restructuring,

including anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Anticipated events were those expected to take place with restructuring, while unanticipated events were those not expected to occur. A nonevent was a planned event that does not occur. These various transitions: anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents are critical constructs of the process of moving in, moving through, and moving out of a transition and coping through consideration of the situation, self, support, and strategies for negotiating the transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001). The transition theory allowed assistant principals the opportunity to share their own experiences associated with restructuring.

As an assistant principal, I have experienced restructuring but began by bracketing my personal bias. Other assistant principals will be given the opportunity through this study to describe their perceptions associated with their thoughts and feelings (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, allowing other assistant principals the opportunity to share their experiences allowed for a concentrated study of experiences. These experiences described by assistant principals associated with before, during, and after the transition drove the research in defining themes.

Research Questions

The following central research question and guiding questions formed the basis for this transcendental phenomenological study.

Central Research Question

How do assistant principals describe their experiences associated with restructuring?

Sub-question One

What were the experiences of assistant principals before restructuring took place?

Sub-question Two

What were the experiences of assistant principals during restructuring?

Sub-question Three

What were the experiences of assistant principals after restructuring occurred?

Setting

The site for this research study was in a school district in the southeast area of Virginia, a mid-Atlantic state. This public-school district is a medium-sized school district. The city in which this study occurred includes schools, both urban and rural, and consists of a variety of demographics. This system has a total of 20 schools, including elementary, middle, high, and alternative schools, as well as a vocational center. The school district has approximately 14,000 students in preschool through 12th grade. This district employs 1,000 licensed professionals with an average of 14 years of experience and an entire support staff of approximately 1,000. The school district employs principals, assistant principals, and disciplinary and academic deans as the leaders in each school.

This school district has a seven-member school board that oversees the superintendent. The division will have a new superintendent in the summer of 2020 with the previous superintendent departing the division in June 2019; therefore, the urgency for this study will capture experiences of assistant principals before or at the beginning of the new superintendent placement. One of the goals of the school board is to attract, develop, and retain high-quality, diverse staff by increasing the retention of productive employees. During the 2018–2019 school year, data associated with maintaining quality staff was low. The data stated most employees are satisfied with their current job or current position; however, over half feel as if morale is a problem according to district surveys that are conducted yearly and emailed to principals and assistant principals (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). Many assistant principals within

the district have experienced a transition from one school to another due to restructuring. The results will provide district leaders and the newly hired superintendent with experiences of those assistant principals. They have faced restructuring and transitioning to assist in making effective personnel restructuring decisions.

Participants

Over five years, there have been at least 20 assistant principals who have experienced restructuring. Participants in this transcendental phenomenology study consist of assistant principals who have experienced restructuring within the last five years. A criteria-based, purposeful sampling method corresponded with maximum transferable variation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transferable maximum variation is the purposeful strategy associated with selecting less than twenty participants to maximize diversity relevant to the research question(s). In the event more participants were needed, Patton (2002) offered snowball sampling that could identify more participants through personal references. For this study, I sought 12 participants, including all assistant principals that have experienced restructuring, providing logic, emphasize experiences, analysis, and theory (Saunders et al., 2018). The data provided by participants allowed for detailed, thick descriptions of assistant principals' own experiences. Experiences were shared through the interview process in describing their own lived experiences. While there was not a specific number of participants required, the goal of the research was to reach thematic data saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Because this sample included only assistant principals who experienced transitions because of lived experiences, it is defined as practical and purposeful (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Corbin and Strauss (2015) asserted that the researcher should identify relevant issues, events, and happenings during the collection and analysis of the data. Assistant principals assist

in the management of the school, including helping the principal with administering, facilitating, supporting, and supervising school faculty and staff. The role of the assistant principal includes fast-paced multitasking, is at times is stressful, and helps to ensure the safety of the school and compliance with federal and state guidelines.

While restructuring was productive for me and allowed me to grow professionally, this is not the case for all assistant principals. However, when first being notified of restructuring, the transition was a complicated process throughout each stage before, during, and after. Hence, just as change is difficult, transitioning associated with restructuring is also difficult

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Level Restructuring
Amaya	54	Black	Female	Elementary to elementary
Ariana	53	Black	Female	Middle to elementary
Brenda	44	White	Female	Elementary to elementary
Brooklin	45	White	Female	Elementary to high
Chloe	32	Black	Female	Elementary to elementary
Cooper	42	Black	Male	Elementary to middle
Gala	41	Black	Female	Elementary to middle
Rochelle	54	Black	Female	Elementary to elementary
Savion	29	Black	Male	Vocational to high
Silas	28	Black	Male	Elementary to vocational
Verona	55	Black	Female	Elementary to elementary

Procedures

This study began after the required Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval had taken place (Appendix A). It is the IRB's responsibility to ensure that all research is planned and conducted ethically. Once permission was granted, a systematic process aligning with the methodology of this study began.

Assistant principals that had experienced restructuring were those invited to participate (Appendix B) and given a synopsis of the process and purpose involved in this study (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). Participants contributing to the study agreed to sign a consent form for their participation (Appendix C) in this research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consent forms include, but were not limited to, risks, benefits, identity protection, and knowledge that it was voluntarily accepted data collection with analysis, and confidentiality with the use of pseudonyms (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

 Demographic data were collected for detailed descriptions of the participants. Data were then collected using semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) and followed up after reviewing all data with a focus group (Appendix E; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). Data were collected qualitatively through this interview process, and the questions were divided into chronological categories to capture the assistant principals' experiences before, during, and after transition resulting from restructuring (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This data were collected using audio recordings and information stored via a password-protected computer (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once all the data were collected and professionally transcribed, coding, and analysis took place for themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Also, the descriptive nature of this research design was to create a unity of what is real and what is ideal (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27). As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), the first step in data analysis was to set my biases aside. Epoché, as defined by Moustakas (1994), involves the setting aside of any prejudgments and conducting interviews with an unbiased, receptive manner. The epoché process was best for this study because of the phenomenon of my restructuring, giving me, the researcher, a chance to mitigate my own bias. Then, participants had the chance to share their voice based on their experiences. As the researcher, being open and receptive to other assistant principals participating in this study and share their experiences was binding (Moustakas, 1994).

The data collected went through the process of phenomenological reduction, which Moustakas (1994) defines as bracketing. The process of bracketing includes, giving each statement equal value, delimitation of meaning, invariant themes, individual descriptions, and composite descriptions. Imaginative variations included the meanings and perspectives of the phenomenon through variations, themes, and structure (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, synthesis occurred through textural and composite structural descriptions where meaning developed, giving the essence of the phenomenon was experienced (Moustakas, 1994).

Throughout the research process, reflective journaling provided an opportunity to record personal insight, reflections, and questions that arose throughout the process of research. The practice of journaling included the recording of multiple ideas, events, or thoughts associated with restructuring while going through the research process and steps (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). It also involved in keeping a reflective journal that also allowed the researcher to mitigate bias and create transparency throughout the entire research process and also allowing review at any time or by any relevant party (Ortlipp, 2008). Therefore, reflective journaling was an essential tool to organize, reflect, collect, and analyze data in this phenomenological research study.

Figure 1

Procedures
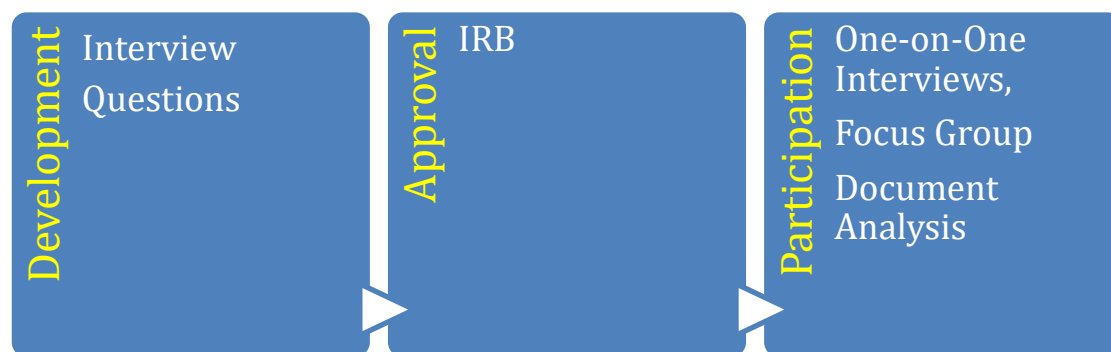
The Researcher's Role

I served as the primary instrument in the collection of data as a human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I am employed within the district researched, where affiliations with participants include a purely professional relationship versus that of a personal relationship. However, I was only familiar with who they are and the role in which they serve as an assistant principal. Insightful qualitative work can be and was the result of an environment in which the research is familiar, allowing firsthand knowledge of the district's policies, procedures, and bias (Ashworth et al., 1986; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Hanson, 1994). Therefore, effective bracketing was essential in this study as I have experienced restructuring in the past; however, bracketing allowed for identifying other participants that may have different experiences associated with their lived experiences with the transition because of restructuring.

I analyzed personal and official documents that relate to restructuring after IRB approval and district release of documentation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My documentation review analysis included multiple data sources released by the district, such as emails, notifications, documents, memos, and any other sources. The process of epoché implemented as a way of setting aside all prejudgments or preconceived ideas through bracketing, as described by Moustakas (1994). It served as a way of setting aside any prejudgments or preconceived ideas, allowing reflection as if it is for the first time, to continue with the opportunity mindset of a fresh start, clearing of the mind, and an understanding of being transparent to me (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Moustakas (1994), it is necessary to be open to all possibilities and findings. I bracketed my biases out of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) but used my personal experiences to inform the development of my interview protocols. Along the way, I kept a reflective journal (Appendix F) for my personal experiences and reflections. According to

Corbin and Strauss (2015), "every researcher has perspectives, biases, and assumptions that they

bring with them to the research process" (p. 46). Therefore, this journal served as a tool to

capture some of my biases and allow me the opportunity to recognize reactions, feelings, and

concepts throughout the interview process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The journal also served as a

useful tool in the process of recording information related to the method, logistics, and personal

experiences related to the phenomenon, which was the descriptive nature of this transcendental

phenomenological research design. Timelines were helpful to keep me on track to finish

(Appendix G).

<div align="center">

Data Collection

</div>

This transcendental phenomenology designed allowed assistant principals the opportunity

to describe their experiences, giving voice to their lived experiences with the process of school

division restructuring in southeast Virginia. Data collection included document analysis, one-on-

one with open-ended interviews, and a focus group (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth,

2018; Moustakas, 1994). During the interviews and focus groups, it was best when rapport

developed between the researcher and the person interviewee to build credibility (Christians &

Carey, 1989). Therefore, I ensured that a rapport was established before the interview began.

These means of data collection allowed for triangulation of data analysis for trustworthiness and

reliability (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). During data

collection, I addressed my feelings and bias through reflective journaling and document analysis

(Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews

The next method of data collection was the interviews with participants following a

revised interview protocol. Interviews were conducted in person and one-on-one to observe body

language and other nonverbal details with hand-written notes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed, allowing me to focus entirely on the non-verbal aspects of participant interviews. Questions were open-ended, allowing for participants' experiences to be described in detail and were structured to capture their experiences in certain areas before, during, and after restructuring took place (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Schlossberg's transition theory was the guide for developing the interview questions associated with describing their experiences with "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" of the restructuring process (Lyons et al., 2016; Schlossberg, 1981a). The interview questions are presented in Appendix D.

Questions 1 through 3 served as opening questions where the interviewee could share using a straightforward manner while rapport was being developed (Patton, 2005). Building relationships among faculty and staff in a school building is crucial just as building a relationship with those being interviewed. Trust is a factor promoted in an environment where there were strong relationships and trust established (Demir, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016). Therefore, even when conducting interviews, it was essential to build a relationship for the interview to feel nonthreatening.

Questions 4 through 17 reflected on experiences and the level of awareness associated with going through restructuring in Virginia. Questions 4 through 8 focused on before experiencing restructuring. Building trust is one of the variables that are mandatory and deeply woven into the school itself (Kelleher & Levenson. 2014). Trust is an essential component in building relationships and the feeling that someone "has your back." It is a fact that the principal alone cannot accomplish the required job demands without assistance. Researchers and

practitioners stress the importance of building trust and respect in successfully building relationships and managing change to create a positive learning environment between and among the roles of leadership (Hindman et al., 2009; Lee-Colvin, 2018). When building this positive learning environment, relationships are crucial to success. According to Khalifa et al. (2016), educational reform claims that school leadership is the crucial component, secondary to teaching. Change is the emphasis of Questions 9 through 13 and focuses on the during phase of restructuring. This group of questions focuses on during transition because of restructuring, where one experiences a high degree of vulnerability. At this point, participants may talk in-depth about the phenomenon of restructuring. Leadership that is continuously changing is a challenge facing public schools today and is often caused by factors such as career transition, retirement, and unforeseen circumstances.

According to Brooks (2018), Snodgrass Rangel (2018), and Leithwood et al. (2004), the reason for the concern is because of the pivotal role which administration plays in a process that can ensure school improvement, a process that can take between five and seven years. A constant change in principals or assistant principals makes it hard for schools to implement new programs for improvement purposes. In education, change can happen very quickly or suddenly. When there is a change in leadership, the old ways of doing things are sometimes changed, causing people to have anxiety or stress over the unknown or new ways. Transitions alter one's life with change in relationships, routines, and assumptions (Lee-Colvin, 2018; Schlossberg, 2011). Change, regardless, is hard and complicated when adjusting. In conclusion, change regardless, is hard and challenging to adjust, and there are emotions associated with restructuring assistant principals in Virginia.

