

CROSSING OVER TO ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Makeisha Hinds

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2022

CROSSING OVER TO ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by Makeisha Hinds

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2022

APPROVED BY:

Matthew Ozolnieks, Ed. D, Committee Chair

Daniel Baer, Ph. D, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS). This study aimed to answer: what were the perceptions of individuals as they transitioned to assistant principal? The theory guiding this study was Schlossberg's transition theory which provided a conceptual framework for creating generalized themes of the participants' experiences. Studies of building level leadership typically focused on the principal. This study sought to fill the void in the research literature around the assistant principal transition. Schlossberg's transition theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study in order to align the thematic grouping of ideas to the 4S's transition model which outlines a person's ability to cope in the four categories of situation, self, support, and strategies. This qualitative study employed a transcendental phenomenological approach with a sample size of twelve assistant principals from one urban school district located east of the metropolitan city of Atlanta, Georgia. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview, focus group, and annotated picture submission. Qualitative analysis indicated that persons transitioning to the role of assistant principal relied on meaningful past experiences, situational learning, and relationships to cope with their transition phase. Data analysis further indicated that organizational factors such as mentorship and leadership programs all contributed to the persistence of assistant principals in the transition phase.

Keywords: assistant principal, induction phase, professional development, transition, transition theory, Schlossberg, 4S Transition Model

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to Lloyd Hinds and Marelva Hinds, my grandparents who gave me the world. They didn't have to, but they did. I am forever indebted; I am forever grateful.

Copyright Page

Copyright 2022, Makeisha Hinds

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
Dedication	4
Copyright Page.....	5
List of Tables	9
List of Figures	10
List of Abbreviations	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	12
Overview.....	12
Background.....	12
Problem Statement	20
Purpose Statement.....	21
Significance of the Study	22
Research Questions.....	24
Definitions.....	25
Summary.....	26
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	28
Overview.....	28
Theoretical Framework.....	28
Related Literature.....	30

Summary	58
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	60
Overview	60
Research Design	60
Research Questions	63
Setting and Participants	63
Researcher Positionality	67
Procedures	70
Data Collection Plan	73
Trustworthiness	84
Summary	87
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	88
Overview	88
Participants	88
Results	96
Research Question Responses	102
Summary	106
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	107
Overview	107
Discussion	107

Conclusion	120
References.....	122
Appendix A.....	135
Appendix B	136
Appendix C	138
Appendix D.....	139
Appendix E	140
Appendix F.....	141
Appendix G.....	143
Appendix H.....	145
Appendix I	146
Appendix J	147
Appendix K.....	148

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics Table.....	89
--	----

List of Figures

Figure 1. Schlossberg's Integrative Model of the Transition Process.....	47
Figure 2. Schlossberg's Coping Resources - The Four S's.....	56

List of Abbreviations

Assistant Principal (AP)

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)

Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE)

Professional Development (PD)

Georgia Student Health Survey (GSHS)

Xander County Public Schools (XCPS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

As the second in command to the principal and the forefront of interactions with students, teachers, and parents, the assistant principal (AP), also called the vice principal (VP), serves a vital yet forgotten role. Newly minted APs are usually shocked when they first transition into their new role by the duties, responsibilities, and expectations of their new environment (Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016). While there is a considerable body of literature highlighting the job description of an AP, there is a need for further contributions to the literature that enhances the understanding of the struggles faced by APs during their initial transition into building-level administration (Kwan, 2019; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2016; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). There is a noticeable trend in the literature identifying the importance that the AP plays in schools (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017; Hausman et al., 2002; Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016). Through the analysis of the personal experiences of APs and threading of common challenges faced in the transition phase, a thematic scope of the challenges faced by and overarching needs of APs during their transition will be articulated (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Riddick, 2018). This chapter focuses on the historical, social, and theoretical context of the AP position, as well as the problem and purpose for this study. The research question and sub questions outline the scope and focus of this phenomenological study.

Background

The AP is an often-overlooked area of study as it relates to educational literature and research (Kwan, 2019; Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). Research has shown that more than half of the number of APs polled did not understand what portion of their evaluation focused on being an instructional leader leaving them ill-

prepared for and struggling to balance their role in leadership, establish an identity, and employ coping strategies (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). With instructional leadership being the primary charge of an assistant principal in Xander County Public Schools (pseudonym) (XCPS), it is important to understand the AP's capacity and readiness to meet the demands of their roles, duties, responsibilities, and the challenges faced in order effectively and efficiently provide supports (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). The Assistant Principal (AP), also called the Vice Principal (VP) in Kwan's (2019) study in which the author researched the socialization process of vice principals (VP) and suggested further studies using qualitative methods in order to provide insight into "the sophisticated, multifaceted, and multilayered nature..." of transitioning into educational leadership (p. 410).

The AP's role is complex and demanding; while their duties and responsibilities have not dramatically changed over the years, more recently, new expectations of being an instructional leader has been added to this already demanding job (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016). Teachers who had prior experiences as a teacher leader, "noted that they were more ready for instructional leadership responsibilities than those who had no experience as teacher leaders" (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017, p. 415). This is also supported by Marshall and Phelps Davidson (2016), who noted that educators seeking upward mobility will participate in teacher leadership roles and may also seek out the guidance of a sponsor-protégé.

This qualitative phenomenological study is important and needed. Conducting a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of newly appointed APs in XCPS allows for a descriptive account of the transition phase into this role and aims to provide meaning to this particular change process. The findings of this study will contribute to the articulation and

understanding of the AP transition. This study will provide information to future researchers who wish to study the AP transition in other districts.

Historical Context

The rise of the AP position in schools across the U.S. occurred in the 1930s with "...the first comprehensive discussion of this critical position..." occurring in 1970 followed by a period of silence until the topic resurfaced in the middle of the 1980s (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015, p. 208). Austin and Brown (1970) surveyed 1,127 high school principals and 1,207 APs in seven geographical regions and identified the AP's role and responsibilities as management of student behavior and building operations. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) published an article in 1991, titled: "Restructuring the Role of the Assistant Principal" calling for the reconfiguration of the AP's duties and responsibilities to shift from managerial tasks to an emphasized focus on instruction. The call for Professional Development (PD) aimed at improving the leadership capacity of APs began to surface in research in the early 1990s with Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) and later resurfaced in the 2000s with recurring themes of inadequate knowledge base and leadership development continuing to current research which can be observed in Kwan's (2019) study focusing on the socialization aspect of novice vice principals.

With an initial focus on principal preparation and preparedness for assumption of their role, duties, and responsibilities, the literature on educational leadership contains ample strategies, program analysis, professional development, and best-practices to address the needs of principalship preparation (Kearney, Okilwa, & Goldhorn, 2016; Grissom, Loeb, & Mitani, 2015; Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Gurley et al., 2015). The literature surrounding instructional leadership is also centered around the principal with literature that identifies effective

instructional leadership behavior for principals and studies on the effect size of the principal's impact on student learning (Sparks, 2017; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). However, as the AP role evolves to instructional leader, there is a need for the analysis of the AP's transition phase. An analysis of the AP during their transition phase allows for a succession plan that groom internal leaders for a more seamless transition (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Riddick, 2018).

The position of AP is typically viewed as the entry-level into school administration in educational institutions in the United States, moving from a "one-classroom perspective as a teacher... [to a] second-in-command administrator of an entire school" (Kwan, 2019; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017, p. 405). APs are often not afforded opportunities to refine their skills and expertise; they are typically assigned duties and responsibilities that they must *figure-out* how to execute with little-to-no formal guidance; a trial by fire process (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017).

Social Context

The complexity of the modern AP's duties and responsibilities has evolved to match that of the principal necessitating the need to develop and align the experiences of the AP to PD based on informed overarching needs (Leaf, & Odhiambo, 2017; Morgan, 2018; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). Professional and relational socialization are integral to the transition process and effective execution of duties and responsibilities of the AP. The AP serves as a change agent in the hierarchical structure of authority in the school with the ability to impact student learning and school climate and culture (Chingara & Heystek, 2019).

The readiness of APs to assume their duties affects not only the departments, functions, and personnel that they oversee, but it also affects students' performance, building-level climate and culture, and district-level initiatives (Baker, Guerra, & Baray, 2018; Leaf & Odhiambo,

2017). These challenges may have negative effects on an AP professionally and personally leading to job dissatisfaction, lack of confidence, a loss of a sense of worth, and even emotional problems (Kwan, 2019). By providing APs with strategically aligned PD and support, schools and districts can refine the skills, capacity, and ability of the AP and model the emphasis on collaborative and instructionally focused administrative teams (Furey, 2017).

Sun and Shoho (2017) argued for the AP's assumption of roles and responsibilities that meet the demands of school changes for improved student performance. The participants in Sun's and Shoho's (2017) study of APs' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities, ranked instructional leadership fifth in importance, and it was 20th out of 25 in the ranking of their execution of duties and responsibilities. This quantitative, G-theory study included 568 APs in Pennsylvania and Texas to examine the perceptions of APs on the importance of school activities in relation to school success. The researchers, Sun and Shoho (2017) recommend further study using qualitative or mixed methodologies in order to capture a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the "unit of study [in order to account] ...for variances" not captured in this single-method research (p. 485).

With the increasing responsibilities of the principal, the AP is called upon to be flexible and available to manage student discipline, transitions, transportation, staff, parents, stakeholders, and an array of matters that may become pressing at any given moment (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). An AP must be prepared to adequately deal with these various challenges at a moment's notice (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017). In order to assure and insure a well-managed, safe, and orderly learning environment for all students that promote engaging learning, understanding the experiences and perceptions of APs become vital in providing them with supports and PD to refine and maximize

their skill set. School administration that focuses more on instructional practices are more likely to experience improved student achievement (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017). Improving the skills and abilities of the AP trickles down into improved climate and culture in the building among the faculty and staff, improved customer service provided to stakeholders, improved instruction, and most importantly, improved student academic achievement and social and emotional well-being (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017).

Theoretical Context

Schlossberg's (2011), transition theory is applied to this study to provide a structured alignment for thematically grouping coping strategies in and phases of the transition process. Open-ended questions in a semi-structured environment will be used with individual participants in order to gather information that will be analyzed for compartmentalizing of common experiences into thematic threads (Moustakas, 1994). This study will add to the literature that exists concerning the AP transition process and will provide a context for future researchers seeking to ameliorate the supports provided to new APs.

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) stated that this transition model allows for an understanding of an individual's needs through a structured approach to predicting, measuring, and modifying reactions to transitions. Schlossberg's transition theory examines factors that influence an individual's coping abilities and maps out the individual's movement through transitions. The present factors in Schlossberg's transition theory relates to the transition, individual, and environment to determine the degree of impact that the transition imposes on the individual (Carroll & Creamer, 2004). Additionally, Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, and Wang (2017) study affirms the presence of additional stressors associated with moving into an administrative

position such as isolation from their former teaching peers which may lead to psychological withdrawal.

Articulating on the identity construction of leaders as it occurs through a leadership development program, Moorosi (2014) conducted an intersectional, mixed-methods study to articulate the notion that leadership development is essentially an identity transition rather than an acquisition process of managerial skills. The study included longitudinal data from 2007 to 2010 of 287 participants in six out of nine South African provinces that participated in the leadership development program. Three themes were identified as contributing factors to identity construction of leadership through the leadership development program. The three themes identified by Moorosi (2014) are identification and development of interpersonal skills, individual demographics, and the individual's level of interaction with external factors such as mentoring and networking opportunities.

Further addressing the gap in the literature as it relates to the AP transition, Armstrong (2010a) introduces a change model theory based on literature and primary research to describe the socio-emotional transition from teaching to administration. In "Administrative passages: Navigating the transition from teacher to assistant principal" (2009), Armstrong (2010a) elaborated on the transition process by framing the process into cycles of transitions and described the pre-role preparation, PD, factors, and processes as it related to the individual participant's transition from a teacher-leader to administration. Similarly, Armstrong (2012) reported the recurring themes experienced by 15 VPs in their transition from teaching to administration through the lens of organizational socialization processes in order to examine the phenomena of change, transition, and passage within a secondary school setting in a Canadian province from 1999 to 2007. Through the analysis of the VPs' lived experiences, Armstrong

(2012) confirmed the paradoxical journey of their transition across organizational boundaries provoking personal and professional change.

In the analysis of the transition from teacher to administrator, Kwan (2019) focused on the socialization of new VPs in Hong Kong drawing on the development stage theories in order to understand the challenges faced by new VPs. Based on the results of the study, the author suggests that the VP adaption process is affected by structural feedback, principal's sponsorship, and peer affirmation to varying degrees based on their stage of development in the socialization process (Kwan, 2019).

Of the various socialization dimensions, this study will take a closer look at the transition phase experiences of the novice APs in XCPS and the alignment of these experiences to Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory which includes three distinct categories: understanding transitions, coping with transitions, and application of the model to work life transitions; "the transition model provides the structure for analyzing any transition" (p. 161). The increased focus in management literature over the last two decades on understanding emotion (Miller, Considine, & Garner, 2016) points to the need for a more textured understanding of this concept as it relates to the field of educational administration (Armstrong, 2012).

The term transition as it will be used throughout this research study is defined as a period where change occurs and involves a complex process of experiences over time (Wilson, 2019). In order to deal with change, one must begin by understanding the types of transitions and align life experiences accordingly. Based on Kuhlthau's (1993), "Information Search Process" study, uncertainty stems from a lack of understanding, lack of constructs, and/or a gap in meaning necessitating the focus of this study to construct meaning and to add textured understanding to the context of the AP transition phenomenon.

Problem Statement

The problem is a lack of understanding of the transition to the AP role. This study is designed to address the problem of individuals coping with the transition to the role of AP (Armstrong, 2015; Kearney, Okilwa, & Goldhorn, 2016; Kwan, 2019). Regardless of the type of change, transitions often require individuals to acquire skills necessary to cope with unfamiliar situation, environments, and roles (Schlossberg, 2011). The current literature regarding the transition of building level administration focuses primarily on the principal, and the transition to AP is an under-represented area of educational literature; the AP role has even been labelled as the "forgotten leaders" (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004). Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) explained that "the assistant principalship is a unique entity because the position lacks a precise job description yet entails numerous tasks to ensure the success of a school" (p. 264). A gap exists in the literature as it relates to the understanding of the experiences faced by individuals as they transition into the role of AP (Morgan, 2018).

Transitioning into the role of AP often isolates the individual from their former teaching peers which causes withdrawal from a preexisting support group for the AP (Crawford, 2013). This forces a redefinition of self and situation (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). When an AP is not equipped with the tools, skills, and supports to execute their duties, it creates stress, contention, and lack of progress (Baker, Guerra, & Baray, 2018). Delving into the transition process from teacher to AP will shed light on the needs, supports, and resources currently available and utilized during this process in order to provide supports to individuals during this stage (Crawford, 2013; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). As part of the leadership pipeline to district-level leadership, it is incumbent to support individuals at this initial stage in

order to adequately groom internal candidates and reduce the probability of the ineffective, failing AP (Gurley et al., 2015; Kearney, Okilwa, & Goldhorn, 2016).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS). The transition experiences of the individuals will be analyzed through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory. At this stage in the research, transition to the AP position means an individual to undergoes the movement process to role of AP from a different educational position. Throughout this research, transition will be generally defined as the rite of passage, challenges, and preparation undergone by the participants in assuming their new role as AP (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). As described by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, (1995), transition is "...any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles..." (p. 27). Kwan and Li (2016) noted not only the psychological preparedness but also the individual's readiness to assume new administrative duties. The theory guiding this study is the adult transition theory developed by Schlossberg (1995), as it outlines the various assets and liabilities of each developmental stages of transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. The phenomenological study design is "...not only a description but it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences" of the individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 77). The unit of analysis in this study is the account of the participants of their transition to AP which will be used grouped in thematic sections in order to provide a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to contribute to the literature on the transition experiences of individuals to the role of AP and how they navigated their transitions. The effective transition of APs helps to ensure positive organizational success based on individual preparedness. School and district PD provided is most often geared towards teachers and principals leaving a gap in the development of APs (Kearney, Okilwa, & Goldhorn, 2016). Some districts have responded to the need of in-house PD for APs with the creation of induction service programs aligned to district expectations of skills, competencies, and dispositions (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). Qualitative research seeks to make sense of and created an understanding of the different lived experiences of people (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Theoretical Significance

This study will also inform a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the AP position. Given that APs make up over half of the building-level administrators, the lack of research in this area is a significant void (Kwan, 2019; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). The ability to enhance the skills, competencies, and knowledge of the AP can be more adequately addressed through targeted and strategically aligned PD geared towards overarching needs and school/district expectations based on the experiences of the transition phase as described by Kwan (2019). For district-level personnel and principals working with APs, this research offers a conceptual understanding that may be more effective in understanding issues related to the success and challenges faced by APs by looking at the experiences faced during the transition phase (Moorosi, 2014).