Questions 14 through 17 described the assistant principal's new placement because of restructuring. Building relationships was once again meaningful between the principal and the assistant principal. Therefore, the trust factor of building this trust and respecting one another in successfully building relationships and managing change within a school created a positive learning environment between and among the roles of leadership (Hindman et al., 2009; Lee-Colvin, 2018). According to Sun and Leithwood (2015), the key to leadership was establishing clear goals and keeping these goals at the forefront of the school. However, when comparing goals, missions, and visions, the vision and mission have broader meanings with the vision relating to the leader's view of education (Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Therefore, after restructuring occurred, it was important for the principal and the assignment principal to be in sync with the mission and vision of the school. Question 17 allowed assistant principals to share intimate details that they may have experienced with restructuring. These details included emotions and feelings that one experienced.

Questions 18 through 20 allowed for the opportunity to explain and reflect on experiences associated with restructuring. When transitioning and restructuring occurred, it required a sense of self-awareness in being able to adapt to new situations with role identification (McClellan, 2015). Often, assistant principals become marginalized with their voices ignored (Armstrong, 2015). Assistant principals outnumber the number of principals in almost all districts where some schools have one principal and multiple assistant principals; however, they are overlooked when in fact, they are the main entry point in administration (Armstrong, 2015). The job of the assistant principal requires personal awareness, adaptation, willingness, reflection, and growth (Armstrong, 2015; McClellan, 2015).

Focus Group(s)

Focus groups allowed for multiple participants to share at the same time, giving them opportunities to capture multi-layered concepts and for clarifications to be made (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The focus group took place after the completion of interviews from participants. The purpose of the focus group was to serve as a follow-up to individual interviews and as a way in which questions could be checked and cross-check for clarity (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This use of focus group(s) was beneficial in collecting data that would yield information from experiences. Participants might hesitate to share on a one-to-one basis; however, they often open-up in a focus group with those sharing similar experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The focus group questions were as follows:

1. Overall, as an assistant principal, how do you describe your experiences before, during, and after restructuring?

2. What do you describe as being the most compelling aspect of restructuring before, during, and after as an assistant principal?

3. What do you describe as being the most disruptive aspect of restructuring before, during, and after as an assistant principal?

4. What effects have restructuring had on the morale, or workplace satisfaction of assistant principals?

5. How have you been able to build and cultivate relationships because of restructuring?

6. How did you feel once notified that you would be affected by restructuring?

7. Let us discuss the different emotions that you experienced while you were going through the transition.

8. Compare and contrast the two different principals that you served under as an assistant principal.

9. What skill(s) have you developed because of being affected by restructuring?

10. What is the take-away that you have associated with your experiences?

Focus group questions allowed me the opportunity to probe even further with participants to collect additional data on experiences with restructuring. Some questions within the focus group were to clarify previously asked questions from the interview. Question 1 dives deeper into the aspect of restructuring. Lee-Colvin (2018) emphasized that change makes it challenging to build relationships, including community, staff, faculty, students, and parents. In contrast, there are times when change is welcomed and needed with new energy, new life, and new ideas; however, constant change never allows for leaders to build relationships among the staff (Hindman, 2009; Lee-Colvin, 2018). Questions 2, 3, and 6 are descriptive, giving more detail of before, during, and after restructuring occurred. These questions allowed the voice of the assistant principal who was affected by restructuring in Virginia and the way they received notification of the transition. When transition and restructuring occur, it requires a sense of self-awareness in being able to adapt to new situations with role identification (McClellan, 2015). When assistant principals were marginalized with their voices ignored, they tend to become complacent (Armstrong, 2015). Question 4 focuses on restructuring, along with morale and culture. However, if the school's administration team is continually changing, consistency is not present.

Similarly, Question 5 references the building of relationships and the fact that constant change rarely allows for the cultivation of relationships (Hindman et al., 2009; Lee-Colvin, 2018). Both questions relate to the change in the climate. According to Harris and Kemp-Graham

(2017), "Culture is the nucleus of the school" (p. 54) and is believed to be the area where schools develop their own identity (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). Question 7, also aligned with relationships, offers the opportunity to describe the multiple emotions associated with the transition. Hindman et al. (2009) stated that leadership is all about building relationships and setting a course through vision resulting in positive effects within the school. It is human nature for people to resist change because it is hard, causing unexplained confusion (Schlossberg, 2011). Armstrong (2015) revealed frustrations from assistant principals as they shared their experiences in many areas with restructuring. These frustrations include more significant levels of scrutiny and expectations from teachers, teachers complaining about issues they expect the assistant principal to solve, increased workload managing ongoing crises and solving problems, the pace of new information and emails, lack of control over personal schedules, and added pressure was maintaining the safety of the school.

Question 8 served as a comparison of types of leadership styles. Numerous characteristics describe leaders in today's education system; however, the most common types of leaders are those that are delegative, autocratic, democratic, transactional, and transformational (Lee-Colvin, 2018). Questions 9 and 10 are considered as an opportunity for the assistant principal to articulate areas of growth that they experienced through restructuring as well as share any advice to others that may in the future face restructuring. The job of the assistant principal requires personal awareness, adaptation, willingness, reflection, and growth (Armstrong, 2015; McClellan, 2015). Just as restructuring with principals, assistant principals learn from experiences to develop their skillset and perspectives to adapt to change when it takes place.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was beneficial when analyzing recorded materials that aligned with restructuring as a part of the research process. Corbin and Strauss (2015) recommended using various data sources that are written, observed, or recorded, including internal documents, memos, memoirs, Internet postings, and even historical records. The document review blended a unity of meaning by reviewing documentation for meaning, effectiveness, and reliability (Moustakas, 1994). Documents analyzed included but were not limited to, documents that address policies and procedures for leadership restructuring within the school district.

Overall, reviewing multiple documents aligned the research questions and overall design. Another advantage of the document review was looking for a framework of meaning. Moustakas (1994) suggested meaning is at the heart of transcendental phenomenology. Documents were analyzed by breaking down content looking for similarities and differences in writing while grouping common concepts (Bowen, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Bowen (2009) suggested when analyzing documents that it is essential to interpret and find meaning followed by coding information into themes. Document analysis provided an opportunity to view various documents to see if there was evidence of a smooth restructuring process or if changes were needed. When analyzing various documents, an effort made to incorporate primary and secondary sources. Each document collected was identified with a specific rationale as to why it was selected. Therefore, documents and policies were analyzed as a data point within this research.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved conceptual ordering and evidence for the author or researcher to understand the data they are analyzing (Peterson, 2019). This research is a transcendental phenomenology in which experiences were resulting from restructuring within the school division described in all areas of data collection (Moustakas, 1994). The primary source for this

study comes from the framework of Moustakas (1994). Data points were analyzed using

Moustakas's (1994) suggested approach of being open, receptive, and even naive in listening and

hearing during data collection. Data collected from assistant principals were analyzed in the

following chronological order: interviews, focus groups, and then document analysis. Analyzing

the phenomenological data were done using the methodology of preparing questions, collecting

the data, organizing/analyzing/synthesizing, identifying textual and structural descriptions in

meaning, and summarizing related findings for possible future research (Creswell & Poth, 2018;

Moustakas, 1994).

When analyzing the data, extensive and prolonged synthesis was needed to develop

patterns of meaning (Ho, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), analyzing data can

represent challenges when organizing themes, interpretation, and representing data because the

steps are interconnected, forming a spiral concerning analysis. Therefore, the steps for

interpretation needed to be in place. For example, after each interview and the focus group, each

question was organized, varying in length, using memos in the reflective journal to include the

question, concept(s), raw data, analysis of raw data, and methodological notes as needed (Corbin

& Strauss, 2015).

The coding process describes the breaking down of research in the smallest possible

units. Coding involves structuring data in an organized manner, and coding messy information

into quantifiable, organized conceptual research data (Christians & Carey, 1989; Corbin &

Strauss, 2015; Ho, 2018). Thematic coding used for the focus group; however, the one-on-one

interviews were required in-depth methods for coding. Finally, inductive reasoning followed in

extracting raw data from the interviews and aligning the data to initial themes (Thomas, 2006).

Moustakas (1994) defined the steps as a reduction of information through horizontalizing, clustering, identifying themes, and allowing for coherent textual descriptions. Next, separate statements were removed, analyzed into themes, and textural descriptions of experiences remained (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Reflection allowed for the core meaning and essence of the study to be identified. When delineating concepts for interpreting the meaning of the data, interviews, and document analysis were conceptualized based on interpretation, meaning, brainstorming, questioning, comparisons, reflection, and the delineation of themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Becker (1998) stated that when developing concepts, it is the continuous dialogue in the empirical data that needs a way of being summarized. Summarization took place in all areas of research. When conducting interviews and the focus group, answers were verbally repeated back to the interviewee to ensure all information was captured. Summarizing each question was done by writing memos in the reflective journal.

According to Patton (2005), elements associated with triangulation include purpose consistency, multiple data sources, methods for collecting data, and perspectives of theory when interpreting data. Overall, data analysis included managing and organizing data in a reflective journal for data files, and new ideas came from reading text, notes, and ideas—codes classified into themes through experiences and the essence of the phenomenon. Then interpretations developed significant statements grouped into meaning, and data represented in textual and structural description essence was developed (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Data points were collected using multiple forms, including document analysis, interviews, and then a focus group. Data were triangulated and analyzed using these

three methods. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the effects of restructuring assistant

principals in Virginia.

Trustworthiness

The components of trustworthiness include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and

transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and are delineated in this section. Elements of trust

incorporate recognizing one's own bias and allowing participants to have the opportunity to

volunteer rather than be forced to participate (Peterson, 2019). Participants tend to trust and give

credibility to the process when questions are purposeful, pseudonyms used, and they can share

their experiences (Peterson, 2019). Methods for increased trustworthiness included member

checks and the triangulation of data collected from interviews and document analysis (Corbin &

Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002).

Also, validity and reliability sought throughout the study. Multiple data sources such as

interviews, focus groups, and a documentation analysis used to identify themes or perspectives

as ways of obtaining and merging data so that each set validates the other sets. Triangulation by

selecting a variety of assistant principals sharing their experiences using their opinions in an

accurate account of the phenomena that they experienced along with the criteria that all

participants are trustworthy impacts this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

When transcribing the interviews, reliability played a significant role in ensuring all aspects of

the interview were captured (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). I planned and

hired a professional transcriber to record interviews, and then as the researcher, I identified

themes throughout the interview data.

Credibility

The origin of the term credibility thought to defined as "believable." Also, the notion was that it had to fit the criteria of being able (Creswell and Poth, 2018) to be understood in layman's terms, applied with diversity, and sufficient to bring about change (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe the reality of lived experiences. Research emphasizes exploring individuals' experiences as they describe the phenomenon they relate to, and the researcher gave information to develop a theory (Cope, 2014). Mendes-Da-Silva (2019) stated that transparency is crucial to credibility. Transparency included the protection of participants' identity and an accurate collection of data. When conducting interviews, research has shown that questions need framing in a way that will influence the accuracy of interviewee responses and attention paid to gestures that the speaker uses, which can convey information not used in words (Broaders & Goldin-Meadow, 2010). The credibility of participant lived experiences information established through the implementation of epoché and member-checking for accuracy of statements and generalizations of participant responses.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability measures the quality of study and supported the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is the degree where findings from the study confirmed by other researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to the research from Butler (1984), dependability and confirmability are constraints associated with providing the trustworthiness found in research. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), both dependability and confirmability reference the consistency of bracketing and the themes found in research. During this study on experiences of assistant principals' dependability and confirmability were used in the descriptions of themes, member checks, and reflective journaling. Dependability was a part of

the internal process in conducting research, while confirmability was included in the

confirmation of information through member checks, bracketing, and journaling through the

research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Techniques used in establishing dependability

consists of the use of inquiry audit and establishing conformability included all of the following:

the use of audit trails, raw data, data reduction and analysis, data reconstruction and synthesis,

process notes, dispositions materials, instrument development, and reflexivity (Pandey &

Patnaik, 2014).

Transferability

Data derived from this research may prove to be similar or different in context from one

assistant principal to another. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the use of detailed and thick

descriptions in research to allow the researcher to be able to make recommendations that may be

transferable. Because my research took place in a standard setting, transferability was evident

throughout the research. This use of rich, thick descriptions of experiences allowed the reader to

make decisions based on reading transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993). Transferability provided

knowledge and insight to those in policy-making roles through which change can occur from the

research conducted (Ferrando et al., 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were evident throughout the research through following

procedures of the Liberty University IRB process, ensuring that data are protected, and the use of

pseudonyms. All data collected happened after receiving IRB approval from the Research and

Ethics Office at Liberty University. Reflective journaling and all interview notes and

documentation from data were securely locked in a desk for privacy. All electronic data were and

are password-protected on a flash drive and a personal computer. The use of pseudonyms for the

confidentiality of participants and the school district in this study was used (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Permission from district leadership of the division took place, the participant's identity was kept confidential, and all data remained secure and locked either electronically or in a secured locked cabinet. Transparency took place in being transparent, explicit, and open in methods and procedures used while later sharing findings with participants and school officials will take place (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after school district restructuring in Virginia. This chapter detailed descriptions related to the research design, the process of selecting participants, the setting, and the role that I played as the researcher. This chapter also included data collection, analysis, and delineates the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness. This chapter concluded with ethical considerations instrumental in this research by allowing assistant principals to be able to share their personal, lived experiences that they have encountered as well as providing insight for other assistant principals in the future that may face restructuring.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research study was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after restructuring in Virginia. This chapter provides the results of the study, beginning with detailed descriptions of participants. Twelve participants in this study vary demographically, in age, ethnicity, and gender found in Table 1 of the previous chapter. Pseudonyms used in this research protect the identity of all participants. The voice of participants represents using representative quotes gathered from the interviews and a focus group. All quotes are presented verbatim and may or may not contain grammatical errors to depict the authentic voice of participants accurately. The following processes occurred and include epoché, phenomenological reduction with horizontalization, theme identification, textural and structural descriptions, coding, and the experiences of participants. Results presented through themes that emerged from the data collection of interviews and document analysis provided in answering the central research question: How do assistant principals describe their experiences associated with restructuring? Themes and subthemes supported the following sub-questions through analysis:

What were the experiences of assistant principals before restructuring took place?

What were the experiences of assistant principals during restructuring?

What were the experiences of assistant principals after restructuring occurred?

Summary findings identify both textual and structural descriptions of assistant principals' lived experiences before, during, and after restructuring in Virginia that aligns with the framework of Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory servings as the theoretical framework in this research study.

Participants

This study included assistant principals who experienced restructuring within the past five years, along with documentation referencing their restructuring experiences. This study was conducted using 12 assistant principals who met the criteria and were willing to participate. Participants shared their experiences via research questions from personal interviews and by participating in a focus group with their peers who had similar experiences and sharing documentation related to restructuring. Portrait descriptions are included for each interviewee and further describes their own lived experiences with the phenomenon of restructuring. All assistant principals who participated shared their experiences, including duties, responsibilities, and their role in different schools within the same district. Participants shared their first-hand experiences, allowing for their voices to be heard clearly.

Assistant principals who participated in this study ranged in age from 28 to 55 years. Ethnicity included ten Black people and two White people, and nine females and three males. Six participants moved from elementary to elementary, four from elementary to secondary, and two from elementary to other placements. Participants in this study also have a variety of experiences ranging from serving as a teacher assistant, academic coaches, a central office position at the district level, sports coaches, an employee at Southeastern Cooperative Educational Programs, dean of students, dean of discipline, mentor, alternative education, and vocational education. Participants in this research study have numerous years of experience in education and administration. Table 2 identifies the years of experience per participant in both education and administration.

Table 2

Participant Experience

Participant	Experience in education (years)	Experience in administration (years)
Amaya	25	8
Ariana	24	5
Brenda	14	5
Brooklin	15	4
Chloe	10	3
Claudia	31	18
Cooper	16	4
Gala	20	10
Savion	9	4
Silas	6	3
Rochelle	23	3
Total	216	80

Amaya

Amaya is a 54-year-old black female who is short in stature but has a wealth of knowledge when it comes to education. She is a single mother who works hard to provide for her high school son. Amaya is and always has been an energetic and humorous person with the ability to adapt to new situations quickly. She grew up in a military family and is a former military wife. She attributed her flexibility because of military exposure. Before working in administration, Amaya taught for numerous years and served for three years as a dean of students. Her role as the dean of students was like an assistant principal with fewer responsibilities and duties. Amaya, a dedicated member of a sorority, was also passionate and sounded enthusiastic, describing both her experience in education and administration.

Ariana

Ariana is a 53-year-old light-skinned Black female with short black hair and glasses. She was tall, well dressed, and had a contagious smile. She described herself as a wife, mother, and soon-to-be a grandmother. Ariana is a 24-year veteran in the field of education, and her years in the field have allowed her to adapt to any new given situation quickly. She has taught in many

different positions, including third grade, fourth grade, vocational education, the workforce center, and middle school in several districts in Virginia. Throughout her interview and participation in the focus group, her compassion for education was apparent. Her face lit up when sharing experiences that she encountered throughout her years. Ariana also has her doctoral degree and has served as program director and the dean of students before becoming an assistant principal.

Brenda

Brenda is a 44-year-old white female with short black hair, brown eyes, and glasses. She appeared well dressed, tan, and medium in her statue. Brenda attributes her comfort with change as growing up a military child and being married to a man in the military. Her passion for education started many years ago since education was valued in her household, growing up and with her children. Her passion continued as an adult when she started teaching children with disabilities. Her love is to make a difference in the lives of children. She shared her expertise in working with positive behavioral interventions for students. One accomplishment that she takes pride in was one of her first administrative experiences where she was working at a fully accredited school where discipline was almost non-existent, except for on the bus. Therefore, she developed for the entire school to use "Bus Bucks" for every day they behaved on the bus. At the end of the week, students could use their bucks to buy candy. Her excitement when sharing this story gave her a sense of accomplishment. She also shared that it was at that time that she bought stock in Jolly Ranchers!

Brenda has experience in many areas of education and other states. She started as a teacher's assistant in Maryland. Once moving to Virginia, Brenda began working with the Southeastern Cooperative Educational Programs, as a general education teacher and later a

special education teacher in both elementary and middle school. When moving into administration, she began as a dean of discipline overseeing the discipline component before becoming an assistant principal. She has also served as the district's summer school administrator.

Brooklin

Brooklin is a 45-year-old white female with medium length brown hair and beautiful brown eyes. She was average height with a small build and stylish dress. Brooklin was soft-spoken during the interview. She shared being a wife and mother of grown children allows her time to dedicate to her job. Before going into administration, she worked with elementary and middle school students as a classroom teacher and a special education teacher. It was evident that Brooklin has a goal and will not stop before reaching that goal. She is goal oriented and has a strong desire to accomplish her goal of one day being a principal and serving as a school board member.

Chloe

Chloe is a 32-year-old Black female with dark skin complexion. She was fit and slender build, dressed in the latest trends, and had short black hair. Chloe is a young, single lady who is a godly daughter and dedicated to her church. Before Chloe went into administration, she was a computer teacher in one of the district's middle schools. Her dedication and hard work carried over from the classroom to her present job as an assistant principal. Hence, her work ethic is why she headed the districts summer enrichment program. When describing herself, Chloe emphasized her dedication to both her church and her sorority. She shared that as an assistant principal, the job demands are so different as a teacher. She stated that as a teacher, much of her weekends included lesson planning and grading papers with less time for church and her

sorority, but now as assistant principal, she goes all day with no downtime during the day and has more time on weekends.

Claudia

Claudia is a 54-year-old Black female with many educational experiences. She had short straight black hair and large, vibrant eyes with a stocky build, average height. She also had a medium skin complexion with various spots on her face hidden by her glasses. Claudia describes herself as a seasoned veteran in education who is tired and ready for retirement. This year marks 31 years in education. She and her husband are looking forward to traveling because their children are now grown, out of the house, she shared in an honest, firm voice. And she did promise to send me a postcard on her near future travels. Claudia seemed to like to tell of her many stories in administration. However, she describes feeling accomplished because of her many years in education. Claudia's many experiences in education included being a teacher assistant with preschool children, an elementary teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, and back to assistant principal, all within the same district.

Cooper

Before going into administration, Cooper has held numerous supervisory positions in an alternative school, a division alternative education supervisor, employee at the division level in central office, and a dean of discipline, after teaching special education. Currently, Cooper is serving as a middle school assistant principal after serving as an elementary school assistant principal and is working on his doctoral degree. Cooper is a 42-year-old large dark-skinned Black male who was well dressed. He has short, shaved hair and limited facial hair. His happy-go-lucky attitude and a charming personality noted throughout the interview. When talking about himself, Cooper emphasized his love for his wife and young children, being that of a family man.

Gala

Gala is a 41-year-old Black female with notable characteristics. These characteristics include being small and petite, but feisty, wearing a short skirt, silky top, and high heels, and having long braided hair with medium skin color. Gala wore her emotions on her face making various facial expressions throughout the interview process. Gala, divorced for many years; however, she has a grown daughter and is recently a new grandmother.

Gala has served the last 24 years in education. She has held various roles, including being a teacher at the elementary level, an academic coach, and an assistant principal. Before her experience with restructuring, all her years in education were at the elementary level. It was during that same time of transition that she experienced some personal conflict in her life. She currently serves at a middle school and has the same duties at the elementary level as an assistant principal, just with older students.

Rochelle

Rochelle is a 54-year-old light-skinned Black female with black short hair and glasses. Dressed in athletic gear at the time of the interview, she was on the way to the gym after her meeting for stress relief. Her activity allows for her slender build and desire for being physically fit. Rochelle prides herself on being a wife and mother to her grown daughter. She attributes her gift in helping others to the fact that she was the oldest of nine children and was left helping her single mom raise her brothers and sisters. Her nurturing spirit was evident as she shared from her experiences growing up and being depended upon and needed. Rochelle is currently a 23-year veteran in the field of education and served as an assistant principal for three years. Her career in education started as a teacher assistant, teacher, and academic coach before moving to a position

at the district central office as a content specialist. After her experience at the central office, Rochelle moved into an administrative position serving as an assistant principal.

Savion

Savion is a 29-year-old Black male athletic in his stature as a coach. He had a medium complexion with short black hair. He is a happy-go-lucky guy who has a passion for mentoring students. He shared about growing up and attending school right here in the same district where he attended school and married his childhood sweetheart. He recognizes kids going through some of the same struggles he went through as a kid, and he wants to make a difference. He, as defined throughout the district, is the right mentor. Savion, a youngster and new to administration, shares further information related to him personally and in education. Savion, like Chloe, is homegrown. He attended school in the same district where he now works and lives in the same community where he grew up. Savion has an outgoing, charismatic personality where people cannot help but love him. He was moving from a vocational assistant principal to a high school assistant principal.

Silas

Silas is a 28-year-old Black male with average height and a buff build. He is always smiling and well dressed in a charming personality with a short clean-cut hairstyle. Silas, a young, married man with a child on the way, and opportunities for advancement in administration for him to pursue within the district. Currently, Silas is enrolled in a doctoral program and close to defending his dissertation. He has taught on the secondary level, coached many sports, and has served as a dean of students, where his focus was on discipline at the elementary level. Silas adapts quickly to change, and it was apparent through his interview. He

has a passion for mentoring students. After serving as assistant principal half of the year, Silas

transferred as an assistant principal at the regional college and career academy.

Verona

Verona is a 50-old Black female with glasses, short hair, and well dressed. She is older

with light facial features of age, tall and thin, and a widow. Currently, she has 26 years of

experience in education at the elementary level. Verona is a faithful child of God. She has a rare

and unique kind spirit about her as a person, and it shows in her life. She shares her faith as the

guiding force behind the ability to adapt to change. Her self-efficacy and deep beliefs allow her

to prosper in any given situation or experience. She is a true inspiration not only to assistant

principals but everyone she meets throughout her life.

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Results

</div>

This study allowed assistant principals the opportunity to describe their experiences

before, during, and after experiencing restructure in Virginia. The results of this study are

presented through structural analysis following the ideas and processes recommended by

Moustakas (1994). The data analysis process included horizontalization, theme identification,

textual and structural descriptions along with the essence of experiences described (Moustakas,

1994). After completing one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and analysis of official

documentation, five primary themes with subthemes emerged within the research (see Table 3).

The five primary themes that emerged from the analysis include building relationships,

challenges faced throughout the process, division consistency with notification, the emotional

aspect, and growth through restructuring. While transcribing audio interviews, reflective

journaling, and coding subthemes supported the analysis of data collected, reflective journaling

included the process of memos when analyzing data, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2015).

This process included the analysis of each research question and documentation in the identification of abstract ideas and general notions through concepts; identification of raw data in reviewing processed primary and secondary data; analyzing through detailed examination and structure by the question; assessing systems of methods related to methodology and summarizing the data collected.

Table 3

Themes and Subthemes for All Data Sources

Theme	Subthemes
Building relationships	Principal to assistant principal
	Between faculty/staff, students, parents
Challenges	Leadership styles
	Time
	Preparation
Division consistency	Superintendent
	Assistant superintendent
	Director of secondary education
Emotions	Positive
	Negative
	Uncertainty or why
Growth experience	Adjustments
	Reality

Theme Development

Themes and subthemes developed because of interviews and document analysis through horizontalization. Similar themes using codes began to emerge because of reflective journaling that included the concept of doing memos after each interview. Significant words and phrases began to stand out as being important. Following that process, I also read and re-read each interview and listened to the audio recording over and over to assist in theme development. Information was then coded in nodes using NVivo, where themes and subthemes were identified in an organized manner (see Table 3). Specific themes and subthemes include in this study: building relationships emphasizing on between the principal and assistant principal and among

the faculty/staff, students, and parents; challenges with restructuring including leadership styles, time, and preparation; division consistency of notification with emphasis on the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and director of secondary education; emotions whether positive, negative, and the uncertainty of why; and finally growth experiences through leadership styles and level adjustments.