Practical Significance

The practical significance of this study is the impact of transition, according to Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory on the individual's relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. The invariant structure of this phenomenon is that APs struggle during the transition phase of their transition; understanding how APs struggle, the struggles they face, and the strategies used to overcome these challenges can be used to inform PD needed to prepare and equip APs for their integral position as second in command in building leadership (Armstrong 2010a; Crawford, 2013; Kwan, 2019). This allows for more efficient processes and execution allowing for a deeper focus of the AP on instructional leadership. Taking for granted that APs are expected to learn from on-the-job experiences, a systematic approach aligned to the needs of APs to ready them for their position would not only serve the school but also the district with a quality leadership pipeline (David, Johnson, & Alexander, 2018).

Empirical Significance

The data gathered from this study will inform generalized, overarching thematic issues and concerns that effect the transition to AP. An improved understanding of the AP transition process would offer valuable information to the field of study (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017). The research indicates a need to understand better the transition experience and PD needs of APs (Kearney, Okilwa, & Goldhorn, 2016). The results of this study can be used on a wider scale to affect change in districts that have similar demographics. Information that sheds light on the AP transition allows for alignment of supports and PD that focus on the true needs of APs. In order to adequately develop APs into school leaders that positively affect building processes, staff development, and student achievement, "there is a need for additional training to prepare these individuals to successfully transition ..." (Kearney, Okilwa, & Goldhorn, 2016, p. 17). Most

school districts have taken ownership of creating PD programs that develop their internal candidates for higher levels of leadership which provides a need for an understanding of the AP transition phenomenon (Colmer, 2017; Graham, 2015; Kearney, Okilwa, & Goldhorn, 2016).

Research Questions

How do new APs describe their personal experience of transitioning to the role of assistant principal in XCPS? Shedding light on the transition process of persons as they transition to AP allows for a deeper analysis of transition experience of APs and aligns thematic experiences that allow for aligned resources geared towards the improvement their readiness for assuming the position of AP. This research will address three sub-questions which directly align to the four key components of Schlossberg's transition theory.

Central Research Question

What is the lived experience of individuals who transition to the position of assistant principal?

Sub Question One

What are the feelings experienced by individuals who transition to the role of AP?

Question one also aligns to Schlossberg's transition phase identification and transition process alignment allowing for the researcher to identify the type of transition undertaken and transition process. Responses to sub-question one could include but are not limited to descriptions of what triggered the transition, the duration of the transition, the amount of control and the degree of change in the role experienced by the individual.

Sub Question Two

What are the strategies employed by individuals who transition to the role of AP to cope with the transition process? The second sub-question will address what strengths and

weaknesses the individual believed they brought to the situation. This question allows for the researcher to examine the self as it relates to assets and liabilities as the participant lives through the experience of the AP transition phase (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Elements that relate to the second sub-question include the individual's sense of self-confidence, maturity, discipline, and perceptions.

Sub Question Three

What are the resources used by individuals who transition to the role of AP to facilitate their transition process? The third sub-question asks participants to describe how they navigated through their transition to AP. This aligns to the component of supports and can include persons, events, and rituals used as resources in order to facilitate the transition process for the individuals involved. The coping strategies used by new APs as they transition to the role of assistant principal will be addressed in the third sub-question. This sub-question will be used to identify strategies utilized by new APs to mitigate difficulties experienced during the transition process to include but not limited to framing their perspective(s), managing their time and stress level, aligning their efforts to work through their transition.

Definitions

Pertinent terms used in this study are defined below in order to provide perspective, common understanding, and focus for the reader.

1. *Assistant Principal* - refers to the leadership position that falls second in command to the principal in relation to building-level leadership (Shore & Walshaw, 2018). The term assistant principal is synonymous with vice principal, junior administrator, and deputy principal as used interchangeably in other research, districts, and states (Armstrong, 2015; Hamm, 2017; Kwan, 2019; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). The terms

- assistant and deputy imply a subordinate relationship to the principal (Cranston, et al., 2004).
2. *Instructional Leadership* - leadership practices that focus on planning, evaluation, coordination, and improved student learning (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017)
 3. *Professional Development* - opportunities that focuses on skill development and career advancement (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017).
 4. *Self* - personal and demographic characteristics that affects and individual's perception of life (Schlossberg, 2011).
 5. *Situation* - the trigger, timing, control, duration, role change, concurrent stress, and assessment of the event occurring (Schlossberg, 2011; Wilson, 2018)
 6. *Strategies* - coping responses that modify the individual's meaning and control of the situation (Schlossberg, 2011).
 7. *Support* - networks, relationships, and situations that modify the event leading to developed meaning, control, and management (Schlossberg, 2011).
 8. *Transition* - any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, perceptions, and roles (Schlossberg, 2011).
 9. *Transition theory* - a systematic approach to the analysis of adult transitions that allows for understanding of challenges and alignment of resources (Schlossberg, 2011).

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs

in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS). While on-the-job training and experiences are valuable, they have muted effects if not directly aligned to the needs of the individuals' experiences (Schlossberg, 2011). Understanding the needs of the APs through the analysis of their transition experience allows for aligned supports to improve their skills and competencies. This study will provide a rich, textured description of the AP transition experience in order to better understand this process.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

With an emphasis on instructional leadership in education, a consistent focus has been placed on examining the challenges faced and preparation needed for the appropriate development and grooming of principals with sparse research involving the development and preparation of the AP (Liang & Augsutine-Shaw, 2016; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). However, there is a need for a better understanding of the challenges and preparation needs of the AP which is usually the first level of administrative leadership in education. The position of the AP is under-represented in professional literature, especially as it relates to the transition to the role (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Kwan, 2019; Oleszewski et al., 2017). In this literature review, I provide an overview of the current body of knowledge surrounding AP challenges and emphasize the need to understand the challenges faced by persons transitioning into the assistant principal role and how they assimilated to their new duties and responsibilities, as well as the theoretical framework applied, Schlossberg's transition theory.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory which is a mechanism for "analyzing human adaption to transition" (p. 2). Integral to qualitative inquiry, a theoretical framework provides the researcher a "system of constructs and laws" as the lens from which to examine the relatedness of the phenomena (Gall et al., 2007, p. 32). A construct allows for identification of the broad concept of the research which is then more clearly defined by variables and operational definitions. This study will examine the phenomenon of the lived experiences as individuals transition to AP in XCPS (pseudonym) a metropolitan district east of Atlanta, Georgia. Transitions are not prescriptive. Rather, "transitions are conceptualized

as being experienced” by individuals in different ways; transitions are personal and not structured events that occur in the lives of individuals (Chick & Meleis, 1986; Wilson, 2019). While diverse, transitions entail defining features that signal movement from one state to another (Schlossberg, 1981; Wilson, 2019). Thus, we must first ground ourselves in an operational definition of the term transition. For the purpose of this study, the term transition is informed by Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) and is defined as an event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. There are three sets of variables that affect an individual’s ability to adapt to change: the individual’s perception of the transition, the characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments, and the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). The time needed for an individual to fully assimilate varies with each individual.

Marshall and Phelps Davidson (2016) described the initial entry into administration as a “professional shock” (p. 272). The steep learning curve that is experienced by individuals transitioning to the AP position is also supported by Armstrong (2010b), Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang (2017), and Sun & Shoho (2017) and is described as complex, stressful, and redefining. The Schlossberg transition theory was developed to facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aligning them to resources that would assist the strategies needed to cope with the “ordinary and extraordinary process of living” (Evans, et al., 2010, p. 213).

The theoretical framework used in this study is Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory. In this study, the researcher will look primarily at the perceptions of individuals as they transition to AP; the defining moment that crystalized the transition to AP. Transitions are signified by change in an individual’s situation; transitions happen over a period of time and are rarely linear and simplistic (Wilson, 2019). Transitions are often assumed to be apparent changes in an

individual's situation or demeanor and occurring with such frequency that it could be said that individuals are in a constant state of transition (Leibowitz & Schlossberg, 1982; Wilson, 2019). Chick and Meleis (1986) offered an early definition of a transition as a "passage from life phase, condition, or status to another" over time with changes in perception as well (p. 239). For the purpose of this study, the term transition was informed by Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) and is defined as an event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.

Several studies have suggested the need for effective and efficient support in order to prepare individuals for the role of AP noting that most districts do not provide targeted PD geared towards the professional needs of APs (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017; Browne-Ferrigno & Wang, 2017; Crawford, 2013; Marshall & Phelps Davison, 2016; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). With the multitude of demands and mandates on schools, collaboration and support are more vital than ever (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). Strong support is also one of the four factors addressed by Schlossberg as integral to adaption in, through, and out of the transition process (Schlossberg, 1981).

Related Literature

Globalization and economic initiatives have led to an international focus on schools and student outcomes interlaced with educational leadership and development (Gonzales & Roberts, 2022; McBrayer et al., 2018; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). School leaders are regarded as having a key influence on student learning (Herman et al., 2017; Leithwood & Azah, 2017), second only to that of the classroom teacher through the development the leadership capacity of teachers (Hallinger, 2011), implementation of data-informed decisions (Liou, Grigg, & Halverson, 2014), fostering a climate and culture that is conducive to a positive

learning environment (Hollingsworth et al., 2017), and use of research-based strategies to inform school improvement (Bryk et al., 2015). Minimal attention has been paid in the literature as it relates to the unique professional experiences of the AP. This phenomenological research study contributes to the literature that serves to enhance the understanding of the experiences of APs in their transition to this role.

Originally developed in 2006, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders have undergone several periods of reform since its inception between 2006 to 2015 with major reformation linked to school improvement and accountability. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders provide a guiding compass for schools in an effort to promote ethical and professional behavior. There was a decrease in the literature related to the managerial tasks of school leaders and moved towards a larger emphasis on instructional leadership capacities associated with the accountability movement of leading learning and leading culture/climate (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017).

Although the AP position is crucial to school principal development and the operational structure and processes of the school, the leadership development of the AP has been largely understudied (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Klar et al., 2020; Gonzales & Roberts, 2022; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017); APs have been underutilized (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017); and their role has been ill-defined (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Marshall & Phelps, 2016). The structure of the AP position is often limited and dependent upon the needs of the principal (Cohen & Schechter, 2019) leading to a lack of PD that directly aligns to the need of the AP (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009; Shore & Walshaw, 2018) and a systematic approach to training APs on the skills needed to execute their duties effectively and efficiently (Armstrong, 2015; Gonzales & Roberts, 2022). APs are often unprepared and underdeveloped

throughout their career in this position which is supported by the literature (Gonzales & Roberts, 2022; Mitchell, Armstrong, & Hands, 2017; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017) leading to a need for a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions, experiences, and expectations of APs (Morgan, 2018; Shore & Walshaw, 2018).

The advent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law in 2002 increased the federal government's role in school accountability for student achievement (Blackburn & Williamson 2009). Followed by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 which moved the roll of responsibility from the federal government to the state, the need for effective instructional leaders is ever more pressing; the ability of the AP to ensure instructional practices that are intellectually challenging, authentic, and aligned to the needs of students based on data informed decisions. As a fundamental element of school effectiveness, leadership has a significant impact on student performance outcomes (Gonzales & Roberts, 2022; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2009). School administrators' roles, duties, and expectations have become more complex with expectation of specific professional knowledge and skills that successfully move the needle on student achievement (Erol & Karsantik, 2021). Hattie (2015) conducted a meta-analysis identifying the impact of various educational strategies on student learning. In perspective to leadership, there are several strategies that yield high impact: evaluating one's impact as a leader as having .91 effect size; focusing on high-impact teaching and learning, .91 effect size; being explicit about what success looks like, .77 effect size; and setting appropriate levels of challenge, .57 effect size (Hattie, 2018). With an impact score of .4 effect size equating to one full year of learning, these four leadership strategies can make a significant difference in being an effective instructional leader.

In order to be apt and skilled to focus on high-yield strategies, an AP must first

understand their transition and be able to connect to resources that support their professional development. Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) argued that organization employee turnover is often attributed to “unrealistic, inflated, or unmet expectations that are not addressed at the beginning of the transition” (p. 15). The transition theory provides a framework that facilitates the understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to appropriate resources (Evans et al., 2010). By understanding the transition experience of APs, PD programs can also address the access, retention, and attrition rates of individuals serving in this position. Even if an AP is adequately trained to perform the technical and managerial tasks of administration, most APs are not prepared for the socio-emotional and political challenges experienced by their new position (Armstrong, 2010b; Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017; Buchanan, 1974; Kwan, 2019).

Schlossberg (2011) also makes note that work transitions are complex because not only do individual roles change but also the structure of the work, and “the support available at the time of transition is critical to one’s sense of well-being” (p. 160). While there is no one magical coping strategy, a closer look at and deeper understanding of the AP transition experience allows for well-informed, well-developed maximization of resources and availability of these resources. In the research, Marshall and Phelps Davidson (2016) describe some of the dilemmas faced by APs such as “decrease in job satisfaction, emotional problems, a loss of a sense of efficacy and even a lack of confidence” (p. 274). The transition model allows for the mystery to be taken out of change, for a structured alignment of experiences into generalized themes. Understanding of the AP role ambiguity and complexity allows for the development of strong PD programs leading to a strong continuity of leadership (Carroll & Creamer, 2004; Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016).

History and Reality of the Assistant Principal

Rooted in the formalization of teacher training programs, the AP position evolved around the mid-1800s (Hodgins, 1911-1912), the position of AP was introduced in U.S. schools in the 1930s (Glanz, 1994). Termed ‘headmasters’ of teachers at the time, these individuals oversaw the administrative duties of the school. Early APs were expected to complete an array of tasks from maintaining the cleanliness of the school to leading instruction (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017; Hawkins, 1975). With little change in their situational responsibilities, the assistant principal served in varying capacities for decades with the first comprehensive discussion of their position appearing in 1970 (Austin & Brown, 1970). From 1990, the number of APs grew drastically from around 44,000 to nearly 81,000 indicating a need for increased leadership needs in schools (Superville, 2021). Gaining interest from researchers in recent years, the AP position, role, and experience remains an elusive entity in educational leadership literature (Hamm, 2017).

Research shows that leadership is a fundamental element in influencing school effectiveness (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; McBrayer et al., 2018; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Specifically, the self-efficacy of school leaders in their ability to positively impact change and execute their duties and responsibilities (Kelleher, 2016). Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s perception of their abilities, strength, and liabilities within a given function, situation, or domain (Bandura, 1977). Development of the skills of APs contributes to their increased confidence in the execution of their duties and responsibilities exerting confidence in their ability to positively impact change (Morgan, 2018).

Described as the “forgotten leader” and as the “forgotten man,” the AP has been an underutilized resource for many years (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004 p. 224; Glanz,

1994, p. 283). APs are not only lacking in preparation from their formal university coursework, but there are also few preparation programs and meaningful professional development opportunities to available to prepare the AP for their role (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani (2014) found that while APs viewed their role as instructional leaders, challenges arose in their practice, execution, management, and PD. In the research, there is also an indication that there is a lack of access to mentoring, instructional leadership, and professional development opportunities for new APs (Owleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012; Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014; Superville, 2021).

Unlike teachers who can enjoy the isolation of their own classroom, APs must navigate a new social and cultural front as they assume their new role. Rarely afforded the depth of PD opportunities that new teachers and principals receive, APs often report “feeling unprepared for their role” (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017, p. 286). The early experiences of the AP point to “experiences of isolation, loss, and overload” resulting in heightened pressure, conformity, and accountability (Armstrong, 2015; Bayar, 2020). Today’s building-level school leadership is complex with challenging requirements that are not adequately addressed in most leadership preparation programs leaving the AP to rely on their administrative internship experiences where APs report inadequate learning opportunities (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017; Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014).

In their study, Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani (2014) examined the written narratives of forty-five APs undergoing a PD program which shed light on how APs perceived their leadership roles as they transitioned from operational leaders to instructional leaders. Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani (2014) make a case for tailoring PD for APs based on their needs and school context providing customized supports to assist and maintain the daily operations of instructional

leadership. Kwan (2019) and Superville (2021) also conclude that APs are generally inadequately prepared for administrative duties professionally or psychologically as they transition to administrative roles.

According to Hayes & Burkett (2021), APs need formal PD that is intentionally planned and addresses the development of skills aligned to working with teachers, decision-making, and communication. Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2015) called for PD addressing social, technical, and leadership skills for APs which were generally not addressed by preparation programs. The AP training and exposure should not be left to haphazard and informal experiences (Cohen & Schechter, 2019). In their study of newly appointed APs, Erol & Karsanistik (2021) summarized that APs expressed a need for support in areas of legislation, technology, implementation, pedagogical practices, time management, and personal development. The identified need for support of new APs is also articulated by Kwan (2019) who asserts that socialization is a key component for addressing the learning of new responsibilities in organizational role change and has been an under-developed area of study in educational literature. Only a partial representation of the AP role is contextualized in the current body of literature leaving a gap in the understanding of the needs and complexity of this role (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004).

Understanding the AP role and needs as opposed to simply studying of their duties and responsibilities contributes to the literature of the AP experience and professional needs. Currently, the AP functions as a key component of the school's success with low visibility. The results of this phenomenological study are important to taking adequate measures in understanding the AP transition experience in order to mitigate the difficulties faced by APs as they transition to this role and to increase the awareness of education stakeholders in contributing

PD that facilitate the growth and development of APs. In order remain effective in a changing conceptualization of public education, there is a need for highly skilled and effective educational leaders. An APs agency to positively impact change is directly related to their perception of self-efficacy which is informed by their ability, skills, and liabilities (Bandura, 2001; Chingara & Heystek, 2019).

Duties and Responsibilities

Becoming an administrator is a complex transition that provokes changes in an individual's professional and personal life and sets boundaries between teaching and administrative roles (Armstrong, 2012). Crossing the administrative threshold exposes new APs to a different organizational perspective. The extent of changes to an individual's responsibilities, duties, and position is described by the role change factor. Although APs experiencing anticipated transitions may be expecting of the difficulties that come along with the transition, the AP is still one of the most misunderstood and understudied roles of school leadership (Gonzales & Roberts, 2022; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017) leading to a need to understand the preparedness individuals for their changes in role, duties, and responsibilities (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017; Crawford, 2013; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). The challenges faced by new APs can also be attributed to an inadequate job description and ambiguously defined practices (Morgan, 2018).

The change to administration exposes individuals to new responsibilities, norms, reference group, scrutiny, and accountability at levels not experienced in their previous roles (Armstrong, 2012). Even if an individual perceives their transition to the role of AP as a gain in status, there is a level of stress that accompanies any transition (Schlossberg, Water, & Goodman, 1995). Because the role of AP is drastically different from being a classroom teacher,

role change is a prevalent factor during this transition and often contradicts the “novice’s primary socialization as teacher and create cognitive, emotional, and moral tensions” (Armstrong, 2012). Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani (2014) study of over 100 APs in two urban school districts found that APs struggled to envision their role as instructional leaders. Schlossberg (1995) notes, “A given role change can be more or less difficult (and have greater or lesser impact) depending on whether the new role is a loss or a gain, positive or negative, or has explicit norms and expectations for the new incumbent” (p. 56). Individuals transition to AP experience a modification of self and must learn new behaviors forcing them to relinquish the comfortable mindset they were used to (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017).

Primarily focused on managerial functions from its conception, researchers called for the reconceptualization of the role in the mid-1980s (Fulton, 1987; Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017; Greenfield, 1985; Pellicer et al., 1990). Sun and Shoho (2017) point out that assistant principals have been ignored in the literature where the principalship takes the forefront. However, the demand for school changes and improved student performance leads to a new importance of the AP’s roles and responsibilities to a focus on instructional leadership (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017; McBrayer et al., 2018). The advent of instructional leadership duties and responsibilities arose in the literature between 1985 to 1995 expanding the duties of the AP to include capacities for instructional supervision, program evaluation, staff development, and curriculum leadership.

The AP learning of their job duties and responsibilities is often deemed difficult as their functions are not always precise as “school-leadership responsibilities have become more challenging and complex due to decades of mandated reform, rapidly changing demographics, technological advances, dwindling financial support for schools, and changed expectations”

(Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017, p. 397). However, there is an increasing need to develop APs' communication, collaboration, and team development skills in the early stages of their transition to this role (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017). The duties of an AP also include the ability to disaggregate and analyze data to improve student learning and increase accountability.

One participant in Armstrong's (2012) study notes that "the job does not afford you a way to ease in slowly, and so it is a baptism by fire" (p. 410). The authors of "Assistant principal leadership development: A narrative capture study" (Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014) and "Assistant principals' perceptions of meaningful mentoring and professional development opportunities" (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017) concluded that APs are in need of well-structured, customized mentoring and PD to aid in the development of their job-embedded training. Without systematic, structured support aligned to the development of APs, these individuals may be subjected to unnecessary high levels of stress and anxiety (Bayer, 2020; Shore & Walshaw, 2018).

However, these PD programs must evolve to focus on the who and not so much the what; Who am I as an assistant principal, and who do I want to become (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). However, the boundaries of transitions (the beginning and the ending) are porous creating a blurred transition period as individuals move through the transition towards integration and assimilation (Wilson, 2019). Thus, assigning numerical times, dates, and values to transition periods are invalid as transitions differ based on the personal lived experiences of individuals and varying factors that affect the transition event (Meleis, et al., 2000; Wilson, 2019). Transitions are initiated by the disruption of stability, a feeling of disconnectedness, a sense of loss, and incongruity between reality and expectations (Meleis, 2015; Wilson, 2019).

Recent studies indicate the strong leadership force of APs that needs to be more broadly utilized urging the need for meaningful PD (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). Weller and Weller (2002) argued that APs often do not fully understand their role, duties, and responsibilities creating gaps in preparedness, understanding, and execution. Unfortunately, the unclear job description and alignment of responsibilities have been found to affect the AP's job performance and emotional well-being (Oleszewski et al., 2012). In reviewing the duties and responsibilities of APs over the decades, discipline and management was found to be number one duty of most APs which does not align to the expectations and leadership standards of educational leaders. With the dearth in research conducted on assistant principalship, Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, and Wang (2017) argue that it is "difficult to discern the extent to which assistant principals are ready to perform the diverse functions of contemporary instructional leadership" (p. 398). Barnett, Shoho, and Okilwa (2017) affirm that PD should focus on the identified areas of need expressed by APs. The authors also assert that school districts should be intentional in the development and grooming of their internal leadership pool through the development of formal learning opportunities and structures (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017).

With the introduction of leadership standards in 1996 and accountability legislation such as NCLB in 2001, "training and professional development for assistant principals should prepare them not only to continue to be effective managers but also to simultaneously increase their capacity to be assume greater responsibilities as instructional leaders" (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015, p. 213). While sparse, the literature base surrounding the AP has been consistent; most authors agree that "the assistant principal has historically been relegated to operational tasks in school management" and that "capacity building and professional development for

assistant principals' leadership is clearly in order" (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015, p. 217). Armstrong (2010b), Marshall and Hooley (2006) and Superville (2021) assert that APs are likely learning on the job with little formal support. Scholars suggest that the most effective PD practices are those that are directly aligned to the needs of the individual; they are job-embedded, personalized, and occur in professional learning communities (Klar et al., 2020; Learning Forward, 2017; Leithwood & Azah, 2017).

There is no consensus in the literature regarding what APs do or should do making it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of individuals serving in this role and to provide PD needed to improve their impact, quality, and effectiveness (Superville, 2021). However, with the increased attention on student performance, educational leaders are called to assume a greater responsibility in their role by serving as instructional leaders while simultaneously managing operational tasks (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015). While complex and context specific, instructional leadership skills and knowledge can be taught and developed. The term instructional leadership was introduced in the 1970s but remained limitedly defined for decades (Neumerski, 2012).

In their 2015 study, Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee conducted an in-depth content analysis to determine if participation by APs in a preparation program proved valuable. Through a single-case study, the researchers found several key thematic factors; participants who completed the preparation program had strengthened instructional leadership, increased institutional perspective, strengthened collaborative practice, increased skill in technology use, and role clarification (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015, p. 217). Not only must APs be prepared for their role, but they must also learn the social career norms of the organization and their function in it. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett, 2012 identified several areas of need for AP professional

development that revolve around their daily activities such as community relations, staff evaluation, program evaluation, instructional management, and discipline management.

The limited studies conducted on the AP indicate that they can function in varying capacities leading to “narrowly defined responsibilities, limited opportunities, underutilization, and lack of support (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016). However, it is generally agreed upon in the literature that individuals transition to the administrative role of AP experience prominent levels of uncertainty and anxiety in their work environment (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017; Crawford, 2013; Kwan, 2019; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Want, 2017). This space of unfamiliarity and discomfort serves as the indication of transition as there is a change in role, relationships, and responsibilities which aligns to the situational factor of Schlossberg’s transition theory. The demands of accountability, globalization, and technology increase the complexity of the AP role. The success of a district is dependent upon the development and availability of well-prepared leaders. Sparks (2017) and Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Riddick (2018) identifies a commonality of high-performing educational systems is their creation of a cohesive, structured support system at varying levels of leadership that identifies and develops talents at varying levels within the organization.

Stressors in an individual’s life outside of the specific transition being analyzed are considered concurrent stressors, and the individual’s perception of the transition is gauged by whether they believe the transition is positive, negative, or benign. As novice APs negotiate and accommodate their new, redefined leadership identity and role, they simultaneously relinquish their identity as teacher causing feelings of mourning and loss (Armstrong, 2012). Stressors can include but are not limited to whether the AP finds it difficult to relate to the staff, students, and stakeholders. This can be a result from change in location, but also from a change in the role,

duties, and responsibilities once held by the AP prior to their transition. Disintegration is a physical, cognitive, and emotional change process experienced by a range of disorientation and dissonance especially when experienced with inadequate support (Armstrong, 2012). The stress experienced by individuals during the transition process can greatly affect the individual's ability to cope (Schlossberg, 1981). Everyone's transition process varies making it integral to evaluate each AP's transition through the lens of specific factors and order to ascertain a line of symmetry and congruence.

The research suggests that induction and preparation programs can provide growth and understanding bridging the gap between general duties and responsibilities and leadership practices; however, in order to provide APs with meaningful professional development, we must first understand their needs and align resources accordingly (Armstrong, 2015). A successor should always be groomed simultaneously in so that changes in leadership are seamless (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Riddick, 2018). The job responsibilities of the AP are described by Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) as a "mosaic of partial responsibilities" (p. 273). Instructional leadership focuses on the planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of student learning (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). In a study conducted by Armstrong (2010), one of the AP noted that the "skills that are required as an administrator haven't been touched when we go through the principals' programs" (p. 699). Nevertheless, the demand for APs to serve as instructional leaders, agents of educational equity, efficacy, and change, understanding the support needed for APs through an in-depth analysis of their transition experience will inform leadership PD needed and lead to more satisfied and effective APs. The current body of literature does not explore the different backgrounds of APs and how this

phenomenon influences the experiences and PD needs of those serving as APs (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017).

Applicability of Schlossberg's Transition Theory to the AP Transition

Schlossberg (1981) introduced the transition model as a framework that could be used to analyze individual's "transitions of all kinds - positive and negative, dramatic and ordinary" (p.3). The application of Schlossberg's transition theory "provides a structure for analyzing any transition;" it can "take the mystery...out of change" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 161). First published in 1981, Schlossberg defined their transition theory "as a vehicle for analyzing human adaptation to transition" (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 2). This phenomenological study focuses on the phases of moving in, through, and out of a transition, particularly as it relates to the ending of an individual's previous role and the assumption of their new role as assistant principal. Kwan's (2019) study focuses on the organizational socialization which addresses work norms, values, and behaviors associated with the position.

Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011) emphasize the implementation of orientation programs to assist individuals in their transition; this allows for individuals to know what is expected of them throughout the process. Once an individual understands the expectations and resources available, they are then in the "moving through" phase of their transition where they manage their duties and responsibilities along with the other parts of their lives (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 57). Schlossberg's transition theory not only address the organizational socialization focused on by Kwan (2019), but also addresses professional socialization which is characterized by the skills, knowledge, and disposition needed for the execution of an individual's duties and responsibilities.

In order to understand the term transition, Parkes (1971) proposed the term psychosocial transition which is defined as any change that requires “the abandonment of one set of assumptions and the development of a fresh set to enable the individual to cope with the new altered life space” (p. 103). This aligns to Chick’s and Meleis’s (1986) definition of transition as a rite of passage. Bien (1982) also defines transition as a self-renewal process. However, Schlossberg (1981) further layers transition with the individual’s perception of change which determines the impact of such an event and the process of integration into the individual’s life. An individual’s ability to adapt to change depends on their perception and alignment of resources to the deficits in terms of the transition (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 7).

Change cannot be arbitrarily examined absent of the context of human experience; context refers to the individual’s relationship to the transition (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). In their later edition, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) describe a transition as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 33). Schlossberg (2011) further argued that the adaption to a transition was based on three sets of variables: perception, pre- and post-transition environments, and the characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. Schlossberg’s framework aligns to the strategy of this research which focuses on the transition of individuals to the role of AP. This framework allows a comprehensive lens from which factors that influence an individual’s ability to cope with a transition can be categorized.

There are three types of transitions defined by Schlossberg (1995) transition theory. The anticipated transition is comprised of events that would normally occur in the progression of life such as marriage, birth, first job, first home, etc. The unanticipated transitions are those events that are unscheduled and not predictable (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). These events

involve situational occurrences that are not consequences of the natural life cycle, such as: premature death, being laid off, divorce, etc. The third type of transition is the non-event which are those an individual expected to occur but did not, such as: not receiving an anticipated promotion; cancer that did not metastasized. The research shows the relationship of the individual to the event or non-event is central to understanding their perception of the transition (Irvin, Copenhaver, & Koclanes, 2017; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Transitions are experienced in three phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out.

The framework of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory is centered around the following premises that: individuals continuously experience transition, one's reaction to a transition depends on the type of transition, your perceptions, the context within which it occurs, and the impact of the transition on one's live, and a transition is a process includes phases of assimilation and continuous appraisal over time as the individual moves in, through, and out of the transition which can be seen in Figure 1 (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 59). Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1982) argue that career services, such as PD, in the workplace should address a full range of transitions from vertical, lateral, and non-movement. One way to acknowledge and address workplace transitions is to examine the experiences of others who have undergone the same or similar transition. As districts seek to refine their succession plan, there is a growing concern over leadership transitions expressed in the literature.

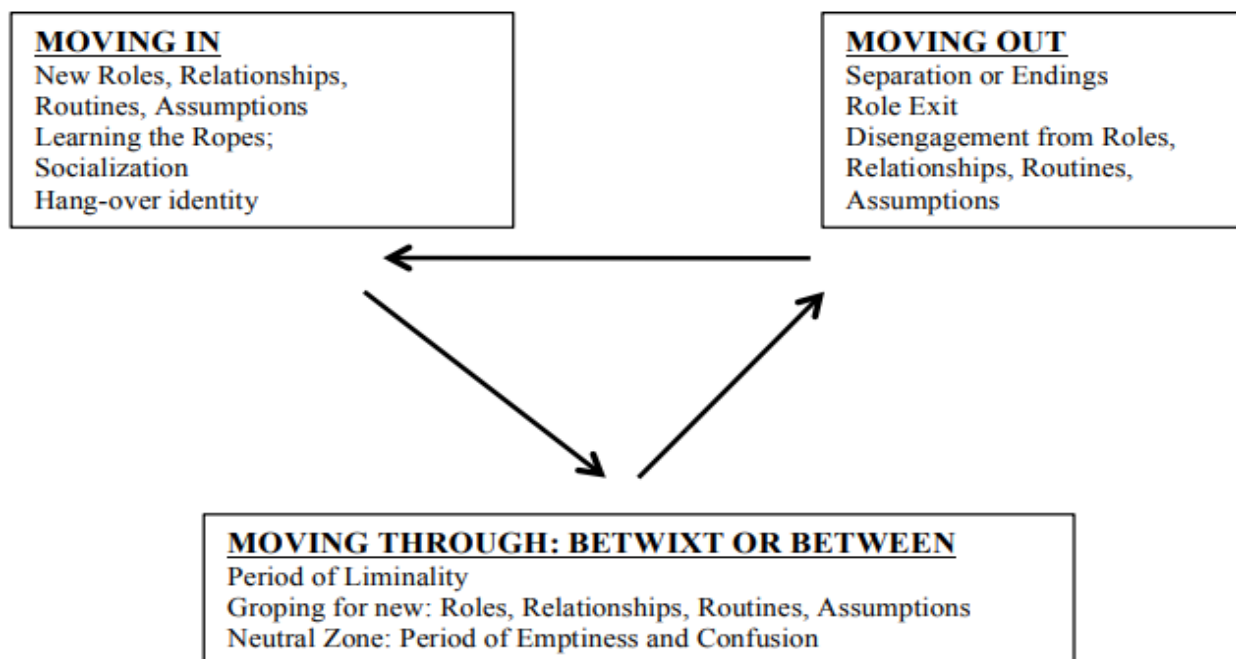


Figure 1. Schlossberg's Integrative Model of the Transition Process, (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 44)

Individuals adapt differently to change. Schlossberg (1981) focused on the examining an individual's transition as a means of understanding how adults respond to transitions in their relationships, self-identity, behavior, and resources as they adjust to new environments and circumstances. Schlossberg's transition theory is an adult development theory that focuses on the transitions experienced throughout life and means by which individuals cope and adjust (Schlossberg, 1995). According to Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012), this transition theory is centered on the following premises: transitions are fluid, multidimensional, and continuous; an individual's reaction to a transition depends on their perceptions, the type of event, the context, and impact on their lives; and transitions occur over time and individuals move through different phases of integration (p. 59). The individual's perception of the transition often has a greater impact on their experiences throughout the transition process than the change itself (Schlossberg, 1981, p 5).