Table 3 displays each theme and corresponding subtheme that stood out when analyzing and synthesizing the various data points through the one-on-one, face-to-face interviews, the focus group, and the documentation analysis of contracts, emails, notification, and website announcements for the district located on the staff portal. The district has a public website and a Facebook page used for public access and social media. However, the division also has a private website for all employees of the division for their use for district purchased resources, grades, etc. The private staff portal is employee password protected and is only accessible by the employees of the district.

Building Relationships

This first theme that appeared in this research study describes the relationships between the principal, assistant principal, faculty, staff, students, and parents. Building relationships is an essential component of education. Just as teachers build relationships with students and their parents, it is equally vital for administrators to build relationships with their assistant(s) principal, students, staff, faculty, and parents. Building relationships is crucial when restructuring occurs. Through one-on-one interviews and a focus group, the overall relationship that principals and assistant principals develop sets the tone for the building.

Brooklin described the relationship that she and her principal developed as "the setting of the tone throughout the building." She further stated:

It is the relationships between the leaders of the school that determine the culture and the

climate for the building. People that serve in buildings know that the leadership

determines how people feel about the work environment. A productive environment is

beneficial for success within the school ranging from trust, relationships of others, and

learning. If the staff feels links are essential, they will most likely develop relationships

as well. They, the team, will also work to their potential when a connection has been

established with the administration.

The subthemes developed through relationships include that between the principal and assistant

principal and relationships between the faculty/staff, students, and parents at their previous

location and then once restructuring had taken place.

Relationships Between the Principal and the Assistant Principal. All participants in

this research study described and compared their relationships with their new and former

principal. They also answered an opinion question based on how they perceived their former

principals feeling because of their restructuring reassignment. Relationships at previous

locations, before restructuring, were all positive with relationships between the assistant

principal and faculty/staff, students, and parents. Out of the 12 participants, 11 stated they had a

positive relationship with their previous principal, and one assistant principal felt they did not

have a positive working relationship. Before restructuring took place, assistant principals

described their relationships with their former principals. When analyzing previous or past

relationships, the following key concepts were positive: professional, supportive, worked well

together, team, and an open relationship, and negative thoughts included feeling left-out and no

trust. Raw data showed that 92% of former principals and assistant principals had a positive

relationship, and 8% had a negative relationship. Eleven out of 12 of the assistant principals

shared that they had positive experiences with their former principal, one described a negative experience, and one describes their relationship as slow to start but ended up being manageable. Cooper shared that he "felt left-out of decision making and did not feel valued by his principal," Silas shared that the relationship between he and his principal was "a slow process in the beginning, but eventually, they meshed together developing an effective relationship." Other participants describe their various relationships with their principal stating things such as: "we worked well together, we were both professional, we made a great team, and we both had the opportunity to grow together." Ariana stated that she and her principal were a great team who balanced each other out were always on the same page, and most importantly, they trusted each other. Ariana further stated:

> My principal praised me often as doing a good job as an assistant principal, and I think that is because many of the duties are similar except for the special education piece. My principal and I had a excellent, supportive relationship among each other and with our staff by building rapport and having an open-door policy.

Brenda also agreed that she and her former principal had a great relationship. Brenda was a new assistant principal and knew the importance of developing relationships. She worked hard, and her former principal shared with her what a great job she was doing. Her former principal even shared with the director of elementary leadership what a great job Brenda was doing. Therefore, she was chosen to oversee the district's summer school program for all elementary students. Chloe also described the close relationship she had with her former principal. Restructuring was painful for her. Throughout the interview and the focus group, her facial expressions showed the difficult time that she experienced during the transition. There were several times throughout the meeting that Chloe teared up. She had a bond with her principal, who was instrumental in her

becoming a teacher and then an assistant principal. She and her principal were the model team. Chloe, employed in the same division she attended as a student and was serving as assistant principal under the direction of her former fourth-grade teacher, who was her principal. Her former teacher became principal many years after having her as a student, and Chloe even completed her administration internship under the leadership of her former teacher, who was now principal.

Gala shared with emotion, the strong bond that she and her former principal had. It was one like no other, according to her. She shared examples of talking every day, even on the weekend, going out to dinner together, and also participating in community events with each other. When her former principal left the district, and she was transferring, not by choice to another school, she was clearly in the description of heartbreak and pain. She marked that time in her life as being "shattering." Gala also shared it was important to know that they were both in other relationships, and it was purely platonic. Restructuring took her out of her comfort zone, and since she has experienced the world of middle school.

Gala shared her experiences associated with transitioning as an assistant principal as follows:

Serving in my role at the elementary level was the best experience ever. My principal and I were best friends and even referred to ourselves as work husband and wife. We both had a similar leadership style and belief system. As a team, we encouraged our faculty, staff, students, and parents. Many times, we would hold events and free tutoring for students on Saturdays. The students were like our children. School was both of our lives. We supported each other no matter the situation. I did feel a traumatic loss when we no longer worked together, but I would not say it was because of my restructuring. He was

leaving the district to go to another district, and they were going to restructuring the school with a new principal and assistant principal. My feelings of sadness and traumatic loss was because of my relationship with the principal and the feeling of a break-up between us. During my time of transition, I was somewhat nervous and fearful because of going to a different level with older students per se. The principal and I have a good relationship but nowhere like my other relationship with my former principal. My former principal and I had a rare and unique relationship. I do not think I will ever have another relationship that was as solid as I did with my previous principal. I miss him each day. It feels like a void in my life and like losing your very best friend.

Savion and Silas concurred as to having a great relationship with their principal. Both indicated that their previous leader gave them good advice, provided opportunities to grow, and supported them in developing their leadership style. On the other hand, Cooper did not have a productive relationship with his former principal. He explained that they were not a "good fit," and he felt "left out" many times.

Relationships at restructured locations, identified as overall positive. Out of 12 principals, all reported positive relations between the assistant principal and the faculty/staff, students, and parents with only two participants identifying having negative relationship between themselves and the principal.

After restructuring took place, assistant principals described their relationships with their new principals. When analyzing new relationships, the overwhelming majority of the new principal and assistant principal teams had a positive relationship, and few had a negative relationship. Ten out of 12 of the assistant principals shared that they had positive experiences with their new principal, two described the new placement as being a negative experience.

Rochelle, who is no longer in administration, shared that her relationship with her new principal was good at first and quickly changed where she felt as if she was not valued professionally. Verona, currently in administration but looking for a change, shared that her duties as an assistant principal are the same for the most part; however, her new principal has a much different leadership style. Verona shared the following inspiration in her interview:

I knew I was going to miss the people I had worked with over the past couple of years but was honestly elated with the change because I knew it was of and from God. I knew that I was going into my new position like I do any position; I will put the needs of the students first, complete any task given to me to the best of my ability, and strive to motivate others. My transition was not stressful, knowing I was going to be responsible for the same types of things but just at another location and under a different leadership. Special education, busses, instruction, professional learning, and observations do not change; the only change would be the style of leadership that the principal brings to the table. I am still serving as an assistant principal and embrace my job each day with honesty, and I continue to celebrate the success of all students and adults. The fact that my children are grown, and I am a widow gives me the time to focus on my job and devote limitless time to education.

Overall, relationships are positive between the principal and the assistant principal in this study. Nine assistant principals concurred as having a positive relationship between them and their principal, as evident in 75% having adequate relationships. This data leaves the question: Is it beneficial for principals and their assistant principals to have a productive working relationship?

Relationships Between the Faculty/Staff, Students, and Parents. All participants described having successful relationships with faculty, staff, students, and parents in both school settings before and after restructuring occurred. Brenda stated:

> I had excellent relationships with both my faculty and staff. Every morning I greet them in the hall and even went room to room saying good morning and smiling. That is my way to check the pulse of the building and make sure everyone is good. In the process, students see that I am visible, and I am building relationships with them also. I attribute this to building those relationships with the faculty and staff, where they are always willing to go the extra mile for me. One example was after being in a special education meeting all day, the teacher left and went and bought me chocolate and a soda. That is just one of the many examples of my staff going the extra mile for me.

Building relationships with students, regardless of the level, is important. All students, regardless of age, need motivation, mentoring, acceptance, and love. Cooper shared the following:

> I have served at all levels from elementary, middle, high, and alternative education, and all students need to be recognized. Sometimes all it takes is a minute to listen, talk to them, give them a high five, fist bump, or even a hug. Students look up to us as adults, and it is our job to make sure their needs are met. Ariana even goes as far as learning every student by name and addressing them by their name in building student relationships. She also makes sure that faculty/staff and parents know that she is always available for them and has an "open-door policy."

Savion shared his efforts in building relationships with parents:

> I try to make connections between home and school by building relationships with my parents. Over the years, I have been into the homes of parents, sat with them at games,

and even participated in their community events. Before becoming an administrator, I

would tutor students at no charge because I knew their parent(s) could not afford to pay a

tutor. Some parents just need to be heard and want to have someone listen to them.

Others tend to need to know that as leaders in the building, we are going to make sure

their child is safe and protected.

Brooklyn stated that she makes a point to listen to her parents "actively and always make time

for them" regardless of how busy she is or how much she must complete before the end of the

day. Claudia echoed this idea by stating that her goal was to have great relationships with her

stakeholders, that includes students, parents, and staff, as well as the community. All data

referencing relationships between students, faculty/staff, and parents were robust and indicated

that relationships are valued. Cooper describes the essence of relationships as:

Every morning I would walk through the halls greeting every single person that I came in

contact with. This included custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, parents, students,

and visitors. As far as the faculty and staff, I would walk by them and ask questions about

how they were doing, how their children or families were doing, and if they needed

anything. The faculty and staff knew that I was genuine and cared for them, trying to

meet their needs.

Challenges

Another identifying theme that stands out in this study is challenges. Challenges surround

every aspect of our lives but are especially prevalent because of restructuring. Assistant

principals identified challenges with restructuring in adjusting to different leadership styles

between principals, the time frame in which they had to move, and the fact that preparations for

the new school year were already taking place. All assistant principals, either through the

interview or the focus group, shared their challenges throughout the transition process. The

transition from one school to another required learning new leadership styles and adjusting to the

new leaders' expectations; also, one must learn the make-up of the school, including the mission

and vision, the way of doing specific things, and the demographics of the school. As with any

life changes, there comes challenges. Aligning with Nancy Schlossberg adult transition theory,

many assistant principals were affected, and it required them to cope with the ups and downs

throughout the process of restructuring.

Table 4

Codes in Challenges by Participants

Participant	Challenge		
	Different leadership styles	Time allowed to transition	Preparation for previous school
Amaya	X		
Ariana	X		
Brenda		X	
Brooklin	X		X
Chloe		X	X
Claudia			
Cooper			
Gala	X	X	
Rochelle	X		X
Savion		X	X
Silas		X	
Verona	X		X

When analyzing the data, three of the 12 participants indicated challenges between the

different leadership styles they experience. While five out of 12 referenced the time frame in

which they had to move from one location to another physically and the fact that they had

already begun planning for the next academic school year.

Rochelle stated:

I felt as if I was in a constant state of turmoil during the transition. I had to learn a new

school's population, expectations, policies, procedures, data, and so on. I was trying to

make sure I shared everything with the person taking my place at the former school and

at the same time learn about another school. This state of overload was challenging. I

know in education, we must be flexible, but changing placement is challenging while

going through the process. On the other hand, my restructuring result was excellent. My

principal and I were somewhat a better fit in the beginning, and where I thought aligned

in our vision.

Subthemes associated with the restructuring of assistant principals included leadership styles, the

time it took to transition, and the preparation that had already taken place for the new academic

year to come.

Leadership Styles. Leadership styles vary from administrator to administrator.

Interviews allowed for the description of both principals, the former and new. However, the

focus group compared the leadership styles of the two principals. Overall, there were those

principals that identified as being involved in the school and those not so involved. Gala,

Rochelle, and Verona were the three participants that referenced a struggle with the two different

leadership styles they experienced because of restructuring. Gala knew that her transition was

going to be modified in leadership styles because her previous experience afforded her a once in

a lifetime, nearly perfect working environment. Rochelle, on the other hand, shared her

experience with leadership styles as:

Before experiencing restructuring, I had a phenomenal experience. I was serving at the

school I started teaching in as a teacher's assistant. I felt as if I was coming full circle and

working again with some of the same people, I worked with twenty years earlier. They

knew me and knew my leadership style. My relationship with the principal was one where we agreed to disagree, and we made the time each day to sit down and eat lunch together. I held students to high expectations and had good relationships with the parents. Many times, I would go into the homes of students where I was welcomed, and they trusted me because they knew I wanted what was best for their child or children. Home visits were easily made because the school was in the middle of a neighborhood where the students came from.

Verona further added that her challenge with the different leadership styles that her new principal "brought to the table as it was opposite from my previous administrator." When describing the leadership styles between the principal and assistant principal, Cooper indicated it was not a struggle; however: he feels as though in his new placement that he and his principal have similar leadership styles. Also, Claudia shares her experiences as working with many different principals over the years and experiencing multiple leadership styles. She shared:

My current placement and what I consider to be my last because retirement is right around the corner for me is a good match as far as leadership styles. My principal and I are like sisters, and we are a good fit for each other. We both lead by example and focus on communication, honesty, trust, availability, awareness, and visibility. Our staff knows that we are the same. When working with other principals and their leadership styles, I feel as if I have had to adjust or alter my leadership style. Because leaders are the structure of the school, both the principal and assistant principal(s) must align with each other.

In education today, the leadership style of administration impacts the school's climate and culture. Therefore, further effects of the leadership style(s) trickle down to the teachers' and students' performance.

      Time. Time is indefinite continued progress of life's existence. The society in which we live is fast paced, where time is of the essence in everything we do and accomplish. Ten out of the 12 principals interviewed shared their struggle with time. Out of the 12 assistant principals, three of the participants share their efforts with time due to serving as the district's summer school administration. Brenda shares her struggles with time as follows:

> I was struggling pulled in every direction possible. I was trying to wrap up the current year, make last-minute preparations for summer school, and move my belonging so the new assistant principal could move in. Not to mention the time that it would take to learn about a new school and the principal who was also new. The district was to start summer hours the next week, where schools were only open Monday-Thursday. Summer school was in another school, so the following weeks had to be spent there where the program was being offered so that I would be available to staff and parents. Summer school ended the last day of July, and the district's mandatory administrative retreat was the next week-the first week in August. The second week in August, I had to get my son ready for college and much needed time for my family. I moved into my new school and met with the principal for the first time the day before teachers were to return. Looking back, I do not know how I managed to survive that summer, not to mention the time I had to transition.

Gala shared a similar scenario associated with time. She also was the acting administrator for middle school summer school that very same year. Gala stated, "I don't even think I had the time

even to process what was going on that summer." Chloe also struggled with the time frame of moving from one locational to another due to her serving as the district's summer enrichment programs coordinator/administrator.

When it came to the struggle with time, Savion and Silas had the least amount of time to prepare for a move physically and mentally. Both indicated that they adapt quickly to change; however, their change happens for both participants almost overnight. Savion described it as being late summer, two weeks before the return of students, and one week before the arrival of staff. Much like Savion's experience, Silas restructured suddenly. He described his experience as:

> My struggle during the transition was learning new systems and guidelines in February instead of the beginning of the year and working with high school students versus elementary students. The quick turnaround process happened over the weekend, so it was super-fast.

Preparation. Many assistant principals and principals start planning before school ends for the upcoming school year, and this study reveals such. Throughout the year, the administration identifies areas, and the School Performance Plan identifies areas that are specific for the school. This process includes a plan with action items to show improvement or growth. Nine out of the 12 assistant principals referenced that plans for the next school year were in the process of being developed. Chloe stated that she and her principal had already sat down and brainstormed some focus areas they wanted to address for the next year.

Chloe even described how they had started to prepare as follows:

> My principal and I spent downtime when students were taking the Standard of Learning (SOL) test, and traffic in the hall was not existent to start planning for the upcoming

school year. We even started planning out on the academic calendar for the next year, along with the plan of what we wanted our summer committee to complete. I often wonder that if the upper management-or powers would have notified us of my restructuring, then that time could have been used learning and researching my new placement.

Rochelle is another participant who shares that she felt that the preparation that she had already done for the next year was in vain. Rochelle shared:

My summer committee had already been identified, and I made the schedule for their week with the task to complete. Every detail was planned right down to the breakfast, lunch, and snack menu. Data from the current year was tabulated and ready for the summer committee divided by grade level and subject. Now with restructuring, I would not be able to participate with my committee because the committee was scheduled to work the second week of July to which I will already be at my new assigned school. Reflection on this experience leaves me with not feeling as if I completed my given task of being responsible for the summer committee.

Verona shared that she had even ordered items from catalogs for the next year's behavior incentive program at her previous school. She had already planned the incentive events and programs for the school. And she, along with the school's Title I teacher, had already planned for the year's parent involvement programs. One other aspect that Verona shared was that she read the book chosen for the staff summer read and had already started the book study for the staff and ideas to incorporate into the preservice week at the school. Savion also echoed preparation that had already started for the upcoming year. He shared the challenge with preparation for the

upcoming year as being he had already planned for his vocational school. As with most educators, preparation is a fluid movement where planning for the year ahead comes naturally.

Division Consistency

Another identifying theme that stood out in this study includes division consistency when notifying assistant principals of the plan to restructure. The theme of consistency was evident through interviews as the lack of logic and fairness identified. Just as consistency is needed for students to be able to learn by having a clear understanding of procedures so they can understand their actions, the same applies to division employees and especially those in administration. Consistency is one of the needed components as the core set of values that is necessary for respect, integrity, and loyalty within a school division. Document analysis identified consistency with contracts, website banner announcements, and at the administrative retreat, where the notification of assistant principals or any other structural changes were announced as being "New Faces in New Places." All contracts stated new placement with restructuring on July one except for two, Savion and Silas, assistant principals where one moved midyear and the other late August. Division consistency identified in depending on who informed the assistant principal of the restructuring. If the superintendent notified the assistant principal of the restructuring, the script was the same according to the interviews. Assistant principals were called via phone by the superintendents' secretary on the second Friday in June and given a time to meet that day. This date always fell the day after the June school board meeting and the students' last day of school. The last day of school for students does not allow for closure, as stated by assistant principals via interviews. Explicitly, Claudia stated, "the meeting in itself with the superintendent is emotional, and to add, I always wondered what the students felt as to where I went." Consistency reflects our values and standards; therefore, being consistent in all areas

results in better outcomes. The following subthemes developed based on the district official who notified the assistant principal of the restructuring as being the superintendent, assistant superintendent (interim superintendent), or the director of secondary education.

Table 5

Codes in Division Consistency Based on Participant Notification

Participant	Notified by		
	Superintendent	Assistant superintendent	Director of secondary leadership
Amaya	X		
Ariana	X		
Brenda	X		
Brooklin	X		
Chloe		X	
Claudia	X		
Cooper		X	
Gala	X		
Rochelle	X		
Savion			X
Silas		X	
Verona		X	

Superintendent. Seven out of 12 interview participants describe their phenomena of being notified of their restructuring in the same manner. Amaya even referred to it as the "June phone call that no one wants to receive." All seven participants notified by the superintendent describe their meetings similar in changing schools, valid dates, and no explanation as to why instead of a generic reason. Claudia stated, "It was a directive in an authoritative tone." Amaya referred to the notification as the "three more hours before the total disruption of my life." She remembers calling a friend on the way to meet with the superintendent and sharing the following statement: "Well, I got the phone call, so here goes my summer!" On a more humorous side, Brenda shared her experience as follows:

> I was in the middle of a busy day ahead. It was the students' last day of school, so I was
>
> in and out of the building, spending time with them and their parents. I wore jeans that

day because the afternoon was going to entail cleaning my office as it was in disarray due

to me being the summer school admin for the district-papers everywhere. Little did I

know, I was going to get the call to go and see the superintendent. I was wearing jeans,

and the former superintendent detested jeans of any kind, and I did not have time before

meeting with him to go home and change. So, I went anyway in my jeans. I did change

my tee shirt to a collared school shirt!

Overall, participants shared the dreaded phone call they received to meet with the superintendent

that day, phone calls being on the second Friday in June after the School Board Meeting, and

never understanding the reason for the restructuring.

Assistant Superintendent (Interim Superintendent). Leadership styles vary in all areas

of education, ranging from teachers up to the top district office personnel. Four out of the 12

assistant principals were notified of restructuring by the assistant superintendent (interim

superintendent) in a much different manner. Interviews reveal that the tone of these meetings

was more conversational and on a more personnel level. Cooper, Verona, Chloe, and Silas shared

that they knew it was not a choice as to whether they were going to be affected by the

restructuring. Still, they could share from their perspective their thoughts and feelings associated

with restructuring. Chloe voices,

The assistant superintendent explained to me that my skill set with special education and

moral needed at another elementary school in the division was the reason I was selected

as the best fit. Honestly, that made me feel good because I have only been an assistant

principal for two years and was noticed for my dedication and hard work.

Chloe shared it was still hard to leave the school where she served, but she did understand. Silas

shared:

The assistant superintendent, AKA interim superintendent, shared with me that it was an opportunity for me to learn, grow, and get more experience. She shared with me because of my characteristic-which I knew was my ethnicity and experience growing up in the division, I had the skills to reach out and mentor many at the school in which I was being transferred.

Verona captured her experience in an uplifting summary. She shared:

My first meeting with the assistant superintendent was when she came over to my building. It was at that time, before Memorial Day, that she came over and spoke with me about some possible changes for the next year. She wanted to know how I felt. Therefore, a week later, when I was asked to visit her office, I was not caught off guard, knowing it was probably a follow-up to our conservation weeks earlier. I was correct, and it was in a very non-threatening manner. She shared with me her appreciation for my empathy for students, professionalism, and how I strive to be goal oriented. While my restructuring was painful as it is with any significant life changes, I was satisfied because of the approach the assistant superintendent used. Also, I would never question anything of God's plan, and I felt sure this restructuring was his will.

It was evident through data analysis that the assistant superintendent has the characteristics that make an effective leader. She leads with clarity, decisiveness, courage, passion, and humility.

Director of Secondary Leadership. The Director of Secondary Leadership met with one of the 12 assistant principals to notify them of restructuring. Also, the director of secondary instruction was Savion's former principal when he was in the classroom as a teacher, and they had stayed in touch over the years. The director of secondary leadership kept Savion abreast of

events that could require a midyear move through restructuring. Throughout the process, Savion

shares:

> I was kept in the loop the entire time decisions were being made. The director shared that
> I was one of the few in the district they were considering because they knew I would be
> able to adapt with ease. Keeping me informed kept me from being surprised, like the
> majority of my assistant principal peers. I did end up being the one moved, and the
> restructuring process took place within days and over the weekend in February. I had
> mixed emotions because I was learning so much from my current principal, but at the
> same time, I felt honored that the upper powers choose me.

While Savion was the only participant informed by the director of secondary leadership, without

having to go to the central office and being told the reason for the restructuring, he also wonders

where he would be if he had not experienced restructuring.

Emotions

The fourth theme of this study included the emotional aspect associated with

restructuring. The initial information and the process of moving in and through deemed

emotional.

Another theme that emerged and identified throughout this research study was emotions.

All 12 assistant principals shared the emotional roller coaster they experienced throughout the

process of restructuring. Emotions even came out when asked to infer how they thought their

principal felt because of them going through restructuring through the interviews and focus

group. Only four participants cited that their transition process was positive or that of mixed

emotions, 10 participants referenced a negative experience, and seven referenced the uncertainty

and questioning or assuming why. For example, Chloe's expertise required at another elementary

school, Cooper's request to move knowing he and his principal was not a good fit, Savion move

for opportunity purposes, and Silas moved to be chosen as the best fit. Gala and Rochelle

assumed their move was a result of the entire restructuring of administration. The subthemes

developed, and some participants experienced multiple, including positive emotions, negative

emotions, and the uncertainty of why, as seen in Table 6.

Table 6

Codes Indicating Emotions Associated with Restructuring (During Process)

Participant	Positive emotions	Negative emotions	Uncertainty of why
Amaya		X	X
Ariana		X	X
Brenda		X	X
Brooklin		X	X
Chloe		X	
Claudia		X	X
Cooper	X		
Gala		X	
Rochelle		X	X
Savion	X	X	
Silas	X	X	
Verona	X		X

Positive Emotions. After transitioning and time to reflect, all 12 assistant principals

agree that it was a growing and learning experience; however, two shared it was positive from

the beginning. Assistant principals shared their experiences as not regretting the change, a

growing experience, a proper placement, and being comfortable after they settled in from

restructuring. Verona shared her positive experience with restructuring as personally being

"elated" because of the opportunity to switch schools and continue to learn and grow. Verona

shared:

> I was so happy that God answered my prayers. For some time, I was feeling in my spirit
>
> that I needed a change and started praying that he would place me where he wanted me to

go and serve him through administration. I saw my move as positive from the start and knew I was in the will of God.

Cooper also shared that his restructuring was a relief and a positive experience. His first placement as an assistant principal was not working out so well. He felt left out in the decision-making process and did not feel as if he was the one who should serve that school. After being placed at a different level and with a different principal, Cooper shared:

My new experience is an excellent fit for me. We work together as a team and work well together. I feel valued by my administrator and feel as if I make a difference in the school. I would do anything for my principal, and that includes going the extra mile for her because of the way she makes me feel appreciated. Our administrative team is the true definition of a productive working relationship.

Negative Emotions. Ten out of 12 assistant principals shared their lived experiences and the transition process as "emotionally stressful" from time to time, as that is a natural emotion associated with change. Many emotions surfaced, leaving behind a building where relationships with the faculty and staff, students, and parents previously formed. Restructuring noted as being stressful even when transition seemed accepted. Restructuring also indirectly affects the climate and culture of the school with a change of administration. Gala shared her emotional experience:

I was heartbroken when finding out that I was going to have to transition to another school. My principal and I were the best of friends. We knew our faculty and staff and knew their strengths and weaknesses. Students looked up to him as a male mentor and me as a female mentor, inspiring to be like the two of us. Our separation was a traumatic loss for both of us. I compare our separation, much like a divorce. We are still friends, but it is not the same.

Concepts identified through reflective journaling of interviews include emotions such as being in shock, heavy-hearted, devastated, emotional, scared, disappointed, anxious, angry, mad, hurt, upset, and frustrated.