In the first phase, “moving in”, of the transition theory, Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) identified some common needs such as the individual becoming “...familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations” (p. 15). Moving in is the process of leaving behind one known context and entering into a new one (Komives & Brown, 2008, p.4). There are many programs that focus their resources on this stage of support through orientation and preparation programs focused on informing the new assistant principal to their role, responsibilities, and duties. Wilson (2019) prefaces awareness of the transition as the antecedent to declaring a transition is occurring (p. 841). The awareness of a transition precipitates expectations either individual or social but delineates the varying experiences of individuals and blurs the line between what is considered normal or atypical (Schumacher & Maleis, 1994; Wilson, 2019). Planning and preparation can facilitate the transition process if the individual can anticipate issues and problems associated with the change to the individual’s role and structure. Uncertainty comes from a gap in meaning, understanding, and construct. The “moving-through” phase is a period in the transition process where individuals can feel “vulnerable overwhelmed, confused, disoriented, and detached”; it is a time where structure is lost but there is maximum potential for change (Wilson, 2019, p. 843).

“Moving through” is the second phase of the transition process as is characterized the balance and execution of the individual’s new role with the other obligations in their life. This phase is met with new questions such as “Did I do the right thing? ...Can I commit to this transition?” (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989, p. 16). Leibowitz and Schlossberg (1982) also assert that organizational changes in the creation of a balanced career development program can ease the transition anxiety experienced by their employees. Walker-Donnelly, Scott, and Cawthon (2019) define career development as “the total constellation of psychological,

sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of the work in the total lifespan of any given individual” (p. 10). While transitions undergo a complex process, there are some important elements that influence and affect the outcome of a transitions. These elements include but are not limited to the individual’s awareness, expectations, preparation, planning, knowledge, skills, environment, and meaning (Chick & Meleis, 1986; Meleis, et al., 2000; Wilson, 2019).

The third and final transition phase is the “moving out” stage which can be viewed as the ending of one or a series of transitions; however, this also signifies moving into a new transition as well. Often grieving the loss of their previous structure, role, and situation, mourning is a part of stage. However, as change is integrated, the previous role, relationships, assumptions, and routines become one dimension of the person’s assimilation as they change and evolve; “the extent to which a transition pervades daily life affects the degree to which one must adjust” (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989, p. 17). The acquisition of and assimilation to a new role and structure require the acquisition of new knowledge and skills which necessitates the focus for PD to be aligned to the specific needs of individuals who transition to the role of AP. A holistic picture is important when examining the lived experiences of individuals as they undergo a transition in order to understand the factors that positively and negatively impact the individual’s ability to maximize their skills and knowledge to serve the purpose of and maintain the integrity of their new role.

In a recent quantitative study of 118 nurses, Schmitt (2015) used Schlossberg’s transition theory to guide the study which provided information on the resources and needs of recently hired nurses through their transition. Williams (1999) argued that the application of Schlossberg’s transition theory could be used to develop skills and manage transitions of their

employees. From the perspective of Schlossberg's transition theory, transitions provide opportunities for growth of the individual. Administrators must redefine their identities while simultaneously undergoing various stressors which they are rarely prepared for (Searby, Brown-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). Schlossberg believed that this transition model could serve as a systematic framework for analyzing the transition experience of individuals in order to formulate coping interventions (Anderson, et al., 2012). Preparation programs may not adequately prepare individuals for the emotional stress associated with this level of administrative leadership in education (Armstrong, 2010; Searby, Brown-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017).

Schlossberg's transition theory has been utilized effectively to assist individuals with adjusting to their respective transitions since the publication of the 1981 article, "A Model for Analyzing Human Adaption" (Schlossberg, 1981) by understanding the needs and coping strategies of individuals in transition. Since its publication, Schlossberg's transition theory had been developed into a framework that necessitates the understanding and utilization of coping mechanisms to mitigate adult transitions (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Simplistically put, the transition theory is a framework that allows researchers to better understand the process undergone by individuals as they move from reaction to adaption. Characteristics associated with Schlossberg's transition theory include explication of the trigger, the duration of the transition, the amount of control and the degree of change in the role experienced by the individual. Elements of an individual's environment (the internal support systems, institutional supports, and physical setting) attribute to the levels of stress experienced by the individual in transition. Individual psychosocial competence as impacted by their gender identification, age, health, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and previous experiences affect the resources that a person

may deem as beneficial or as a hinderance. This theory provides an adaptable structure which can be applied to the transitions of individuals to AP.

The three types of transitions in Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory are the anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent transitions which are categorized in three areas: individual, relationship, and work (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Created out of the need for a framework that facilitated an understanding of adults in transition, the transition theory co-authored by Schlossberg (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) aids in understanding the assets and liabilities that influence an individual's ability to cope with transition. The transition to AP is usually an anticipated transition which is characterized as being a major life event that is expected as it is a position that is applied for, and the candidate undergoes an interview process (Wilson, 2019).

Van Gennep, an early 1900s ethnographer, identified three stages of transition as separation, margin, and aggregation (Wilson, 2019). However, the commonality is that all transitions entail the requirement for redefinition of self and situation (Wilson, 2019). The margin phase is characterized by ambiguity and is the depth of the transition process. The concept of liminality further articulated by the cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner (1987), referred to the marginal stage of the transition process and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Individuals in liminal spaces experience ambiguity as they move through the transition towards redefinition into a stable and structured state (Wilson, 2019).

The professional and relational socialization process and challenges described by Kwan (2019) denotes the strength in literature given to the principalship and also discusses the importance of the socialization of APs in the process of their leadership development, as well. To

adequately accommodate and support the socialization and PD process for APs, there must first be an understanding of the challenges faced during initial phase of transition (Sparks, 2019).

Given the dearth of literature associated with APs, this study will provide a textured description of the experiences faced in the transition to the role of AP (Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017).

It is generally agreed upon in the literature that assuming a new position often leads to higher levels of anxiety and uncertainty (Kwan, 2019). While there has not been a wide use of Schlossberg's transition theory in the analysis of the experiences of employees, this theory provides a sound framework for informing how organizations address and manage change from within. Constructed around adult transitions, and applied in a variety of settings, this theory lends itself to the analysis of faculty who transition into AP roles. Schlossberg (1981) asserted that the analysis of individual's transition is an effective approach to understanding adult development. The transition to AP is a significant change indicated by the end of their teaching career and the embarkation on a new level of access, accountability, power, and authority. Armstrong (2012) indicates that this transition can create cognitive, emotional, and moral tensions. Wilson (2019) noted that an individual's "uncertainty comes from a lack of understanding, a gap in meaning, or a limited construct" to readily identify with a situation (p.844). The state of ambiguity also known as the liminal period signifies the margin; the space within which the transition actually occurs and is solidified for the individual when they cross over. Liminality in relation to an individual's transition allows for a more complete and comprehensive understanding of phenomenon by examining the threshold that implies the movement from one space to another (Wilson, 2019).

Beyond the trial by fire learning curve experienced by most AP during their first year of transition, there needs to be a sound body of knowledge that informs PD and provides resources to APs on what to expect in the transition phase. Shore and Walshaw (2018) described on the job training without support, systems of feedback, and in-depth leadership training as not effective in growing educational leaders. Schlossberg's 4S transition model provides a theoretical lens that fills the gap in the literature related to individuals who transition to leadership roles in education. Succession planning should be a practice utilized in order to create opportunities for seamless transitions and for the development of the talents of internal candidates that maximize the human capital resource (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Riddick, 2018; Sparks, 2017).

While most do not aspire to middle-level leadership, it is a quintessential role in the vertical promotions to principalship in public education, K-12. There are many reasons why a person transitions to AP: seeking advancement, increase in pay, and the desire to impact instruction on a wider scale. In public education, the leadership pipeline has traditionally flowed from department chair to more complex instructional leadership tasks and responsibilities. However, these experiences do not fully prepare the new administrator for the plethora of tasks that they must accomplish outside of instruction on a day-to-day basis. Hoppe (2003) explained that not only is it important for an organization to have an identification process but that organizations should also have a structured development plan as well.

With an emphasis on instructional leadership in education, a consistent focus has been placed on examining the challenges faced and preparation needed for the appropriate development and grooming of principals with sparse research involving the development and preparation of the AP (Armstrong, 2015; Sun & Shoho, 2017). However, as the frontline of administration, there is a need for a better understanding of the challenges and preparation needs

of the AP which is usually the first level of administrative leadership in education (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Woo, 2021). There is a gross lack of readiness that is apparent in new APs that needs to be addressed in order to adequately prepare individuals for this role (Furey, 2017; Kwan, 2019; Marshall & Davidson, 2016). The AP has often been described as the “forgotten man” (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). With a lack of preparation for study and coursework, coupled with a lack of professional development programs geared toward middle administration in education, the AP is often left to figure out things on their own (Kwan, 2019; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012).

Armstrong (2015) argues the need to understand how APs adapt to their social settings and make sense of their experiences. In this phenomenological study, Armstrong (2015) found that “the participants likened their early experience of administration to a ‘cultural shift’ that was characterized by a sense of dislocation and feelings of ambiguity” (p. 113). The transition to AP involves the encounter, adaption, and stabilization of socialization (Kwan, 2019; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Kwan (2019) also emphasizes the importance of organizational socialization as well as the establishment of a leader image which aligns to the shift in self.

Through the lens of Schlossberg’s transition theory, we can gain an understanding of the struggles faced by APs during their transition into this role; we can gain a deep and rich understanding of the characteristics of the AP socialization process. In Armstrong’s (2012) study, the author examined the perspectives of fifteen vice principals’ transition revealing that the transition was a complex process that provoked personal and professional changes with Kwan (2019) arguing that vice principals are generally professionally and psychologically not adequately prepared for the transition and makes note of professional and relational factors that novice APs may rely on as they adjust to their new roles. Adequate succession planning in an

organization provides the organization with an excess of available talent through PD provided to refine their repertoire of skills (Gonzalez, 2010).

Kwan's (2019) study applies the theory of socialization to the developmental stages of transition of vice principals. In the study, Kwan (2019) discusses the three stages of socialization: initiation, transition, and incorporation. These three stages previously used to study the vice principal transition align directly to the three stages of transition outlined by Schlossberg (1989), moving in, moving through, and moving out of a transition. In this phenomenological study, I will focus on the precipice of the transition experience that crystalized the moment in which an individual leaves the perception and thought process of their previous role and crosses over to and embodies the role of AP. The construction of a leadership identity is synonymous with the facilitation of an identity transition, the internalization and manifestation of a new identity (Moorosi, 2014).

The Four S's

A transition in itself is defined "as any event, or nonevent, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, 1995, p. 27). Adult development theory models typically begin on the spectrum with a lack of awareness and moving toward the final stages of internalization. Transformation is dependent on a combination of personal readiness, and prior social and educational experiences (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Educational theorists argue that educational reforms "must correspond to social change and reflect the needs of the environmental context" (Bien, 1982; Levin, 1974; Stiles & Robinson, 1973). An individual's perspective of the transition affects their account of their assets and liabilities making readiness an important factor in the AP transition.

Focusing on the transition itself provides a better understanding of the experience of the transition, as it relates to the transition to AP.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) identified four factors that affect an individual's capacity to cope with a transition. Note that coping is generally referred to as an individual's behavior as a response to protect themselves from being psychologically harmed (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003; Perlin & Schooler, 1978). The constructs that will be examined in this phenomenological study as it relates to Schlossberg's transition theory 4S's are situation, self, support, and strategies to the APs' perception of readiness and adaption to their role and duties. Individuals display both areas of strength and weakness as they adapt to transitions. This systematic process is often referred to as "taking stock" to determine an individual's resources during a transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito (1998).

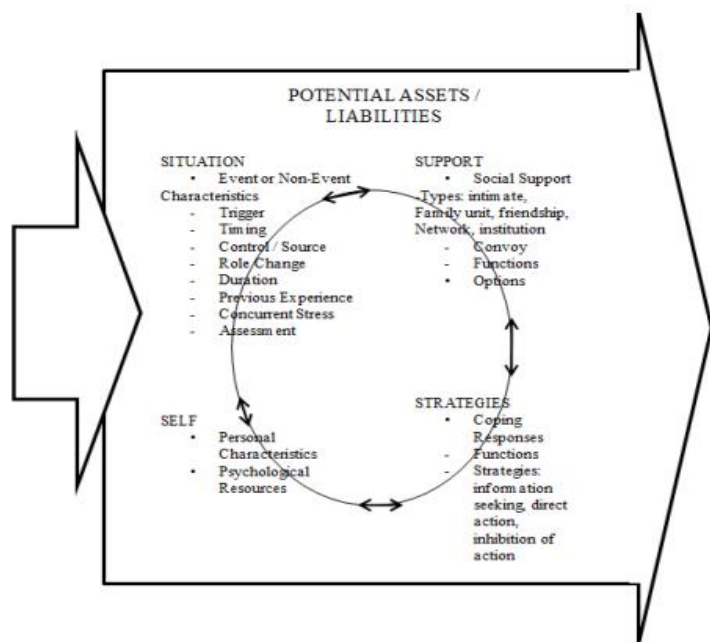


Figure 2. Schlossberg's Coping Resources - The Four S's, (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman., 1995, p. 48)

The situation is defined as the trigger, what precipitated the transition to AP? The situation is also elaborated upon by the timing of the transition, duration, role change, control, concurrent stress, and assessment of the event; the situation allows for a description of the circumstances encountered during the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). The self-factor considers the personal characteristics associated with the individual such as age, gender, stage of life, health, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as psychological resources such as ego, outlook, commitment, and values (Schlossberg, 1981). Support refers to the assets and liabilities of external resources to the individual in transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). Lastly, strategies refer to the coping skills employed by the individual in transition to control, mitigate, and prevent stressful situations (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 2008).

There are several other psychosocial factors that affect an individual's ability to cope with transition. A person's gender identification, to a degree, influences their ability to cope with certain stressors. Schlossberg (1981) asserts that biological age, psychological age, social age, and functional age are more important than a person's chronological age. This is also supported by the thematic findings of Moorosi (2014) concluded that a person's gender, race, background, and context play a role in the development of personal attributes and impacts an individual's transition and leadership development. As an individual ages for example, their experiences may cause changes in their perspective and satisfaction; stressors may be higher for younger individuals than for those who are older and/or more experienced (Schlossberg, 1981). The health status of an individual is also an area of consideration that attributes to their ability to cope; whether their health is perceived as a deficit or a resource. Race and ethnicity affect factors such as an individual's value orientation and cultural norms which may affect the individual's

perspective of and during the transition. During a transition, one's socioeconomic status may present restrictions on their income, health, energy, space, and ideas for coping (Schlossberg, 1981).

The experiences of the participants will be grouped and aligned to Schlossberg's (2011) 4S's system for coping with transitions which are situation, self, supports, and strategies. For the purpose of this phenomenological study, overarching needs and deficits are aligned to these categories of support and strategies; the categories of situation and self are not areas that can be controlled by the school or district. While there is not one strategy that can be applied to every situation, "the support available at the time of transition is critical..." along with the ability to "...flexibly use lots of [coping] strategies" appropriately (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160-161). The Transition Model further clarifies the transition experienced by individuals by identifying the degree of altered roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions, and where an individual is in the transition process.