Uncertainty of Why. While most participants indicated they did not understand and questioned the move, all agreed, knowing the reasoning behind the restructuring would have been beneficial. Six participants stood out with their replies of uncertainty and why. Amaya shares that she was "scared due to going to a school triple the size" of the one she was currently assigned. Rochelle stated that she had "no idea of being affected by the transition. I thought I was at the school in which I would one day be principal." Chloe shared the fact that she and her principal were totally "caught off-guard." Chloe shared her emotional experience:

> In complete honesty, neither my principal nor I thought they would separate us, and we did not understand the reason why because we were a perfect team together. We both cried and cried at the thought of no longer working together.

Savion shared his mixed emotional experiences as he was saddened to leave where he was learning so much about the administration being a new principal. On the other hand, he was excited that he had been chosen to replace another assistant principal and would learn through the new experience. Other than Cooper, who had requested a change, did not see restructuring coming and had a hard time understanding the big picture as to why. Chloe, an outlier in this subgroup of data, shares even though she knew why she was transitioning for her skillset in special education and morale; still, it was a nagging why. Chloe shared her emotional experience:

In complete honesty, neither my principal nor I thought they would separate us, and we

did not understand the reason why because we were a perfect team together. We both

cried and cried at the thought of no longer working together.

Both Chloe and her principal knew why; however, they still questioned-why due to the fact they made for a perfect team.

Growth Experiences

Growth experiences is the final theme in this study that stood out in this research. Both the interviews and focus group identified that after moving through transition associated with restructuring, growth was evident in reality. Participants were able to look back at their experiences and agree that their restructuring was uncomfortable but had no impact on the school or academia of the school.

Each participant encountered some form of growth associated with their experience. All concur that restructuring provided participants the opportunity to learn and grow as professionals after transition occurred, and they had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. Brenda shared her growth as "learning about the minority to majority program that was under watch from the Department of Justice." Silas indicated that he learned about the workforce from his experience. If he had not experienced restructuring, he would not have that knowledge of the district's vocational center and all the areas that differ from the school setting.

Rochelle affirmed:

I experienced growth and embraced it, along with realizing I needed to set goals. I

learned throughout my new adventure to stay open-minded and focused. Any time you

must go through the transition, it is essential to adjust and adapt to your new situation and

be mentally prepared.

The subthemes that stood out through coding in referencing growth experiences include adjustments and reality All assistant principals agree that they grew from their experience with restructuring, even though it was an adjustment. When reflecting on the restructuring, all agree that the transition was resulting in being for the best.

Adjustments. While restructuring offers multiple growth experiences, it also requires adjustments. Each school has its climate and culture shaped by the leadership style of the administrator. Leadership styles vary from person to person and range from that of being involved or uninvolved, from laissez-faire to autocratic. All participants agreed that they learned because of getting out of their comfort zone and experiencing restructuring. Ariana expressed that she "learned the true meaning of flexibility through her experience with restructuring."

Through interviews and the focus group, assistant principals had the opportunity to let their voices speak. Themes and subthemes developed in describing aspects of experiences before, during, and after restructuring. Themes further identified as being either effective or disruptive in the lives of assistant principals.

Reality. In all reality, assistant principals agreed restructuring was not easy and, at times, very difficult; however, it did not affect instruction. Chloe said it best when stating, "Kids are kids no matter if they are on the north side or the south side of town." Change is associated with restructuring, and whenever we experience change, it can be an intricate part of life. Also, associated with the aspect of reality, Ariana and Brenda both referenced curiosities associated with the Friday after the school board meeting and wondering who it is going to be this time.

Assistant principals that participated in this phenomenological research shared personal first-hand experiences of restructuring within the past five years, offering rich, thick data. Participants engaged in interviews for a minimum of sixty minutes on a one-on-one basics and

shared documentation associated with their transfer from one location to the other. Document analysis revealed the same procedures in announcing restructuring. For example, all placement changes announced on the district website (portal), yearly contracts listed new school placement, and listing were shared in the August district administrative retreat as "New Faces in New Places." Three of the 12 participants also participated in a focus group for additional data to be collected and analyzed. Furthermore, the phenomenological methodology of Moustakas (1994) streamlined the research methods used in data collection and analysis from multiple sources. Schlossberg's transitional theory provided the theoretical framework related to principals leaving one school (moving in), going through the process of restructuring (moving through), and going into a new environment (moving out). Once data were collected, reflective journaling and coding assisted in theme and subtheme development.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology research study was to allow assistant principals the opportunity to describe their experiences before, during, and after restructuring in Virginia. Assistant principals could have their voices heard when answering research questions through one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and document analysis. Assistant principals described their experiences in detail to each question.

Central Research Question

The central research question for this transcendental phenomenology answered by assistant principals was: How do assistant principals describe their experiences associated with restructuring? Assistant principals described their experiences through various lenses of transition as positive and negative experiences. They gave detailed accounts before, during, and after transitions with emphasis on "moving in, moving through, and moving out." Transitioning

between schools meant adjustments with new leadership styles, teachers/staff, students, and parents. Starting over meant a possible altering of one's vision, mission, expectations, culture, and merely the way of doing things with different perceptions. Participants agreed that they were surprised they were going to be moved from one school to another, and the transitioning through the process was challenging; however, once they were in their new setting, they saw the benefits. Savion's comment stands out when he said, "I learned and grew as an educator, administrator, and professional with endless opportunities as a result of my restructuring." Brenda also shared that in the beginning, it was difficult, but in the end, she grew and learned from her experience. Therefore, the process of restructuring may be difficult or stressful, but the result may be what is best and that all will adjust, not affecting academics.

Sub-question 1

The first sub-question of this study was: What were the experiences as an assistant principal before restructuring took place?

Before restructuring, experiences of the assistant principal's focus were defined by their relationships. Relationships of participating assistant principals were compared to the principal, faculty/staff, students, and parents. Relationships relate directly to the climate within the school. All 12 participants described having respectful and commendable relationships with the faculty/staff, students, and parents. When it comes to the relationships between the principal and the assistant principal, ninety-two percent shared that their relationships were meritorious. Brenda, Chloe, Rochelle, and Silas all shared being new as an associate principal; they were learning new things every day that relate to the job of an assistant principal. Brenda stated, "My principal taught me how to balance the many jobs of administrators." Silas also stated:

I adapted to my new experience because of the teaching from the principal. I had a
learning curve to accomplish due to the different things associated with working in a
vocational setting. Accommodations still had to be made for those students that received
accommodations, especially regarding testing. However, I had to learn the process
associated with recertification and accreditation when it came to vocational education.
Now that was hard. There were many committees involved in the process, and the
committees made up of people from the surrounding district.

All participants except for one, Cooper, shared they felt as if their experiences before
restructuring were great. Cooper shared when describing his experiences; he got along with
everyone except the principal. That relationship strained because of the "lack of training" he was
receiving.

Sub-question 2

The second sub-question of this study was: What were the experiences of an assistant principal
during restructuring?

It was evident that during restructuring, all assistant principals shared difficulties
associated with this process. There were various ways in which assistant principals experienced
impact by district restructuring. Brenda, Chloe, and Gala struggled with balancing moving out of
their previous school, experiencing emotional distress, and moving into a new environment, all
while serving as an administrator for the district's summer programs. Emotional distress,
especially with Chloe and Gala, was evident when leaving behind their former principal. As
described by Amaya, "I was leaving my comfort zone going into unchartered waters."

Sub-question 3

The third sub-question of this study was: What were the experiences of an assistant principal after restructuring took place?

After time to reflect and settle into their new positions, all assistant principals shared that it was a learning and growing experience. Some shared they thought they transitioned too soon in their unique experience in leadership, but still grew from the experience. Chloe may never have a relationship with another principal as she did with hers; however, she adapted well to her new environment/placement. Brooklin stated it best: "What matters at the end of the day is that students are growing and learning!" Ariana also noted that it took time to be comfortable in her new location due to having to learn the procedures of that school.

Summary

This study allowed assistant principals to recall accounts of their transition experiences associated with the process of restructuring. Assistant principals participating in this study gave their own detailed reports of lived experiences where data collection provided for analysis through one-on-one, face-to-face interviews, a focus group, and document analysis. Research questions guided the study, while themes and subthemes developed through coding and reflection. Reflective journaling assisted in the process of theme development using the method of memos. Memos included each question, development of abstract concepts, raw data, further analysis, notes related to methodology, and summarization of all participants. This research study allowed for assistant principals to have the opportunity to have a voice when sharing their accounts of restructuring. Data collected further addressed the study's central research question and sub-questions. Overall, assistant principals agree that they experienced growth because of restructuring; however, it was a complicated process moving through the transition of restructuring.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after restructuring in Virginia. Assistant principals who participated in this study had the opportunity to tell their story of their lived experiences with restructuring within the last five years. Along with the overview, this chapter addresses a summary of findings relevant to the participant's experiences with restructuring, followed by an empirical and theoretical emphasis. This chapter further incorporates the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study, including delimitations and limitations. Further research recommendations included in this chapter will address future research. A summary concludes with the most important implications of this phenomenological study.

Summary of Findings

Administrators in K-12 education are responsible for ensuring quality teaching for our students to learn (Clayton, 2014; Smith et al., 2017), which undergirds answering research questions and summarizing this study. Therefore, the problem was if constant changing of leadership among schools disrupts the personal and professional lives of assistant principals with arbitrary reassignments causing leadership changes, resignations, and reduced effectiveness, further leading to decreased student performance. In answering this question, the process of phenomenological reduction allowed for the emersion of themes and subthemes after participants told their stories of restructuring.

In answer to the central research question and sub-questions, five dominant themes emerged that describe the lived experiences of assistant principals through restructuring. Themes included (a) building relationships with emphasis on relationships in both environments, (b)

challenges associated with different leadership styles, time, and prior preparation, (c) division consistency with who notified the participant of restructuring, (d) emotions including positive, negative, and the uncertainty of why, and (e) growth experiences with adjustments and reality.

The central research question in this study asked: How do assistant principals describe their experiences associated with restructuring? Assistant principals shared lived experiences broken down by sub-questions, where each phase of restructuring examined the before, during, and after experiences of restructuring. The overall importance of administration and leadership is to achieve the same goal. That goal is that students grow and learn by experiencing academic success. This study found that restructuring was uncomfortable; however, it did not have profound effects on student achievement.

Sub-question one in this study asked: What were the experiences as an assistant principal before restructuring took place? Assistant principals, other than one, had secure connections with their principals. All assistant principals identified as being or having a connection with the faculty, staff, students, and parents. Faculty and staff relationships identified as being predominant essential and valued. Relationships provide the opportunities for collaboration and learning within the school. Each assistant principal shared their lived experiences relating to the significant ways in which they had developed relationships with their principal. Assistant principals described their experiences before restructuring as:

- Growth in leadership, friendship, and maturity

- Improved communication, interactions, and leadership skills

- How to be an effective leader, team member, and monitor academic progress

Administrators, principals, and assistant principals were in search of the catalyst driving the need for restructuring. Ten out of 12 assistant principals did not understand the need for

reorganization among structure when it seemed unnecessary. Restructuring, as stated by one assistant principal, is "messy and stressful" all at the same time. According to Lewis (1989), restructuring is a complex process that impacts those that experience it. Assistant principals agree. Restructuring, described by assistant principals, was unsettling; however, it did not affect student achievement. Before assistant principals were faced with restructure, they overwhelmingly share positive relationships with principals, faculty/staff, students, and parents.

Sub-question 2 in this study asked: What were the experiences as an assistant principal during restructuring? Transition and change causes emotions and feelings of fear associated with the unknown and change (Schlossberg, 2011) and was evident through the "during" phase of restructuring for assistant principals. Assistant principals shared many challenges that were associated with their experiences during the restructuring. Assistant principals shared their emotional process of distress, deemed as a negative point, loss of time wasted from previous planning, time as had to be done quickly, learning new systems, processes, and environment, and of course, the question of why. Ten assistant principals referred to them during phase as they are being devastated, shocked, caught off guard, angry, hurt, mad, upset, scared, and a traumatic loss of placement. Only two described positive emotions of ecstatic and happy. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), when restructuring occurs, the process of emotions is relevant and prevalent. In rationale, experiences shared by assistant principals describe the emotional process during the transition; however, there was no impact correlated with student achievement.

Sub-question 3 in this study asked: What were the experiences as an assistant principal after restructuring took place? Assistant principals agreed, including the one who resigned, that they grew and learned throughout the process after time to reflect. Some of the most prevalent takeaways that were identified by assistant principals are among the following statements:

- Kids are kids no matter where you are, here or there.

- Sometimes it is impossible to understand education because it is always evolving.

- It is our job as leaders to take on the responsibility to do what it takes to make sure student achievement is taking place regardless of placement.

- After time, people tend to be able to adapt to new situations.

- Irrespective of where one serves, any good educator will embrace the culture and climate.

With any leadership role in education, we as administrators are to ensure that student growth is taking place. Leadership roles are involved with multiple layers of responsibility (Eckman, 2018; McClellan, 2015). This research study found that while the restructuring process proved to be disruptive, assistant principals agreed that it was an opportunity for growth.

Restructuring deemed being unsettling, uncomfortable, and a distraction; however, it did not have a determinantal effect on the faculty/staff, students, parents, or academic performance of the school. Assistant principals shared heartfelt, emotional experiences associated with restructuring; although, new findings within this study did not find a link to academic performance as previously predicted. Overall, the new findings found the restructured move beneficial for the greater good, allowed for experience with growing roots elsewhere, and that directly affected a minimum of constituents.