Summary

Throughout this literature review, relevant literature on Schlossberg's transition theory, its application and relevancy to adult transition, and the history and role of the AP were examined. Schlossberg's transition theory offers a framework that facilitates an understanding of adult transition; it focuses on the transitions experienced by adults and the means by which they cope and adjust to circumstances (Schlossberg, 1990). One needs to first understand the meaning of a transition for a particular individual and/or subgroup, the context of the transition, as well as the impact of the transition in order to provide assistance and resources to individuals aligned to their specific needs. Barnett, Shoho, and Okilwa (2017) and Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani (2014) both contend that APs are an invaluable resource for schools and should be viewed as key

members of the administrative team working towards advancing the school's success. Marshall and Phelps Davidson (2016) propose the need for school districts to systematically provide supports to APs by "expanding and deepening their understandings of the hurdles and dilemmas they face" (p. 272). As the conceptual framework for this phenomenological study, Schlossberg's transition theory was selected because of its applicability to the population being studied, addressed internal and external transition variables, and framed transition as a process of individual meaning construction. The findings of this phenomenological study will inform the alignment of PD for new APs based on their identified needs, which in turn, can improve school climate, performance, and individual job satisfaction and effectiveness.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS). This phenomenological study explored the experiences of APs as it related to the transition phase through the lens of Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory in order to describe the lived experience of the participants deriving meaning and thematic units of understanding. In chapter three the procedures, research design, and analysis that were used to conduct this qualitative, phenomenological study are presented. A phenomenological study was used to examine the challenges faced during the transition phase to AP in order to provide a rich description of the challenges faced of newly minted APs. An outline of the design structure is explained providing the rationale for employing a phenomenological qualitative analysis for the purpose for gathering and conducting inductive and deductive data reasoning and analysis. The participants selected were prescreened using a purposeful random sampling in order to conduct an embedded analysis of the data. Employing a semi-structured, open-ended interview questions with participants allowed for data collection that subsequently aligned to Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory and 4S's coping strategies model.

Research Design

A qualitative study using a phenomenological approach with a pragmatic framework was employed to conduct this study. Qualitative research is rooted in various ways of making sense of and understanding the lived experiences of those being studied, and a transcendental phenomenological study aims at describing the common thread of the lived experiences around a

phenomenon of multiple individuals to create a textural and structural description of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative research method was most appropriate for this study as it allowed for data collection that was both inductive and deductive allowing for analysis that was used to weave together the voices of the participants to establish patterns and themes in the lived experiences of the transition phase of APs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) also noted that qualitative research design is aligned to gathering of data and analysis that involves the interactions between people and is more sensitive to individual differences. Phenomenological research calls for an objective, textural description of the phenomenon followed by reflection and analysis to derive general descriptions and universal meaning from the experience of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Suspending past experiences and knowledge in the phenomenological approach, allowed for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the induction/transition process (phenomenon) of APs at a more in-depth level in order to deduce descriptive, informative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell (2013), the textural descriptions examine the participants' experiences, the structural descriptions develop through how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Moustakas's (1994) data analysis method of transcendental-phenomenological reduction was the best suited methodologically for this study and was used to achieve a textural-structural synthesis and essence of the experience. To focus on the participants' experiences and utilize a true transcendental approach within a phenomenological design, the researcher bracketed out presuppositions and acknowledged them in the positionality section. By doing this, as the researcher, I opened myself up to new ideas and consciousness (Moustakas, 1994).

The nature of this phenomenological study involved the placement of inquiry, related to the experiences faced by the newly appointed AP, into the context of situation, time, and

experience allowing the participants to tell their own stories, and using a phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to draw meaning and understanding from these lived experiences for the purpose of providing a rich description of the AP transition phenomenon (Vagle, 2018). In phenomenology, there were two important concepts described by Husserl (1931): the concepts of noesis and noema. Ihde (1977) defined “noema is that which is experienced, the what of the experience, the object-correlate. Noesis is the way in which the what was experienced, the experiencing or act of experiencing, and the subject-correlate” are weaved together (p. 43). What was initially perceived in an experience is the noema; what is understood from the experience is the noesis. A transcendental phenomenology study focuses the study around rich, textural descriptions, structural descriptions, and an essence of the study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In the phenomenological study of the lived experience of the transition to AP, my qualitative, phenomenological study sought to align the participants’ experiences to Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory to deduce general descriptions, universal meaning, and thematic constructs.

With the application of Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory, the generalized descriptions and universal meanings were categorized in to the four factors of influence that determines a person’s ability to cope with transition: situation, self, support, and strategies. Using the Epoché, as the researcher, I objectively described the experiences of the participants in vivid, textural language in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon. This was followed by a structural analysis of the data in order to thematically connect descriptions, meaning, and themes. A theme is the experience of focus, the meaning, the point of something, an event, and experience; “theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand” (van Manen, 2014, p. 87).

Research Questions

The research question that guided this phenomenological study outlined the lived experiences of individuals transitioning to the role of AP in XCPS. This phenomenological study allowed for a more in-depth description of the AP transition experience in order to inform the body of literature surrounding APs. The central question and sub-questions allowed participants to shed light on their lived experiences as they transitioned to this integral role.

Central Research Question

What was the lived experience of individuals who transitioned to the position of assistant principal?

Sub Question One

What are the feelings experienced by individuals who transition to the role of AP?

Sub Question Two

What were the strategies employed by individuals who transitioned to the role of AP to cope with the transition process?

Sub Question Three

What were the resources used by individuals who transitioned to the role of AP to facilitate their transition process?

Setting and Participants

This research study was based on the interpretive tradition of qualitative research which situated the phenomenon in its natural setting. The setting for this phenomenological study was “Xander County Public Schools” (XCPS) (pseudonym), a school district east of metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia. XCPS is the only school district in this county with one city. The city has a population of approximately 15,195 comprised mainly of middle-income families (US Census

Bureau, 2010). The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) census information revealed the median age was thirty with 5,661 households, and 3,642 families residing in the city. The racial make-up of the city based on the 2010 census was 24.3% White, 55.8% Black, 1.4% Asian, 0.2% Native American, and 1.5% from two or more races. Those reporting that they were of Hispanic descent were 16.3% of the city's population. There are 3,910 households in the city with 34.2% of them having children under the age of eighteen with an average family size of 3.17.

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), October 1st, 2021, Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) count of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) for XCPS students lists 55.57% of students qualified for FRL. Of the 16,500 students in Xander County, 11.97% are students with disabilities, 4.66% are students with limited English proficiency, and 10% are students who are considered gifted and talented (Schoolnet,2022). The racial make-up of the student population is 68.13% Black, 8.27% White, 1.20% Asian, 0.33% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 4.19% multi-racial (Schoolnet, 2022). Students reported as Hispanic from any racial background comprised of 18.12% of the student population (Schoolnet, 2022).

The school district has approximately 900 full-time teachers and over 15,000 students (US. Census Bureau, 2010). The hierarchy of leadership at the school level is as follows from least to greatest: teacher, coach, administrative assistant (AA), assistant principal(s), and principal. Of the thirty-nine APs in the district, twenty-six are female and thirteen are male; 92% of the APs identify as Black and 8% as White. At the elementary school level, there are thirteen APs. The middle school level has nine APs, the high school level has twelve, and the alternative schools have five APs combined. This information is accessible through the district's public website.

Setting

There are twenty-three schools in XCPS which includes one career academy, one alternative school for behavior, one magnet school, one virtual academy, and one alternative school for high school credit recovery. The twenty-three schools consist of eleven elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and five non-traditional schools. There are approximately 15,500 students. Each student is provided with a laptop making it a one-to-one district from third through twelfth grade. First and second grade students are provided with class sets of tablets.

With a newly minted aspiring leaders program tiered with levels for aspiring leaders, induction phase APs, and induction phase principals, there was a need to understand the transition of APs in order to understand the challenges and overarching needs of this group. A phenomenological qualitative study allowed for participants' experiences to be obtained in order to gain an in-depth understanding of a real-world problem of the perceptions from APs in regard to their transition process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

Out of the thirty-nine APs in the district, twelve were selected for this qualitative, phenomenological study. All APs received an opportunity to participate through participation in a demographical screener. The potential participants were ranked based on fewest to most years in the position and whether they transitioned to the role of AP in XCPS. The consent of the selected participants was rendered for final approval in the study. Participants were interviewed virtually using Microsoft Teams, and the interviews were recorded for data collection purposes. Participants were asked not to enable their cameras during the interview, and their sessions were coded with pseudonyms in order to maintain their anonymity. For the interview, participants were asked to slate an hour of time in order to conduct the interview. Subsequent interview

sessions were not needed for data collection; all participants were able to complete the scripted questions with detailed answers in the allotted timeframe.

Participants

Participants for this study were current APs in XCPS. Given that Schlossberg's (2008) theoretical framework focuses specifically on individuals in transition, the selection of study participants focused on examining the experiences of individuals who have undergone the transition to the role of AP. Purposeful sampling was conducted, and potential participants were screened prior to selection in order to ensure that they meet the criteria for participation in the study. Purposeful criterion sampling was used to understand the different perspectives from a variety of persons who have experienced the transition phase from teacher role to AP (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This qualitative phenomenological study only examined the current APs in the XCPS serving in the respective role of assistant principal. No other districts were included in this study.

Participants were prescreened using a Microsoft Forms in order to gather information on qualified participants for the study (see Appendix B). Twelve participants were selected for participation in this study, and pseudonyms and codes were used to protect the identity of the participating individuals. Of the nineteen schools in XCPS, there are thirty-nine APs allocated to the various buildings. The number of participants aligns with Polkinghorne's (1988) and Creswell's and Poth's (2018) recommendations of 6-20 participants.

The participant sample pool was generated from the XCPS current APs. Of the thirty-nine APs in XCPS, a sample size of twelve participants was used or until data saturation was reached (Moustakas, 1994). This sample size of participants allowed for an in-depth and comprehensive narrative from each participant. Due to the sample size, the results may not be

representative of other APs in similar districts. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend at least six to twenty participants for phenomenological studies with the intent of studying a few sites in extensive detail. For this phenomenological study, twelve participants were used from the sample pool of candidates as the target or less if data saturation is reached prior to (Moustakas, 1994). This convenience sample ensured that participants are willing and able to share their experiences within the phenomenon. All participants were assigned a code and given a pseudonym for confidentiality.

Researcher Positionality

Bracketing is the process by which the researcher sets aside their beliefs, feelings, and perceptions by distancing themselves from their values to ensure non-judgmental and non-directive data collection in order to analyze the phenomenon from a non-biased perspective and known as the Epoché in phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). As a current AP serving in the same district as the participants, it was necessary for me to bracket my experiences in order to be more understanding and receptive to the persons being interviewed. Using the Epoché, as the researcher, I objectively described the experiences of the participants in vivid, textural language in order to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

As a key instrument in the research process, I observed the details of the AP transition process through in-depth, semi-structured interviews in order to provide a textural description of the phenomenon. A conversational space was created through the researcher's ability to interact with and respond appropriately in the interview process to guide the participants to answer questions. The researcher in a qualitative study research inherently influences the research process, and the researcher needed to be empathetic but also transparent concerning their values that may influence the research (Krostjens & Moser, 2017). Because the researcher was a key

instrument in the qualitative interview process, there were attributes that can potentially influence the data collection and analysis; this called for interviewer reflexivity (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Pillow, 2003). Living through the challenges, on-the-job training, and lack of available supports, as the researcher, I understood the need for well-developed and strategically aligned PD for preparedness and confidence in execution of the role of AP. I am a current AP in XCPS, and I would be interviewing my peers. This bias was tabled during the interview process of participants. In order to be transparent throughout the research process, the researcher provided notes on the process of collecting data, analysis and interpretation of data, and sampling process (Krostjens & Moser, 2018).

Interpretive Framework

This phenomenological study was conducted through a pragmatic lens that focuses on the beliefs and decisions that guided individuals through their transition to AP in real-life situations. Pragmatism focuses on what individuals know, do, and act on. The information gathered was aligned to Schlossberg's transition theory (2011) in order to better understand the transition process and experiences of individuals moving into the role of AP. This allowed for complex themes and hidden issues to be documented and analyzed with in-depth descriptions. The pragmatic framework allowed for an analysis of the actions, situations, and consequences of the AP transition process to be detailed. Thus, focusing on the problem being studied in order to categorize the major themes uncovered (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

A philosophical assumption is a theoretical framework utilized to collect, analyze, and interpret data; it establishes the researcher's background and positionality with which the study is

being approached. The philosophical assumption reveals the belief(s) employed by the researcher to arrive at decisions and conclusions in the research study.

Ontological Assumptions

Ontology is the researcher's belief on the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From a nominalist stance, reality is constructed based on each individual's experience, understanding, and interpretation of the world around us. The way that someone interprets their reality depends on their perspective. While the constructs of the situation may be the same, each person's perspective impacts their ability to learn, adapt, and benefit from the AP transition process. As the researcher, I believe that there is one universal reality in which we all function and perceptions shape our understanding throughout our life based on our experiences and exposure.

Epistemological Assumption

The relationship between the research and the researcher and determining what constituted knowledge was addressed in the epistemological assumptions of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I view knowledge as being informed by experience, situation, and timing. These factors affect how we perceive and understand what we believe to be true. The data collected in this phenomenological study was based on the descriptions of the transition experience of individuals from which themes were derived in order to inform what key terms, strategies, and experiences are important. Through the information provided by the participants in the interview process, the researcher synthesized the various perspectives in order to create generalized themes of experiences and strategies used through the AP transition process.

Axiological Assumptions

Serving as a current AP, the researcher employed bracketing to suspend judgement and assumptions throughout the study. However, as an AP, I value strong work ethic and problem-solving skills. In the role of AP, the researcher was empathetic and invested in the concerns of others who have made the same transition. However, each individual's experience was different and informs the transition process with a greater degree of description through the analysis of the varying nuances in the respective experiences.

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument conducting the interviews in this phenomenological study, the researcher's role was to collect the data objectively, synthesize the information, and provide a detailed account of thematic conclusions. As an AP, other APs were more relaxed and open to discussing the difficulties of their transition experience. Employing a semi-structured interview method allowed for the participants to provide in-depth descriptions of their journey through the AP transition process. Not serving in a position of authority over the participants, the researcher posed a minimal risk in the process of participants revealing their true reflections throughout the interview process.

Procedures

The process began with the design and submission of an IRB approval request to study human subjects. Prior to beginning data collection in XCPS, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A) was obtained. Site approval from the Director of Assessment and Accountability for XCPS was obtained (see Appendix C). Upon approval from the IRB and participating district, the principal of each school was contacted via email as part of the information and consent protocol. For the schools who agreed for the APs to participate

through principal acknowledgement and consent, a prescreening Microsoft Forms survey (see Appendix B) was sent out to the APs of that school.

If the requirements based on the prescreening survey were met, the researcher contacted the participants to arrange an individual interview session that was conducted using Microsoft Teams and was audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. A series of sub-questions was used to gather information from participants in order to conduct inductive and deductive analysis of the data. The central research question was What is the lived experience of individuals transition to the position of assistant principal?

The central research question was followed by these sub-questions: What are the experiences of individuals who transition to the role of AP? What are the strategies employed by individuals who transition to the role of AP to cope with the transition process? What are the resources used by individuals who transition to the role of AP to facilitate their transition process? Participants were informed in the prescreening survey, as well as verbally at the beginning of the individual interview that the interview will be recorded for data gathering and analysis purposes.

After completion of the individual interview sessions, participants were asked to participate in a focus group in order for the researcher to capitalize on the communication between the participants in order to generate rich, textural description of their crossover experiences. The focus group was asked questions focused on specific features of their transition process such as how, when, where, and why they became APs.

Once recorded, the audio recordings of the interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed and analyzed using open coding to form categories from the information about the phenomenon. The transcripts and audio recordings were numerically coded to protect the identity

of the individual participants, and the coding formulas were destroyed at the termination of the research process. Participants were given an opportunity to review their interview transcripts in order to ensure accuracy and provide clarification as necessary.

Thirdly, participants were asked to submit an image that was a cognitive representation of their transition process with a one paragraph caption explanation of how the image signified their transition to AP. The image could be a photo, drawing, clip art, or quote that was not copy written. The image represented something that was integral to the embodiment of the transition to the role AP and was significant to the participant as integral to their transition to the role of AP. The image was a downloaded clipart, a photo, a symbol, etc. of any situation, scenario, event, or item that described the individuals transition experience. This allowed for the researcher to gain a better understanding of the noesis of the experience; what was understood through the transition as important (Ihde, 1977).

Permissions

The site permission for this phenomenological study in XCPS was obtained through submission and approval of a request form to the Director of Research and Assessment for XCPS (see Appendix C). The IRB approval was confirmed on January 15, 2022 (see Appendix A). An informative email was sent to all XCPS principals to inform them of the research study being presented to their APs (see Appendix H). All participants completed a consent form in order to be considered for participation in this study.

Recruitment Plan

This phenomenological study sought to explore the transition experience of individuals to AP in XCPS. There was a total of thirty-nine APs in XCPS who were asked to complete the prescreening process. A criterion sampling method was used to select participants to ensure that

certain criterion of importance was met. The prescreening process asked the potential participants several criterion-based questions. The participants were asked to provide their first and last name, telephone number, and email as knowledge-based information. In the preliminary process, a statement of the purpose and voluntariness of the research was disclosed. Potential participants were asked whether their transition to AP occurred within XCPS in order to exclude participants who did not meet this criterion. The survey data was collected and analyzed. Participants were grouped in categories of those willing to participate in the study and those who did not wish to participate, further categorization grouped those who went through the transition phase in XCPS. Participants who were willing to participate on a voluntary basis and had undergone their AP transition phase in XCPS were contacted with a follow-up email containing the consent form for participation. Of the participants who met the criteria, twelve were selected for this study.

Data Collection Plan

The collection of data allowed for analysis for the purpose of providing a rich description of the induction/transition phase rendering their behavior, experiences, feelings, and perceptions as meaningful (Moser & Krostjens, 2018). The use of a phenomenological study was employed to understand the meanings developed by APs in the induction/transition phase. Semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were used to gather information about the participants' experiences, duties/responsibilities, support, and coping strategies. A prescreening survey using Microsoft Forms was used in order to determine participant eligibility in the study. Participants received an email invitation, completed a Microsoft Forms, and to participated in a live Microsoft Teams call with the researcher.

For interviewing, each qualifying participant needed to sign the consent form prior to the setting up of individual interviews. The participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview that the interview would be recorded. The recording was transcribed using Microsoft Teams transcription feature and numerically coded to remove the participant's identifiable information. The recordings and transcripts were stored electronically in a cloud-based storage site, OneDrive, in a password encrypted folder. Handwritten notes were stored in a locked filing cabinet for protection with only the researcher having access to the key. Backup files of the audio recordings, transcripts, and handwritten notes were stored on a password protected, encrypted flash drive which was stored in a separate locked file safe.

Individual Interviews

First requesting permission from each principal, the researcher reached out to each potential AP participant with a preliminary survey followed by a consent form and a one-on-one semi-structured interview for qualified participants (Hamm, 2017). Data was collected using semi-structured, open-ended interview questions with sub-questions aligned to Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory and 4S's coping strategies using the interview protocol established (see Appendix F). Prescreened participants who qualify for the study and agreed to participate in the study were contacted individually via email to with the electronically signed consent form; participants were asked to conduct a semi-structured interview that was audio recorded for data collection and analysis. All participants were verbally notified during the individual interview process that the interview would be recorded. The individual interviews should lasted 30-45 minutes each.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Introduce yourself to me as if it was the first time you were meeting me.

2. What is your position in the district?
3. Tell me about your work experience in education.
4. How has your own education and experiences served you in these roles?
5. Describe how you knew that you were ready to begin applying for assistant principal.

SQ1

6. Describe your experience in the interview process for assistant principal. SQ1
7. Describe your experience in being named assistant principal? SQ1
8. Describe your first few weeks as assistant principal? CRQ
9. Describe your prior experiences in leadership that assisted with your transition to assistant principal? SQ2
10. Describe three characteristics that capture the role of an assistant principal? CRQ
11. Describe why you find those characteristics exemplify an assistant principal? CRQ
12. Describe the skills that you felt confident in as you transitioned to AP? SQ3
13. What was the transition process to AP like for you? CRQ
14. Describe who or what facilitated the transition from your previous role to your role of AP? SQ3
15. Describe how you dealt with areas where you lacked understanding and/or competency? SQ3
16. What expected events occurred in your transition to AP? SQ1
17. What unexpected events occurred in your transition to AP? SQ1
18. What did you expect to occur that did not in your transition to AP? SQ1
19. What is one word that you would use to describe your transition experience to assistant principal? SQ1

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked the participant to close their eyes, relax, and think back to when they first transitioned to AP. This activity will last a total of 30 seconds. This activity allowed for the participant to focus on the experience of their transition to AP to set the stage for the interview questions (Moustakas, 1994). Questions one through four were designed to be non-threatening questions in order for the researcher to build rapport with the participant prior to the introduction of more personal questions. In order to establish a trusting relationship between researcher and participant, empathy was employed by the researcher to better understand the participant's perspective and experiences (Moser & Krostjens, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). These questions were based on prior information provided during the prescreening process and were adjusted as necessary for each participant. Question five really got to the crux of the research question which described the initial transition experienced by the individual participants and was followed by more in-depth questions (questions five through seven) to clarify and elaborate on the experience.

Questions five through seven allowed for the participant to explain their perception of readiness for assuming the position of AP based on their prior experiences and for a tabulation of assets possessed and available to the participant prior to and in the transition to AP. Question eight and nine were important to understanding the type of transition that occurred, whether it was an event or non-event, as well as to account for the lived experiences of the transition process (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Questions ten through fourteen aligned to Schlossberg's (1995) 4S's coping strategies. Participants' resources identified in their responses were aligned to the self, supports, strategies, and situation. Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2015), note the concern with instructing the assistant principals in order to better prepare them for the assumption of their role. Question fifteen dealt with the resources the participant utilized or felt

that were needed to facilitate their transition. Questions sixteen through eighteen delved into the individual's perception of the transition and question fourteen expounded further on the change in self. Question nineteen allowed for a summation of the participant's experience in the transition to the role of AP.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The interviews were setup using the participant's five-digit numeric code assigned by the researcher as the title of the meeting in Microsoft Teams. The Microsoft Teams meeting options were set so that the attendees could not turn on their cameras. This was done as a measure to protect the participant's identity. Participants were invited to the interview using the e-mail address provided on the prescreening survey. Once the participant joined the meeting, they were reminded that the session would be recorded prior to the start of the interview. Participants were asked not to turn on their video camera feed. The interview was conducted and recorded via the Microsoft Teams application and transcribed using the Microsoft Teams transcription feature. The recordings and transcripts were stored in a password-protected folder on the researcher's Microsoft OneDrive account. The transcripts were checked by the researcher to ensure accuracy and edited accordingly. Each interview was coded with the five-digit number assigned by the researcher. The transcripts were returned to participants to be checked for accuracy which was a part of the verification process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hamm, 2017). Transcripts were shared using a secured link from the researcher's Microsoft OneDrive. The transcripts were sent to each participant respectively via email, and participants were asked to check for errors and to add context or strike through content as necessary for clarity and understanding and to sign-off on the member check form (see Appendix E). Following the member-check verification process, transcripts were analyzed and independently coded by the researcher into units of meaning

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher horizontalized the interview responses and statements with the purpose of deriving meaning or meaning units that was then be clustered into categories (Moustakas, 1994). The categories were then categorized into thematic units and deconstructed into overarching implications and needs.

The one-word description response of the individual's transition experience for interview question number fourteen was inserted into a word cluster application (<https://www.mentimeter.com/>) which included all words provided and stressed words that were used multiple times with a larger font and closeness to the center. The word cluster created using the mentimeter application was later used in the focus group as a prompt to solicit feedback from the participants allowing for them to elaborate on their word choice or the word choice of others that resonated with their experience of transitioning to AP.

Document Analysis

Participants were asked to submit an image that exemplified their transition to AP (see Appendix D). The images were submitted to a Microsoft OneDrive link after the interview process. The images were coded with the participant's number which corresponded to their interview code as well. Participants could only upload an image through the link provided; they could not access other submissions uploaded in the Microsoft OneDrive folder. The participants were provided with the number to code their image submissions with based on their assigned interview code. If a participant submitted more than one image, the participant was be contacted to identify which one image best supported their representation of their transition process to AP. Participants who did not submit an image were contacted and asked if they are willing to submit an image prior to the focus group session.

The second document that was used for this phenomenological study was the image of the word cluster that was created using mentimeter which is an application that creates a word collage of words entered into the program, stressing words used multiple times. This word collage image was used during the focus group to solicit feedback from the participants based on which word in the cluster resonated with them the most and why. The feedback received during the focus group from the word collage was analyzed to draw out meaning and themes that were then aligned to the individual interview question responses and focus group question responses to construct a textured description of the AP transition process.

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

The image submitted by the participants was used during the focus group session to have participants write what they noticed, what they thought, and what they wondered about the images provided. Each participant's response was coded with their assigned interview code and analyzed in order to draw general themes that captured the essence of the phenomenon in order to reveal structure, meaning, configuration, coherence, and the circumstances of their occurrences and clustering. The researcher analyzed the images and responses from a perspective of the Epoché in order to draw knowledge and meaning. Husserl (1931) defines reflection as the process by which experiences are streamlined in order to arrive at essential descriptions and universal meaning (p. 219).

The word cluster collage was used to identify themes in the choice word selected by participants during the individual interview process. The word collage was also be used in the focus group allowing for the researcher to gain deeper insight in the meaning of the word choice to participants in the study.

Focus Groups

The focus group allowed the researcher an opportunity to converse with multiple participants simultaneously and allowed for exploration of complex, multi-layered concepts to be explored. The participants that were interviewed were invited to the focus group where they were asked to contribute to a whole group, open discussion format. The focus group participants were encouraged to share their opinions and experiences in regard to their transition to AP. The focus group session occurred on Microsoft Teams and were recorded for document analysis and verification. Microsoft Teams transcription feature was utilized to produce the transcripts from the focus group. The researcher served as the mediator and took notes on the discussion and opinions of the group members. The focus group session lasted approximately one hour and thirty minutes. Focus groups allowed for the researcher to draw out meaningful insights and opinions.

Focus Group Questions

The following focus group questions contributed to the central question and sub-questions respectively.

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if it were the first-time meeting and also state how many years of experience you have in education and how many years you have serving as an AP.
2. Type in the chat one word that describes your transition to AP. SQ1
3. Describe the most challenging experience of your transition to AP. SQ1
4. What were some expected challenges in your transition to AP? SQ2
5. What were some unexpected challenges in your transition to AP? SQ2
6. What methods did you use to cope with these challenges? SQ2

7. What strategies for coping do you recommend for individuals seeking to transition to AP? SQ2
8. What skills did you already have that assisted with your transition to AP? SQ3
9. What skills should individuals develop prior to seeking a transition to AP? SQ3
10. Take five minutes to review the word wall provided in the shared image and be prepared to discuss which word typifies your experience of your transition to AP. CRQ
11. Take ten minutes to look over the images in the shared PowerPoint and write feedback on as many as you feel inclined to. You can provide feedback on what you notice, what you think, or what you wonder. CRQ

Prior to the beginning of the focus group questioning and activities, the researcher reviewed the focus group protocol with the participants (see Appendix G). The first two questions focused on the transition experience of the individual participant. These questions were used to bridge connections between the group's discussion and the individual interviews to create a layered description of the experiences of the AP transition. Question two also provided the researcher with an opportunity to cross-check the one-word responses provided in the individual interviews with the one-word provided in the focus group session to see if their responses differed significantly. Question three aligned to the coping strategies and resources employed by the participants to mitigate the transition process. Questions four and five allowed the researcher to gauge the type of transition based on Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory. Questions six, seven, and eight accounted for the coping strategies employed by the participants to navigate their transition to AP. Question nine allows for the participants to respond to what strategies and resources would be most desirable in the transition to AP. Question ten gave the participants an opportunity to elaborate on the one-word responses provided in the individual

interview session. Lastly, question eleven gave the participants an opportunity to provide feedback on the images provided from the participants which gave insight and depth their perspective of the transition process.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The discourse from the focus group participants were transcribed from the recording using the transcription feature in Microsoft Teams, and an in-depth analysis by the researcher was conducted. The notes taken during the meeting were compiled into thematic groups for a more generalized understanding of the participants' experience. The transcriptions were coded to align to the generalized themes to provide rich descriptive examples. The one-word responses provided by the participants of the focus group to question number two were entered into a word wall application (<https://www.mentimeter.com/>) and were compared with the one-word responses from the individual interview session to draw correlations and/or differences in the individual responses versus the focus group responses.

The responses stemming from questions three through five were categorized using Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory for types of transition. The coping strategies identified in questions six through eight were aligned to one of the 4S's of Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory: situation, self, support, or strategies. Responses to question nine from the focus group session were used to categorize the desired resources of individuals who transitioned to the role of AP. The descriptions provided to question ten were used to add depth to the one-word selections of the participants. The feedback responses to the images in question eleven were analyzed for thematic correspondence and coded to align to the overall generalized themes from the individual interview sessions and the focus group session.

Data Synthesis

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with APs in XCPS, and an embedded analysis approach was used in this phenomenological study to identify specific aspects of the case study in alignment with Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory and 4S's coping strategies in order to identify common themes. All data was initially read without mark-ups in order for the researcher to gain understanding and context of the overall big picture prior to the textual analytical process (Hamm, 2017). Initially, all statements had equal value as part of the horizontalization process (Moustakas, 1994). On the second and subsequent readings, the data was prepared, organized, and clustered into units of meanings using a coding schema. The codes deriving units of meaning from the transcribed interview were thematically categorized (Moustakas, 1994). The thematically categorized units of meaning were then analyzed using a descriptive comparative analysis. Notes will be taken describing the relationship among variables, and how they were grouped in order to link logical connections of the evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Reviewing the transcripts of each participant, the researcher aligned the responses to into four categories: situation, self, support, and strategies with two sub-headings in each category: strength or liability. A textural description was developed from the recurring themes identified across cases. A theme is the experience of focus, the meaning, the point of something, an event, and experience; "theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand" (van Manen, 2015, p. 87). The data was texturally described in order to draw a correlation between the essence of the transition for each participant to conclude a unifying theme. The individual narratives were compared to derive meaning and to align experiences to Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory. Through the semi-structured interviews with the participants, the researcher

examined the narratives to derive detailed descriptions of the experiences in order to critically scrutinize the data to correlate the structure, meaning, configuration, coherence, and the circumstances of their occurrence and clustering. At the beginning of the interview, the I started with a social conversation of a short meditative activity to create a relaxed environment followed by the researcher guiding the participant to focus on the AP transition experience. In the collection of data, I removed prejudice and presumptions which in phenomenological research is known as the concept of Epoché which “requires the elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

Trustworthiness

Epoché derives from the Greek word meaning to abstain from judgement. In phenomenological study, the Epoché is the “freedom from suppositions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The Epoché is not the denial of facts, but the ability set aside predispositions and prejudices in order to objectively reflect on the data in order to derive new knowledge. In the Epoché all experiences have equal value; we do not take any position on the matter. The interpretation of the data was grounded in the findings and thematic units of meaning found in the data gathering process. Notes on the research process, reflective thoughts, sampling, materials used, emergence of findings, and data management were well-documented throughout the process and detailed within this research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Krostjens & Moser, 2018). The credibility of the study was established through prolonged engagement, sufficient spent becoming familiar with each participant’s experience, and through member-check of the participants verifying accuracy of content and context. Using Creswell’s (2013) validation strategies, the study used triangulation, rich, thick descriptions, and member checking.

Credibility

Credibility is the validation process in qualitative research (Krostjens & Moser, 2018). Once the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and thematically coded, participants were given a copy of the transcript in order to ensure accuracy and to provide any additional information or clarification. Credibility was also established through prolonged engagement where the researcher invested sufficient time to become familiar with the situation and participants (Krostjens & Moser, 2018). Follow-up questions were asked, and participants were encouraged to provide examples to support their statements.

Transferability

While this phenomenological study may not be generalizable to other school districts or groups, its conceptual framework is analytically generalizable. The understanding of how APs experience the transition phase can be better understood through the application of Schlossberg's transition theory through the process of contextual interpretation. By providing rich descriptions of the lived of the AP transition phase, the experience, perceptions, and behavior can be transferred to other AP transition phase candidates (Krostjens & Moser, 2017). The interview questions can be transferred to studies centered on the transition process of APs in order to gain a deeper understanding of self, situation, and supports as it relates to the individual experiences of the participants in relation to their perceptions of the transition process. This research process can be duplicated with multiple sites across districts and with multiple schools within one district.

Dependability

Using a complete transcription of each participant's interview, the researcher first reads the experience in its entirety to understand the event then conducts a more thorough reading

which involves listing and grouping of expressions, clustering, and thematizing of invariant constituents. The transcripts will be verified by the participants and against the audio recordings. Clarifying questions will be addressed during the interview process and focus group in order to ensure accuracy of statements and responses.

Confirmability

The confirmability of findings was accomplished through participant verification. Transcripts were provided to each participant along with the identified themes for clarification and verification. Participants were afforded an opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy of the information's reflection of the participant's perspectives and experiences. All participants were asked the same questions and as necessary, follow-up questions in order to maintain the dependability of the data gathering process.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the study and purpose of the study in order to gain willful participation and consent. Prior to collecting data, IRB approval was obtained to ensure ethical guidelines were outlined and reviewed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout this research study, anonymity was safe-guarded and maintained. Participants and audio recorded files of their interviews were numbered, and pseudonyms were used throughout the research findings process. The identifying information aligned to the coding of participants' personal identifiable information were destroyed appropriately at the conclusion of the research and data gathering process (Krostjens & Moser, 2017). None of the information shared during the interview process were shared with other participants or persons in order to protect participants' confidentiality.