Discussion

Study findings in this research relate to the empirical and theoretical literature previously reviewed in chapter two. This study corroborates and diverges from numerous literature reviews relating to restructuring and adds to the field of educational restructuring. Theoretically, this study connects with the transition theory.

Empirical

Numerous studies in restructuring generally define transition as difficult just as any type of change in life can be difficult. The role of the assistant principal is vital in assisting the principal in administrative duties and responsibilities, requiring the principal and the assistant principal to have alignment in their leadership, requiring the principal and assistant principal to be aligned in leadership. My study revealed a lack of alignment between Cooper and his principal, causing friction between the two. Cooper stated that before experiencing restructure, he felt as if he was not valued, which indicates there was a problem in alignment between the principal and assistant principal. Rochelle echoed her experience after restructuring, in which she and her principal battled with getting along, causing her to leave administration. According to Jayapragas (2016), principals and assistant principals must be able to handle high levels of stress in this era of constant change by being visionaries, instructional leaders, supervisors of policy mandates, and initiatives for community building to promote inclusive schools. Principals and assistant principals catalyze enhancing and transforming schools positively and progressively (McKinney & Labat, 2015). Therefore, research shows the importance of the shared leadership roles between the principal and the assistant principal in the school, where both must be on the same page to be effective.

According to Harris and Kemp-Graham (2017), "Culture is the nucleus of the school" (p. 54) and is believed to be the area where schools develop their own identity (Karadag & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018). The "support of school administrators is considered to be one of the most important factors in the development of a suitable culture" within a school setting (Demir, 2015, p. 623). Therefore, the leadership within the school sets the culture and climate which has a direct impact on learning, effects structural changes for school improvement, and helps with structural changes within the school (Demir, 2015; Harris & Kemp-Graham, 2017; Karadag &

Oztekin-Bayir, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lee & Li, 2015; McCarley et al., 2016; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). When assistant principals experience constant movement associated with restructuring, it leads to a culture and climate that is unstable. Chloe discusses the climate and culture within her school before facing restructure as being nearly perfect according to staff, student, and parent perception surveys. The leadership within the school sets the culture and climate with direct impact linked to learning (Bloom & Abel, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; McCarley et al., 2016; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). Blackaby and Blackaby (2011) stated that people perform better when they enjoy their work; therefore, it is imperative to build an influential school culture within the building. However, if the school's administration team is continuously changing and consistency is not present, the district's leadership can become unstable, but restructuring may provide for a more effective environment in certain circumstances. Therefore, change needs to be meaningful and not made just to make changes.

According to research, principals should remain in the same environment for a range of five to seven years for student achievement to be impacted and to ensure that school improvement takes place as previously stated (Leithwood et al., 2007). How can relationships be built and cultivated if change through restructuring is taking place too frequently? When answering this question, Hindman et al. (2009) stated that leadership is all about building relationships and setting a course through vision resulting in positive effects within the school. In contrast, there are times when change is welcomed and needed with new energy, new life, and new ideas; however, constant change never allows for leaders to build relationships among the staff (Hindman et al., 2009; Lee-Colvin, 2018).

Assistant principals in this study described their relationships or the lack of relationships they had with their principals, students, staff, and parents. Cooper and his principal, for example,

not only lacked alignment but also lacked a working relationship, which is essential in administrative positions. Therefore, researchers and practitioners stress the importance of building trust and respect in successfully building relationships and managing change to create a positive learning environment between and among the roles of leadership (Hindman et al., 2009; Lee-Colvin, 2018). Likewise, change is difficult in building relationships along with trust, developing teamwork, and collaboration among the staff when those in leadership positions are being changed often.

Lastly, when assistant principals go through restructuring many times, they feel a sense of isolation and a challenge in adjusting to a new principal and staff (Lee-Colvin, 2018). Going through restructuring was difficult for all assistant principals in this study. Each participant described frustration when "going through" restructuring as change; however, they indicated they grew from the overall experience with restructuring. Assistant principals shared that challenges they faced during transition included having to prepare for a new climate, culture, and environment, having to learn a new principal's leadership style and the overwhelming emotions. This study of restructuring confirms with the previous literature research that the process of restructuring may be difficult; nevertheless, people adjust, and academically there was no impact on instruction.

Theoretical

The results of this study indicated the most difficult aspect assistant principals encountered was moving through the transitioning from one school to another as aligned with the transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981b). The stages of transition, according to Schlossberg, were distinct in this study. Moving in was the beginning of the transition when assistant principals prepared to leave their former school, departing their old position. Moving through included the

discomfort of moving into the new position, learning new faculty/staff, and the emotions associated with change. Once the assistant principal experienced the moving out or the completion of transition and arrival at the new environment, there was a steady state in the new position. The results of assistant principals that experienced restructuring in this study added to the literature and reinforced the saliency of Schlossberg's theory. Most assistant principals related to the self-questioned *why* through emotions and challenges. Per Claudia, "I just didn't understand why I would need to move from one school to the other." Participants credited other assistant principals, their former principal, and family as being instrumental in support through the transition. Chloe states that she relied on her former principal for her support with daily phone calls. Strategies as to how to handle the transition falls under the theme of growth. All participants indicated the process allowed them to learn and grow. Verona stated, "My faith led me through the process."

Schlossberg's transition theory best applies to assistant principals experiencing restructuring within a division. My study agrees with Evans et al.'s (2010) claims that Schlossberg and other researchers have developed what seems to be an excellent model to facilitate understandings and actions that are related to transitioning for assistant principals and others who face the same kind of change. When assistant principals go through change due to restructuring, the opportunities to understand why leading up to the restructuring are beneficial. Participants describe emotions while going through the process of transitioning and how they "fit-in" to a new environment. Schlossberg has provided explanations of the process that people go through when restructuring occurs. The transition theory through the process, as outlined by Schlossberg, is the best framework theory related to the restructuring of assistant principals. Therefore, the transition theory added to this research study, theoretically. During this time of

transition, all assistant principals experienced the phenomenon through the lens of the transition

theory. Therefore, Schlossberg transition theory is the most appropriate theoretical lens to view

assistant principals in transition or those who have been affected by the restructuring

Implications

The results of this research study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications

associated with the restructuring of assistant principals. The purpose of this section is to address

the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study.

Theoretical Implications

Research indicates Nancy Schlossberg's (2011) transitional theory aligns with assistant

principals' transition from one school placement to another based on theoretical implications.

While Schlossberg's theory is typically used for mid-career job changes, in addition to

counseling students through difficult times, it clearly works well for conceptualizing the

transition of moving laterally, or vertically, within an organization.

Assistant principals share their phenomenon transitioning from one place to another as

related to experiences of moving in, moving through, and moving out through the process of

restructuring into a new environment. Assistant principals are participants in which they do not

have any say so or control in the decision-making process of restructuring.

The data collected throughout this study presented themes and further subthemes

associated with restructuring and transition-related to change. Assistant principals, as most in the

field of education, understand the need associated in building relationships with all people and

stakeholders and consider building relationships as most important. All participants experienced

challenges throughout the process of transition by having to learn new leadership styles, the time

in which it took to move physically and mentally, and preparation that had already taken place

for the next year. There was a lack in division consist related to who informed the assistant principal of the restructuring but not in the areas of documentation analysis. All assistant principals agree that they experienced positive and negative emotions as a result, along with the uncertainty of why they faced restructuring. Most principals experienced the same as the assistant principal. However, all assistant principals noted that going through transition afforded them learning and growing experiences. Recommendations for division leadership include offering support to assistant principals experiencing restructuring and informing them of the reason(s) why they are facing restructure.

Empirical Implications

This study adds to the current literature referencing the difficulty with restructuring. Assistant principals participating in this study, verify difficulties associated with the process of moving in, moving through, and moving out of their position transition. Existing research indicates leaders or administrators build teams to create high expectations while creating a mission and vision to instill pride, gain trust, building mutual respect, and enhancing the feeling of success (McCarley et al., 2016). Lee and Li (2015) further identified the key to the success of the school's education depends on a good quality of school culture where people are influenced to pay attention, identify with others, work hard) and achieve goals. Based on this literature, a constant change among administration results in the lack of team and relationships. Educational leaders are responsible for the teaching and learning aspect of education. Therefore, the learning environment must be one in which school culture leads to student success. It is the role of the principal to develop an effective culture. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) found some strategies can help in building strong staff culture if enforced or implemented by the school's administration team. These strategies include setting a vision, getting the right people for the job, developing

strong staff relationships, watching for signs of negativity through morale, and keeping open the lines of communication (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). Again, restructure needs to be purposeful and not for the sake of change. Hence, it is through monthly meetings, peer observations, and instructional dialogue with the use of a leveled framework including participants reactions, learning, organizational support, use of knowledge, and student learning outcome required administrators to know how the school and staff were functioning (Ringler et al., 2013). If they are new, then what?

Research provides us with the data that good teachers will leave the school in which they teach if there are ineffective leaders or constant changing of leadership, resulting in instability (Eckman, 2018). Highly effective schools are those that are characterized by high-level stability, including little to no restructuring among administration and school leaders depend on support from both state and district leaders (Jayapragas, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004). Principal and assistant principal turnover is a challenge facing public schools today and caused by many factors such as career transition, retirement, and unforeseen circumstances. According to Brooks (2018), Snodgrass Rangel (2018), and Leithwood et al. (2004), the reason for the concern is because of the pivotal role which principals and assistant principals play in a process that can ensure school improvement, which can take between five to seven years. A constant change in principals makes it hard for schools to implement new programs for improvement purposes. In this study, participants voices gave descriptive accounts with restructuring; however, student performance was not affected by the restructuring. Even though student performance is not affected, restructuring needs to be a well thought through process and not taken lightly just to make changes.

Therefore, while there are times, change can be beneficial or is needed, most of the time, change means starting all over. It is human nature for people to resist change because it is hard, causing unexplained confusion (Schlossberg, 2011). Change requires adapting to new people and a new way of doing things, such as completing tasks (Brooks, 2018). Therefore, in education, when it comes to change, especially in a leadership role or position, it is beneficial if the person and persons being affected by the change had a voice or said so in the decision-making process or understood why.

There are times where the pros and cons need to be thought through before the restructuring occurs. In education, change can happen very quickly or suddenly. When there is a change in leadership, the old ways of doing things are sometimes changed, causing people to have anxiety or stress over the unknown. Transitions alter one's life with change in relationships, routines, and assumptions (Lee-Colvin, 2018; Schlossberg, 2011). Change, regardless, is hard and difficult to adjust. This research references division leadership should consider the implications associated with restructuring.

Practical Implications

Restructuring those in leadership roles affects a variety of people, such as those in district leadership positions, principals/assistant principals, faculty/staff, students, and parents. District leaders need to ensure that the assistant principals' restructure provides the best fit for the school when working with all stakeholders to include faculty/staff, students, and parents. It is also beneficial in explaining the reason(s) why the restructuring is taking place. For example, even though Chloe struggled in leaving the school where she served, she knew the reason for her restructuring—her skill set and knowledge with special education and morale.

It would benefit district leaders to understand the difficulty one experiences when going through restructuring. It is more than just a change from one location to another but rather a series of steps, which means the assistant principal is leaving a place where they had developed relationships and was effective. Perhaps, listening to the voices of and getting feedback from those assistant principals who have experienced restructuring would allow district leaders to assist with a smooth transition. Participants in this study shared that restructuring was disruptive, unsettling, uncomfortable, and a distraction; however, there was no detrimental effect on the principal, faculty/staff, students, or parents. All assistant principals participating in this study shared emotional highs and lows associated with the process of going through the restructuring. Still, after settling in, they agreed that there was no impact on student performance and adjusted in their role in their new environment.

If districts value those in leadership positions, perhaps communicating with the principals before restructuring occurs would be beneficial for all involved, so in turn, the principal can prepare the faculty/staff, students, and parents. Depending on the working relationship, a change in the leadership team can and will affect the effectiveness along the lines of change. Therefore, all aspects need consideration when district leaders are restructuring assistant principals. Restructuring affects multiple people, including the assistant principals facing restructuring, the principal, the faculty and staff, the students, and the parents. The superintendent should allow maximum lead time when making reassignments realizing that it is not an easy process for the assistant principal. Recommendations include allowing and supporting the assistant throughout the transition with a mentor, making changes based on necessity and not for the sake of change, and let the assistant principal know that you understand change is difficult. In conclusion, change is difficult, but it can be beneficial.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations and limitations identify this study, where assistant principals share their experiences. Boundaries defined within this study focus on the lived experiences shared by assistant principals that experienced restructuring. Limitations emerged due to the selected design study and research choices made throughout the study.

Delimitations associated with the boundaries of this research study include participants chosen to share their experiences. The sample included purposeful and criteria-based participant's resulting in 12 assistant principals who experienced restructuring. All participants were from the same geographical location of Virginia and worked within the same district. The selection of participants that participated had firsthand lived experiences with restructuring within the last five years. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended delimitation within a specific timeframe to recall experiences; therefore, participants had to have experienced the given phenomenon within the last five-year time frame. The design delimited to a qualitative, transcendental, phenomenology that excluded certain types of data collection found in different designs.