Summary

By pursuing research that gives voice to APs, we were able to consider the challenges they faced during the induction/transition phase in order to better inform and develop PD aligned to their needs. Through the use of a semi-structured interview process with prescreened, qualified participants, data was gathered through prolonged engagement with each participant. The transcribed audio recordings of each interview were validated through member-check with the participant's given the ability to verify the accuracy of the information content and context. The data was coded for thematic aggregation for analysis. The data gathered provided the researcher with rich, verbose information of the experiences undergone through their induction/transition process to AP. This information allowed for an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon and allow for rich descriptions of the self, situation, supports, and strategies employed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS). The textural description of the transition experience of APs in XCPS was aligned to Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory to determine themes and thread common experiences. The central research question was: What is the lived experience of individuals who transition to the position of assistant principal? The sub-questions were: Sub-Question 1: What are the experiences of individuals who transition to the role of AP? Sub-Question 2: What are the strategies employed by individuals who transition to the role of AP to cope with the transition process? Sub-Question 3: What are the resources used by individuals who transition to the role of AP to facilitate their transition process? This chapter begins with a brief description of the 12 participants. Participants were initially recruited through convenience sampling and then snowball sampling. Data from the participants were collected via semi-structured interviews, focus group session, and captioned image submission. Participants, all of whom were given pseudonyms, are described in the following sections. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the results and analysis of the research data and significant findings.

Participants

This study's participants were all individuals who transitioned to the role of AP in XCPS. The participants' age groups ranged from 30-39 to 50-59 with various preparatory experiences ranging from Department Chair and Athletic Director to District-level Coaching. The participants had an average of twenty years of experience in education. All participants were of African American descent with 8% male and 92% female participation. Twelve participants from

XCPS were interviewed which represents 30% of AP pool in XCPS which is comprised of 90% African Americans and 66% females. Of the twelve participants, four served in primary school level, and eight served at the secondary school level which aligns to the district's one-third primary school and two-thirds secondary school split respectively.

Table 1

Participant Demographics Table

Participant	Age	Years	Level	Female	Male	Race
Angel	43	18	Secondary	Female		African American
Brenda	55	31	Secondary	Female		African American
Charles	40	14	Secondary		Male	African American
Daisy	46	20	Secondary	Female		African American
Erica	41	19	Secondary	Female		African American
Faith	43	17	Secondary	Female		African American
Gloria	41	19	Primary	Female		African American
Heaven	40	17	Primary	Female		African American
India	52	29	Primary	Female		African American
Jamie	37	15	Secondary	Female		African American
Kathy	42	20	Secondary	Female		African American
Laura	36	15	Secondary	Female		African American

Angel

Angel is a 40–49-year-old, African American, female AP with a PhD. She works full-time at the secondary school level and is passionate about teacher professional development. Angel transitioned to the role of AP in 2018 after her previous role as a Continuous Improvement Coach at the district level. Starting as a teacher in the 2004-2005 school year, Angel taught in two different districts for a combined eleven years prior to transitioning to the district level in 2015 and served at the district level for three years before transitioning to the role of AP. Angel noted key persons that encouraged her transition to AP which gave her confidence in her ability to serve successfully in that role.

Her previous experience as a Continuous Improvement Coach prepared her for the role of AP. Angel noted that as a Coach, she “setup supports for [her] teachers and identified ways that [she] could have other people support [her]teachers.” Angel learned how to work with adult learners “to encourage or support adults as learners. Those are things that [she does] now as an assistant principal working with teachers.” Throughout her experiences prior to being an AP, Angel noticed that “the work [she] was doing as a Coach traveling around the district was making a positive impact.” Conducting “long get-to-know-you sessions” was impactful in facilitating Angel’s transition to her new role as AP; “it was a new situation.” Taking everything “one day at a time” helped Angel and her team to put things into perspective.

Brenda

Brenda is an African American female in the 50-59 age group who transitioned to the role of AP in 2012, and she has currently served as an AP at the secondary level for the past ten years. Brenda holds a Specialist degree in Educational Leadership. She started as a teacher 1989 and has taught at the high school and middle school levels prior to becoming an Administrative Assistant (AA) for two years. This was followed by two years as an Instructional Coach at the district level. Brenda noted in her interview that due to her transition to AP after the onset of the school year, there were opportunities that she felt she missed such as initial introductions and start-up training sessions.

She noted that she “was not necessarily introduced to the entire staff...so, [she] just kind of showed up one day and no one really knew who [she] was.” Brenda then spent the next couple of weeks “becoming acclimated.” Brenda noted that three characteristics of an AP should be “compassion, the purpose to serve others, and being a doer as opposed to a talker.” APs,

according to Brenda should “lead by example...so [she] would ask anyone to do anything that [she is] not willing to do.”

Charles

Charles transitioned to the role of AP in January of 2020 at the secondary level after twelve years in education. He is a 40-49 year old African American male with three kids and a Specialist degree in Tier I Educational Leadership. He has taught math at the high school and middle school level in two states with ten years in the current district where he transitioned to AP. Charles describes his first few weeks in the role of AP as exciting with a slight feeling of “angst” because a desire to do a “good job.” Reflecting on the transition, Charles describes the experience as a “blur;” “it was just so much to take in all of the responsibilities.” However, he does describe his experience prior to AP that assisted in his assimilation to the role, such as Athletic Director, Department Chair, and AA.

Charles states that he is “still trying to learn and grow in the traditional sense by being on campus and learning staff.” Knowing the content and conducting observations, “trying to learn as much as [he] can”, Charles noted that there “just doesn’t seem to be enough time to learn everything that is needed...[he] had not gotten a chance to really learn understand.”

Daisy

Earning her doctorate degree, Daisy transitioned to the role of AP in 2021. Daisy is an African American female between 40-49 with twenty years in education, and this is her second year in the role of AP. Previously serving as an Instructional Coach and AA, Daisy was confident in her ability provide professional development in the area of instruction to build teacher capacity and student achievement in relation to the school’s strategic plan goals. Once serving several years as an Instructional Coach and AA, Daisy “gained experience addressing

disciplinary issues, as well as administrative issues, and providing support for teachers” which assisted in her expectations of and transition to the role of AP.

“Becoming an AP at the onset of the pandemic was unconventional” as described by Daisy. She had to quickly learn how to lead in a virtual environment. “Seeking assistance from the principal and other APs” proved beneficial in problem solving areas that were unknown. In becoming an AP, Daisy expected to address areas such as “discipline, instructional support, classroom management, school-wide goals, and monitoring of progress.” The most notable unexpected learning curve was being virtual during the pandemic. However, Daisy remained “flexible, knowing that things could change unexpectedly.”

Erica

Erica is an African American female in the age group of 40-49. She earned her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction and transitioned to the role of AP in 2018. “Born to lead,” Erica describes her journey to AP as a calling to build teachers’ capacity in instruction, pedagogy, and classroom management. Wanting to give back to her community, she started her teaching career at the high school that she graduated from in Florida. She has taught in all three grade bands, elementary, middle, and high school, and she has served as a district level Instructional Coach. Not being “well-received at first,” Erica worked hard to change the structures, protocols, procedures, and practices at school for which she was named AP. This task took time and required collegial relationships that ultimately allowed her to grow and excel in this position. She notes that “being optimistic regardless of what it appears” is a characteristic that has allowed for her to make through tough times in her transition to AP.

Faith

Faith transitioned to the role of AP at the secondary level in 2020. She is an African American female in the 40-49 age group with seventeen years of experience in education. With a degree in leadership, sixteen years in teaching, and experience in various leadership roles, Faith felt “well-prepared for [her] transition to AP.” Previously serving as Department Chair, Grade-Level Chair, and Charter School Board Vice President, Faith expressed that she “had insight in what runs a school.” Her professional development opportunities throughout her teaching career also aided in her skills that mitigated and positively affected her transition to AP.

Gloria

Gloria is an African American in the 40-49 age group with nineteen years working in education with seven years as an AP. She knew that she was ready to transition to the role of AP when she saw success as an Instructional Coach. She worked “very closely with [her] AP at the time, and [she] started being asked to more and more tasks that related to what an assistant principal would do.” So, she began “to build her confidence because [she] had already acquired so much knowledge about the AP role.” Confident and excited, Gloria “knew [she] would do a good job.” New to the district, she worked to build a relationship with the principal to “make sure that [the] school was successful.” Gloria believes that being grounded in pedagogy is a key component to being a successful AP, noting that as an AP, “you have to know what you’re looking for and what the expectations are and the qualities of a good teacher.”

Heaven

Having worked in the district seven years in XCPS and seventeen years in education, Heaven is currently serving as an AP at the primary level. An African American female in the 40-49 age group, Heaven is in her fourth year as an AP. She served ten years in a previous

district as an elementary school teacher prior to transitioning to XCPS. She has also served as a PTA Vice President, PTA President, Grade-Level Chair, Department Chair, and Instructional Coach. These previous roles allowed for her to work closely with the current APs at the time and gain insight into the multiple facets engrossed in the position of AP. She was encouraged by other leaders to pursue what she calls “the natural progression” to leadership. As an Instructional Coach supporting teachers and their professional development, Heaven then knew she wanted to support teachers and have a bigger impact in doing so.

India

With twenty-nine years in education, India began her role as an AP in XCPS in 2020. An African American female in the 50-59 age range, India served in several leadership positions that “prepared [her] to better be an AP.” In her prior experiences, India “learned what it [meant] to be a teacher...pedagogy...[and] how to better support adults.” Noting “perseverance, faith in God, organization, and patience” as key characteristics of being a successful AP, India was excited for the transition to AP but was met with challenges several challenges in her transition. She did not receive the anticipated support and opportunities that she expected during her transition.

Jamie

Jamie has a Specialist degree in Educational Leadership with fifteen years in education. An African American female in the 30-37 age range, Jamie transitioned to AP in 2021 for the 21-22 school year. Having served in previous roles as Grade-Level Chair, Teacher Mentor, and Lead Mentor for the school, Jamie was encouraged to pursue leadership by her peers and supervisors. Although Jamie describes her transition as “very rough...[and] very stressful,” she adjusted quickly. She was confident in her abilities to be a(n) “good listener...empathetic leader...and flexible.” These characteristics mitigated her “rocky” transition.

Kathy

With twenty years in the field of education, Kathy has served as an AP since 2015 after serving as an Instructional Coach and Department Chair. An African American female in the 40-49 age range, Kathy was encouraged and motivated by her peers to pursue the AP role. She felt that schools needed “administrators who were strong in the content area but who also supported the teachers.” Kathy was excited and anxious about her transition to AP; it was “fast-paced” with “highs and lows.” Seeking support from veteran APs, Kathy had to learn and adapt quickly to the daily operations of the building and her new duties and responsibilities. She shadowed her peers and mimicked their strategies in her own situations to build her capacity.

Laura

Laura has fifteen years in education with three and a half years as an AP. She is an African American female in the 30-39 age range. Transitioning into the role in the middle of year, she “had to quickly learn the ins and outs of [her] new role.” Collaborating with her peers, she gained insight and guidance on how to address the specifics of her new duties and responsibilities. With a Specialist in Educational Leadership and having served as Grade-Level Chair, Department Chair, and Digital Learning Specialist, Laura’s education and previous roles prepared her for some of the tasks that she had to execute as an AP. She understood andragogy and alignment of professional learning for teachers based on data-informed decisions. However, the transition still presented its challenges. Some days, Laura stated that she questioned, “what did I get myself into.” Wanting to do a good job, she persevered by building relationships with key persons that served as her mentor throughout her transition.

Results

This phenomenological study was guided by one central research question and three sub-questions to describe the transition experiences of APs in XCPS. Participants completed an interview, focus group session, and submitted a captioned image. The salient themes of their shared experiences, as they relate to the sub research questions are presented in this section. The themes that emerged included meaningful past experiences, situational learning, and changed relationships.

Meaningful Past Experiences

The APs interviewed for this phenomenological study all expressed having exposure, through previous experiences, to some of the tasks that they were expected to execute in their AP role. These past experiences and levels of readiness varied from one AP to the next leading to an array of expertise and readiness levels for various tasks, but each participant expressed a level of confidence in their ability to adapt, grow, and perform under pressure. The past experiences that expressed by the participants answers sub question two which seeks to answer what the strategies are employed by individuals who transitioned to the role of AP. This self-efficacy in their skills and ability positively influenced the participants' ability to adapt to their new role of AP.

In the utilization of prior experiences as a strategy to mitigate their transition, participants' responses also responded to the central research question which elaborates on the lived experiences of individuals who transitioned to the position of AP. Angel described how she took her new role to AP "one day at a time," collaborating and asking questions along to way to gain insight on dealing with and meeting the expectations of her AP duties and responsibilities. Kathy described her first two weeks as "really, really fast paced." Kathy also described that "having those experiences of not only working with just students and teachers, but working with

teachers across different grade bands, middle school and high school” assisted her transition to AP.

The meaningful past experiences for APs came from previous roles that they served in which offered points of exposure to administrative tasks and duties, but none noted professional development that offered adequate learning opportunities that prepared them for their duties and responsibilities as an AP. Erica described that her “effectiveness in the classroom...and previous instructional experience” positively influenced her level of confidence to do the job of an AP. Faith’s experience as Grade-Level Chair, Department Chair, GLISI participant, and Charter School Board Vice-President provided her with “insight on what runs the school” which equipped her for the duties and responsibilities she was presented with when she transitioned to AP.

With fifteen years in education, Jamie described her transition as “rough,” but she was prepared to deal with the transition because of her previous experience “working closely with administration in her previous roles serving as Grade-Level Chair, Teacher Mentor, and PBIS Lead Teacher.” These previous positions offered her insight on how to lead initiatives and with having crucial conversations with adults and students regarding expectations and growth. Charles also described how his previous role as an Administrative Assistant provided him with an “inside look at what administrators do” on a day-to-day basis. He wanted to have positive “imprint on the youth” with his interactions, and he began to take on leadership roles in his third year of teaching that allowed him to build his capacity to transition to the role of AP.

The past experiences of the participants did provide context for their transition, but it did not eliminate the feeling of angst experienced by the participants when learning that they were selected for the role of AP. Sub question one sought to elaborate on the APs feelings during their

transition to the role of AP. Kathy describes her initial emotions as excitement and anxiety. She even questioned, “what did I sign myself up for.” The phase of excitement and anxiety was quickly followed by a phase of learning.

Situational Learning

Often not afforded opportunities to refine their skills and expertise, APs are typically assigned duties and responsibilities that they must *figure-out* how to execute with little-to-no formal guidance; a trial by fire process (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). The theme of situational learning aligns to sub question three which looked at the resources used by individuals who transitioned to the role of AP to facilitate their transition process. Charles describes his transition experience to AP as being “thrown into the fire” with the expectation that you “do a good job” in the process of learning. The “rollercoaster” experience described by Kathy is similar to the ups and downs described by ten of the twelve participants as they navigated their new role as AP. Kathy noted that she “was very excited that [she] was named the assistant principal, but then [she] was also a little anxious;... what did I sign myself up for.” Heaven viewed her transition to AP as transformational. Confident in her abilities to work collaboratively, she expressed that she had great mentorship throughout her transition that assisted her learning and adaption of her new duties and responsibilities. India noted that she “just didn't have the support. The kind of support that [she] desired to have;... it was not ideal for a novice administrator.”

With a new principal and being new to the district, Gloria described her opportunities for learning by collaborating with other APs in her grade-band. There were several people that were instrumental in facilitating her transition process from the Assistant Superintendent, the Principal, and her colleagues. She describes these persons as being “very supportive,” and they

coached her through her transitions. Gloria indicated a feeling of gratefulness in her transition experience to AP which was supported by her collage word submission (see Appendix J).

The emotional journey of self-discovery is also associated with the participants' experiences in situational learning which also responds to the central research question of the lived experiences of individuals who transitioned to the position of AP. Erica relied on her "tenacity, perseverance, and optimism" to guide her through the many situations presented in her transition. Charles describes his AP transition as "overwhelming at times...a kind of recalibration of yourself; you are thrown into the fire...and expected to do a good job despite whatever levels of support that you may be getting." Participants who expressed a "smooth" transition to AP also described having a "very supportive principal" and high levels and frequency of supports from the district and peers.