Limitations associated with this given study are due to the nature of the study being qualitative. The limitation in this study is transferability because of the study sample, including only one district and region in the state. The limit of varied ethnicity groups was influential in this study. Moustakas (1994) suggested the process of epoché and bracketing to be used to limit research bias within phenomenological research. A reflective journal was used throughout this process, as recommended by Moustakas, to bracket out bias. As the researcher and an assistant principal that previously experienced restructuring, it was essential to bracket out my own

experience with restructuring. The final limitation included relying on data from the interview and focus group as assistant principals sharing their self-reported experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study's findings, limitations, and the delimitations of this study, there are multiple recommendations and directions for future research associated with the transition. This research focus was on assistant principals who experienced restructuring within the past five years. All participants varied in age, ethnicity, gender, number of years in education as well as the number of years in administration. The following suggestions could expand on the transition theory for future research or study. First, this study could be extended to other regions and districts in Virginia or compared to other states. Second, outcomes with transition could also incorporate the experiences from assistant principal to principal or in horizontal movement. Third, continuing study to include participants who had a smooth transition, such as not experiencing emotions that affected their restructuring could perhaps expand on this study and serve as a mentor to others. Finally, a mixed-method or quantitative research could examine quantitative measures in depth associated with administrative restructuring.

Summary

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study was to describe the experiences of assistant principals before, during, and after restructuring in Virginia. Nancy Schlossberg's (2012) transition theory guided this study in allowing for participants to describe their varied experiences before, during, and after restructuring. A transcendental phenomenological methodology allowed for assistant principals to have a voice associated with restructuring. Twelve assistant principals participated in this research study data collection by describing their experiences with the process of restructuring through interviews and a focus group. Further

document analysis utilized the finding of similarities and differences associated with restructuring.

Data analysis included coding, theme identification, development of textual and structural descriptions, and identifying the essence of participants experiences. Five themes, along with subthemes, emerged as participants shared their lived experiences before, during, and after restructuring. The themes encompass building relationships in both settings; challenges associated with differing leadership, time, and prior preparation; division consistency based on notification; multiple emotions including positive, negative, and questioning why; and growth experiences with adjustment and reality. Overall, all participants agreed that the fact they experienced restructuring allowed them to grow professionally and learn more about leadership.

The most profound and takeaway correlated to this study encompass the findings. All participants agreed that restructuring incorporated difficulty, distractions, unsettling, and uncomfortable. However, restructuring did not change their skill set as an assistant principal, redefine them personally as an assistant principal, or impact student performance data. In fact, the restructuring was for the greater good of the assistant principal. All participants grew because of being restructured as an assistant principal. Also, the impact mostly affected the principals of the two buildings and the assistant principals that experienced restructuring. Despite the individual inconvenience and discomfort of assistant principals, this phenomenon found that the restructuring did not affect the performance of the school and the staff.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 25, 2020

Lisa Rath
Carol Gillespie

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-48 A Phenomenological Study of Assistant Principals Shared Experiences of Restructuring in Virginia

Dear Lisa Rath, Carol Gillespie:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). 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:
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 §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account. Your IRB-approved stamped consent form is available under the attachment section on your study submission page.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT VERBAL SCRIPT

Recruitment Verbal Script

Hello_____:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to give Assistant Principals an opportunity to describe their experiences before, during, and after restructuring, which could be helpful for those in administrative positions that make decisions on restructuring. I would like to invite you to participate in my study as an Assistant Principal who has faced transition in the past five years.

This study will include:
1. A one-hour face-to-face interview with me. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location and will be audio recorded. Interviews will be scheduled within the next 30 days.
2. Provide any documentation or written material(s) associated with your restructure, if available, at the time of our interview.
3. Consider participating in an optional audio-recorded focus group (if needed) with three to five other study participants. This is strictly on a volunteer basic. The focus group will also take place face-to-face in a mutually agreed upon location. The focus group will occur within a seven-day time frame once all interviews are conducted.
4. Follow up by discussing data once it has been analyzed (member-checking). This should take no more that 30-45 minutes and can be completed in person or via phone.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

If you would like to participate you can let me know now or call me back in the next day or so direct office number ▮▮▮▮ cell ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ I will send you in the district mailing-inner office between schools, a consent document containing additional information related to my study. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of our interview.

We can meet at an agreed upon location such as Starbucks, Gather, (I will provide coffee/snacks-my treat) or one of our offices. I will need you to bring your signed consent form and any written documentation about your restructuring. (if available).

Lisa Rath
Assistant Principal
Direct Office Number ▮▮▮▮ Cell ▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Assistant Principal's Shared Experiences of
Restructuring in Virginia
Principal Investigator: Lisa W. Rath, Principal Investigator, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must have served as an
Assistant Principal and experienced restructuring within the past five years in Virginia in the
Suffolk Public School district. Participants will range in age, gender, years of service, and levels
in which they serve. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take the time to read
this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to give Assistant Principals voice in describing their experiences
before, during, and after restructuring- moving from one location to another (school to another
school) in Virginia. Furthermore, it will aid those who are in upper leadership roles that make
decisions on restructuring and make them aware of the transition process.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a one-hour face-to-face interview with the researcher. The interview will
    take place in a mutually agreed upon location and will be audio recorded. Interviews will
    be scheduled within the next 30 days.
2. Provide any documentation or written material(s) associated with your restructuring if
    available at the time of our interview.
3. Consider participating in an optional audio-recorded focus group (if needed) with three to
    five other study participants. The focus group will also take place face-to-face in a
    mutually agreed upon location. The focus group will occur within a seven-day time frame
    once all interviews are conducted.
4. After data is collected and analyzed, a follow-up to review for accuracy and details
    (member-check). This process should only take 30-45 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The benefits for participants taking part in this study are being given the opportunity to describe
the effects they experienced first-hand before, during, and after transition as an Assistant
Principal and their voice being heard. However, there are no direct benefits associated with this
study. The overall benefit of this study will give those in leadership roles who make decisions to
restructuring knowledge associated with the process and effects of transition.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be confidential. Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- The researcher's personal reflective journal for notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet/desk.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in the focus group setting. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Suffolk Public Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa W. Rath. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ████████████ and/or ██████████████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, █████████████████ at █████████████████████

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A Phenomenological Study of Assistant Principal's Shared Experiences of Restructuring in Virginia

Central Research Question: How do Assistant Principals describe their experiences associated with restructuring?
Sub-questions: What were the experiences as an Assistant Principal before, during, and after restructuring?

Interview Questions:

(Opening Questions)
1. Reflecting on your experience with the transition, what advice would you give those that may experience restructuring?
2. What else do you think would be essential for me to know about your experience with restructuring?

(Before Restructuring)
3. Describe your experiences as an Assistant Principal before you were restructured.
4. What type of relationship did you have with your former principal?
5. What type of relationships did you have with your former faculty/staff?
6. What type of relationships did you have with your former students?
7. What type of relationships did you have with your former students' parents?

(During Restructuring)
8. Describe how you felt when you found out that you were going to be relocated to another school.
9. Describe the challenges that you faced during your transition from one school to another.
10. Describe your experience during the transition from one place to another.
11. How do you think your principal felt because of your relocation?
12. Describe the emotion(s) you felt during this transition.

(After Restructuring)
13. Describe your new placement as an Assistant Principal.
14. After your transition and time to reflect, how do you view your new placement?
15. Describe your relationship with your new principal.
16. What advice or suggestions would you give to others that may be going through restructuring?
17. What else would you like to share with me about your experience with restructuring?

(Closing Questions)
18. Explain how you were notified of having to change schools. Do you have any documentation?
19. May I follow up with you if further clarification is needed?
20. Would you be willing to participate in a Focus Group with your peers to discuss restructuring?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

A Phenomenological Study of Assistant Principal's Shared Experiences of Restructuring in Virginia

Central Research Question: How do Assistant Principals describe their experiences associated with restructuring?

Sub-questions: What were the experiences as an Assistant Principal before, during, and after restructuring?

Focus Group Questions:

1. Overall, as an Assistant Principal, how do you describe your experiences before, during, and after restructuring?

2. What do you describe as being the most effective aspect of restructuring before, during, and/or after as an assistant principal?

3. What do you describe as being the most disruptive aspect restructuring before, during, and/or after as an assistant principal?

4. What effects have restructuring had on the morale, or workplace satisfaction of assistant principals?

5. How have you been able to build and cultivate relationships because of restructuring?

6. How did you feel once you were notified that you would be affected by restructuring?

7. Let us discuss the different emotions that you experienced while you were going through the transition.

8. Compare and contrast the two different principals that you served under as an assistant principal.

9. What skill(s) have you developed because of being affected by restructuring?

10. What is the take-away that you have associated with your experiences?

APPENDIX F: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL SAMPLE

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

A Phenomenological Study of Assistant Principal's Shared Experiences of Restructuring in Virginia

Central Research Question: How do Assistant Principals describe their experiences associated with restructuring?

Sub-questions: What were the experiences as an Assistant Principal before, during, and after restructuring?

Pages 1-10   Self-Reflection with my experience with restructuring
                       Answer all Interview Questions & Focus Group Questions

Pages 11-49   Interview Memos

                       For each research question, the following process was used:

             I.   Question

             II.   Concepts (abstract ideas, general notions)

             III.   Raw Data (primary data, charts, graphs)

             IV.   Analysis (detailed examination)

             V.   Methodological Notes (identified systems or methods)

             VI.   Summarization (by question)

Page 50-52   Coding Tally Interviews
                       Use of possible repeated data with coding

Pages 52-72   Focus Group with Memos
                       Process repeated from Interview (Memos)

Pages 73-76   Coding Tally Focus Group
                       Use of possible repeated data with coding

Pages 77-80   Document Analysis
                       Notes on each internet position, email, Administrative Retreat Agenda

Pages 81-82   Themes & Subthemes

APPENDIX G: TIMELINE

#1 EDUC 989
TIMELINE combining the **Proposal Development Timeframe Worksheet** and **16-week Course Syllabus**

Week Of:	Assignment(s)
October 13	Proposal Submission to Dr. Gillespie for Proposal Review **(MILESTONE ONE)** Class Introductions, Advising Guide Acknowledgement, Discussion Board Forum #1, Dissertation Submission #1, View Presentation by Dr. Spaulding
October 21	Course Requirements Checklist Class Introduction Advising Guide Discussion Board Forum #1 View Presentation
October 27	Dr. Gillespie submits to Dr. Vacchi
November 3	Discussion Board Forum #2 Dissertation Submission #2
November 17	Discussion Board Forum #3 Dissertation Submission #3
December 1	Proposal defense and Paperwork Discussion Board Forum #4 Dissertation Submission #4 View Presentation
December	Edits to Chapter 1-3

#2 EDUC 989
TIMELINE Graduation

Week Of:	Assignment(s)
January 5	Proposal Submission to Dr. Gillespie for Proposal Review (MILESTONE ONE) Class Introductions, Advising Guide Acknowledgement, Discussion Board Forum #1, Dissertation Submission #1, View Presentation by Dr. Spaulding
January 26	Proposal Defense **(MILESTONE TWO)**
February 2	Discussion Board Forum #2 AND Dissertation Submission #2
February 15-24	IRB
February 23-24	SPS District Approval
February 25	IRB Approval **(MILESTONE THREE)**
February 26-28	Secure Interview Schedules
March 1	Personal reflections in Reflective Journal answering all Interview Questions
March 2-5	Interviews Totaling over 126 hours
March 6-10	Transcribe Interviews & begin MEMO's in Reflective Journal
March 8	Discussion Board Forum #3 AND Dissertation Submission #3
March 9	Focus Group, Documentation Analysis
March 10-22	Write Chapters 4 & 5
March 22	Review Final Manuscript **(MILESTONE FOUR)**
March 28-April 21	Edits to Chapter 4 & 5
May 22, 2020	DEFEND DISSERTATION **(MILESTONE FIVE)**
TBD	Submit Dissertation to JFL

APPENDIX H: SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS AND NUMBER OF TIMES

REFERENCED

Significant Statements	#
Confusion with not understanding why they were transferred and the question of uncertainty	39
Excitement with positive emotions associated during the process of transition	7
Feeling that there was not adequate time to transition from one school to another	36
Indicated that the process of restructuring was an adjustment	83
Indicated that the process of restructuring was for the best after time to reflect	78
Negative relationship between the principal and assistant principal after restructuring	6
Negative relationship between the principal and assistant principal at the former location	13
Notification by the assistant superintendent with an explanation of the reason for restructure	19
Notification by the director of secondary leadership with an explanation of the opportunity for experience	9
Notification by the superintendent with little to no explanation of the reason for restructure	27
Positive relationship between the assistant principal and the faculty/staff at the former location	61
Positive relationship between the assistant principal and the faculty/staff at the restructured location	64
Positive relationship between the assistant principal and the parents at the former location	62
Positive relationship between the assistant principal and the parents at the restructured location	62
Positive relationship between the assistant principal and the principal at the former location	39
Positive relationship between the assistant principal and the principal at the restructured location	58
Positive relationship between the assistant principal and the students at the former location	67
Positive relationship between the assistant principal and the students at the restructured location	67
Preparations had already taken place for the next year at the previous location	23
Sadness with negative emotions associated during the process of transition	54
Struggle to adjust to new leadership style(s)	43

APPENDIX I: AUDIT TRAIL

4

Data Collection
- Interviews
- Document Analysis
- Focus Group

Document Analysis
- Journaling/Transcriptions
- Member Checks
- NVivo
- Analysis Completed

Theme Development
- Coding
- Completion of Chapter 4
- LU Tutor Review