In reflections on the images during the focus group indicated a strong participant relation to the image of the tornado, rollercoaster, multitasking, and faith (see Appendix J). The feelings described by the participants allowed for a description of the feelings and lived experiences of the individual participants as they transitioned to the role of AP. Charles described his transition to AP as a blur and submitted the image of the tornado indicating that it was a challenging, fast-paced transition. He also agreed that the transition presented a rollercoaster of emotions, tasks, and duties that he had to navigate, but that staying true to yourself helped him to remain grounded during his transition.

Relationships

Answering the central research question regarding the lived experiences of individuals who transitioned to the position of AP, the APs interviewed each described an experience of credibility, logic, and emotion, respectively, as playing a part in their execution of their new role.

Confident in her “ability to build rapport” and to “interact well with people,” Brenda noted that despite the learning curve of the new position as AP, she felt confident in her abilities to learn, adapt, and assimilate. The sentiment of quickly building new relationships and acclimating the role of AP was expressed by all twelve participants during their interview.

One common lived experience of the participants which aligned to the central research question was the restructuring of relationships. Becoming familiar with their new role, all twelve participants focused initially on building and reframing their relationships with the staff, their peers, and supervisors. India describes her transition to AP as challenging and noted that she was not “afforded an opportunity to build a relationship with the principal at the time” because that person was leaving. With that experience, India had to rely on her newly formed relationships with the staff as their supervisor, and the relationships forged with her peers for support. The participants described their main avenue of support as the relationships built with their supervisors and peers. The novice APs relied on veteran APs for guidance and feedback. Kathy described a key part of her transition was building a relationship with the existing APs in the building using her observations to transfer into her own leadership style.

During their transition process, the participants also described how they quickly learned to function as a team, in unison. The relationships built with the teachers were significant to solidifying their rapport and changed status as supervisor. Kathy described her desire to go into administration was driven by a “need for administrators who were strong in the content, but who also supported the teachers;” a role that she felt comfortable and confident in. Having a positive impact on teachers as a Coach, Angel also describes her high level of comfort with supporting teachers.

Transitioning to AP in the same building where she once served as a teacher, Angel “had conversations with friends to setup relationship boundaries” that aligned to her new role. Differently from Angel’s experience, Brenda was new to the district when she transitioned to AP and had to build rapport with her staff noting that it is “important to lead by example.” Brenda also described having a good relationship with her principal which provided her with support and learning opportunities during her transition.

During the focus group, India also discussed the importance of building relationships with clear boundaries to define the supervisory role of the AP. Jamie and Charles agreed that their transition involved conversations regarding their change in role. The reflection of the focus group indicated a connection to the image of multitasking (see Appendix J) which was indicative of all the tasks that they now were expected to execute as an AP.

Outlier Data and Findings

Of the twelve participants, two expressed AP transition experiences that did not directly align to the experiences of the other ten participants. However, the outlier findings do align to Schlossberg’s (2011) transition theory which aims at easing the transition process for adults. These findings are instances where the supports and strategies employed improved the situation and resources of the individuals involved.

Outlier Finding #1

Angel described her transition as “smooth,” mitigated by supports from her peers, building principal, and district personnel. This same supportive environment was expressed by Gloria who described her transition as “seamless.” Gloria noted that there were a lot of opportunities for her to “collaborate and converse with her principal” that allowed for her to receive the guidance she needed. Having strong communication skills and confidence in her

ability to build relationships, Angel noted that there was nothing in the AP transition phase that she experienced that was unexpected. Angel's and Gloria's submitted images also indicated a feeling of bliss and flexibility (see Appendix J). In both the lived AP transition experiences for Angel and Gloria, the adequate support and strategies employed provided for an improved situation through the availability of resources.

Research Question Responses

The interview questions, captioned images, and focus group responses were analyzed to ascertain the threaded commonalities of the experiences of individuals who transition to the role of AP. The focus of the research questions aims to provide a description of the situational conditions and personal characteristics of persons who have transitioned to the role of AP. Situation and self, according to Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory, are two of four major factors that influence a person's ability to cope with the transition

Central Research Question

What was the lived experience of individuals who transition to the position of assistant principal? The themes of situational learning and relationships both answer the central research question to inform on the lived experiences of individuals who transition to the position of AP. The participants' perspective is that the transition to the role of AP is exciting, exhilarating, and simultaneously, as Charles described, a trial by fire process. Driven by a determination to do a good job, the participants describe the need to learn quickly, build communalistic relationship with the staff and their peers, and maintain their composure under pressure. Erica, Gloria, and Angel all discussed an intrinsic level of confidence and work ethic that allowed them to deal with the transition to AP.

The previous experiences of the participants in which they demonstrated success allowed

for them to better cope with the transition to AP as they had executed similar tasks and roles that were being asked of them as AP. This had positive implications on their ability to cope with their new transition to AP. However, previous experiences alone did not fully prepare the participants for their transition to AP. There was a great deal of work put into building relationships, setting boundaries, and having crucial conversation to establish their new position as supervisor, as AP.

Sub Question 1

What are the feelings of individuals who transition to the role of AP? Angel describes the first few weeks on the job as “fast-paced, exciting,” and filled with relationship building sessions. The feelings of excitement and a level of nervousness was also expressed by several of the participants. The meaningful past experiences of the participants played a significant role in their perspectives and feelings regarding their transition to AP. Building relationships was a universal experience by the participants as they set out to understand their building’s climate and culture in order to make informed decisions about their next steps in leading the staff and students.

Changes in relationships was also described by the participants as an inevitable result of their transition to AP. The participants described feeling overwhelmed at times, but they were determined to perform well in their position. Kathy explained that she didn’t realize that APs put “out a lot of fires throughout the day” resulting in a lot of mediation with students, adults, and parents. Participants understood that their new role of AP required them to conduct evaluations have crucial conversations. This expectation was expressed as an anticipated experience by all participants. The participants also all described a learning curve that presented itself as a challenge because there was typically no one right answer or method for addressing the various situations that would arise from day-to-day.

Sub Question 2

What are the strategies employed by individuals who transition to the role of AP to cope with the transition process? The participants discussed their relationships as support factors that aided in their transition. In the themes of meaningful past experiences and relationships, the participants described previous work-related experiences and important relationship structures and reframing that served to mitigate some areas of unknown or difficulty for the participant during their transition to AP. Both the themes of meaningful past experiences and relationships answers sub question two as these themes served as strategies for APs during their transition to the role. For each participant, there were other individuals, such as supervisors and colleagues, who encouraged their transition to AP. Described as a rollercoaster by Kathy with highs and lows, the participants described one salient strategy for coping with their transition was seeking advice and guidance from their principal and other APs.

As part of establishing boundaries for their new role as AP, participants also described their efforts to build relationships with the staff and restructure previously existing relationships to align to their new expectations. Relationships with the staff allowed for teamwork and delegation of tasks to facilitate the execution of their duties. Building relationships with students and parents facilitated conversations that were necessary to inform stakeholders on academic and behavioral performance and expectations. Gloria also described her “relationship with God as impactful” to maintaining her composure during her Transition to AP.

Relying on their past experiences also aided as a secondary strategy for moving through the participants’ transition to AP which informed the theme of meaningful past experiences. With a variety of past experiences from Instructional Coach to Athletic Director, the participants all discussed areas in which their previous experiences served in their new duties and

responsibilities. Leveraging their experiences with guidance from their peers facilitated the participants' transition process.

Sub Question 3

What are the resources used by individuals who transition to the role of AP to facilitate their transition process? With an intrinsic drive to be successful, the participants employed communication with other APs and their principal as their main resource for facilitating their transition which informed the theme of relationships. Building relationships with the staff and key members in the district were also indicated as key a resource in the transition process that provided APs with support. Their own ability to be resourceful, such as being a problem-solver, motivated, and hardworking proved itself as a resource as well. The resourcefulness of the AP in transition informed the theme of situational learning.

While professional development sessions were offered throughout the year by the district, the participants viewed these more as informational sessions rather than learning sessions that aided their understanding of or ability to execute their duties. In the theme of meaningful past experiences, a description of how APs leveraged their prior knowledge and experiences with the newly gained information to serve them in navigating their new duties and responsibilities. The participants' worked to quickly gain insight on the school, such as the strategic plan, performance data, demographic data, and district expectations to align their efforts accordingly and to be well-versed in the work that needed to be done. The use of performance and perception data as a resource allowed for the participants to gain confidence in their conversations and recommendations for improvement and maintenance of the existing body of work.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the research results depicting the situational conditions, personal characteristics, social support, and coping strategies of the twelve participants' transition experiences to AP. The results were presented and correlated to the central research question of what is the lived experience of individuals who transition to the position of AP. An analysis of the data collected via individual interviews, a focus group session, and submitted captioned images indicated that there were personal, social, and organizational factors that affected the experiences of this group of participants.

The participants of this phenomenological study all shared a desire to be apt APs that positively impacted their respective schools. There were expected and unexpected events of their transition that affected their experiences. Salient events impacting their transition to AP were themed by meaningful past experiences, situational learning, and relationships. Meaningful past experiences were outlined by the roles the participants served prior to becoming an AP that provided insight into some of the duties and responsibilities that they were tasked with once they became an AP. All participants described moments of uncertainty where they had to respond to situations in which they lacked formal training. Building relationships was key to the participants' transition experience as they navigated their new role, duties, and responsibilities.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS). Specifically, this study provided insight on the situational conditions, personal characteristics, social support, and coping strategies of the participants' transition to AP. Prior research indicated that APs were the "forgotten leaders" in building-level administration creating a gap in the literature regarding the transition experience of APs (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004). There was an existing gap in the literature regarding the transition of APs. This research study attempted to fill this gap by exploring the lived transition experience of APs using Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory as a framework for analyzing and categorizing the participants' experiences. A review of the findings, discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research are discussed in the following sections.

Discussion

The narratives of the participants' AP transition experience confirmed that "even though administrative passages are often embedded within the normal practices of schooling, they destabilize new administrators' inner psyches and influence their beliefs and actions in myriad ways" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 121). While excited to be named AP, all participants expressed a level of angst in the transition phase of moving into the role of AP. The participants were largely motivated by a desire to support teachers and pedagogical practices. Moving through the transition to AP, participants discussed three key factors that facilitated their transition: meaningful prior experiences, situational learning, and leveraging of relationships.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of the findings led to three overarching themes: meaningful prior experiences, situational learning, and relationships as it relates to the Central Research Question, “what is the lived experience of individuals who transition to the position of assistant principal.” Sub-question One asked for the experiences of individuals who transitioned to the role of AP which informed the three thematic themes that were developed from the participants’ responses which were coded and thematically unified. Uniquely charged with various job duties, the participants expressed similar strategies employed to meet the challenge of transition to AP. Employing the strategy of relationship building and bonding, the participants were able to meet the demands of their AP job requirements, which informed Sub-question Two, what were the strategies employed by individuals who transition to the role of AP to cope with the transition process. Sub-question Three allowed for descriptive feedback on the resources used by individuals who transition to the role of AP to facilitate their transition process.

Meaningful prior experiences provided participants with insight into some of the tasks and duties that they were assigned in their new role as AP. The participants’ prior experiences varied from school-level to district-level leadership and support positions. While different, all 12 participants noted that their experiences were vital in aiding in their transition to AP. Charting unknown territory, the APs all expressed a steep learning curve upon embarking on their new responsibilities and duties as an AP. Kwan (2019) noted that “the undertaking of administrative duties poses challenges to novice VPs who generally have not been adequately prepared, either professionally or psychologically, for the transition from teaching to administrative roles” (p. 395). Participant, Erika stated that, “I won't say [the transition was] overwhelming even though it

was.” This feeling of being overwhelmed led to on-the-job learning and quick assimilation strategies in order for the participants to successfully transition.

All of the participants expressed scenarios of on-the-job learning in the moment. This naturally created a heightened level of stress necessitating the need for individuals to maintain their composure under pressure. Relationships also aided the participants throughout the transition phase as a support factor that provided participants with guidance, a sounding-board, and feedback. Viewed as a positive role change, the participants expressed a level of control over their transition process through the employment of strategies such as skill building and bonding.

Leaning on the expertise of others and on their own tenacity to succeed, new APs reached out to their peers and supervisors for guidance while simultaneously working on building meaningful relationships with those they supervised and with their peers. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011), point out that when moving into a new position, individuals must familiarize themselves with their new roles, relationships, and routines; institutions should implement orientation programs to assist individuals in knowing what is expected of them. Once they “know the ropes,” they move from the “moving in” phase to the “moving through” phase (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 57). Eventually, as the individual fully assimilates into their new role of AP, they experience the “moving out” phase as stability is re-established.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The three overarching themes that emerged in the analysis of the data were meaningful prior experiences, situational learning, and relationships. Considered as an anticipated transition based on Schlossberg’s (2011) transition theory, the participants all interviewed for and sought after the position of AP, triggering the transition. When named AP, the participants reflected a

consistent emotion of excitement. This speaks to the participants' perception of the transition to the role of AP. When moving into a new situation, the transition is categorized by an individual becoming "familiar with new roles, relationships, and routines" (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011, p. 57). The four major sets of factors that influence an individual's ability to cope with their transition as outlined by Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) are situation, self, support, and strategies. An individual's assets and liabilities in each of these categories are determinants for evaluating the transition experience.

Situation. The participants each indicated a strong desire to move into administration, and that this transition was encouraged by their mentors, peers, and supervisors, respectively. The encouragement of others and their desire to have a greater impact triggered the participants to apply for the role of AP. Within their realm of control, the participants each indicated personal factors that they desired to accomplish prior to embarking into administration, such as sufficient time in the classroom, working in teacher-leader, and district-level roles indicating a positive, anticipated change (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). These experiences informed the participants' perspective of the change.

The permanent change in role was facilitated by the participants' previous experiences and setting new boundaries in building relationships. Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) clarified that there is no single factor necessary for coping with change, and that resources and strategies for coping with a transition can change over time leading to individuals turning their deficits into assets. Angel expressed that was "there was a lot of on-the-job training. Situational training." While the participants' level of comfort and skills can be viewed as a liability, their grit to persevere and utilize strategies to increase their abilities served as an asset.

Self. Moving into the role of AP, the participants' prior experiences aided in their acquisition of new routines that were now a part of their duty and responsibility. The leveraging of their knowledge and skills from prior roles and experiences provided the participants familiarity with the tasks that they were now to execute as an AP providing for a key strategy employed to facilitate their transition. The participants' confidence in Self, played a significant role in the strategies employed by each AP. The individual's perception of the complexity of the transition required the facilitation of resources specific to their individual needs. Taking control by employing strategies such as seeking guidance and building meaningful relationships allows for the individual to integrate the transition into his or her life.

Of the 12 participants, 12 were African American, 11 were female, 9 served at the secondary level, and all had over 10 years of experience with an average of 19.5 years (see Table 1). Considering the transition to AP as positive and timely, demographic characteristics did not play a major role in the transition phase for APs as it relates to the Self influence factor. However, psychological resources did impact each participants' transition; noting an intrinsic motivation to do well demonstrated the participants' values and commitment to the transition process and assimilation. This aligns to Sub-question Two indicating the strategies employed to cope with the transition to AP.

When asked about the characteristics needed to assimilate into the position of AP, the participants presented similar responses such as grit, hard work, compassion, organization, and confidence. While there is no one key strategy for coping with transitions, the participants utilized their intrinsic motivation and skills to level their acquisition of the new skills, duties, and responsibilities. Charles noted that as a new AP, he "had to recalibrate in order to meet the demands of his new position.

Support. Participants indicated that the change in role reflected duties, responsibilities, and situations that required them to in the moment know how to address which is indicated by situational learning. Participants expressed a notion that they thought there would be more training associated with the transition to AP; Angel noted that she expected more “umbrella-like training” that covered common concepts, duties, and tasks. “Adults in transition are often confused and in need of assistance” (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 37).

Of the twelve participants, two of them indicated a smooth transition which was characterized by strong supports for the development of these participants’ skills and knowledge which aided in their transition. These supports included shadowing of veteran APs, mentoring from the principal or veteran AP, an intrinsic ability to be resourceful, professional learning opportunities, and having peer and supervisor support.

Ten of the twelve participants indicated deficits in one or more areas of support which prolonged some of the challenges they faced throughout their transition phase. However, the data indicated relationships with key stakeholders as key to the support they received during their transition to AP. Faith also played a role in maintaining mental stability and staying grounded during the transition for APs. Networks of key stakeholders aided in the acquisition of knowledge, leveraging of skills, and receiving of feedback during the transition for APs. Only two participants indicated that they received sufficient support from PD. This sentiment was not universally expressed and was noted as a deficit for the remaining ten participants in this study.

Strategies. The strategies employed by the participants in this phenomenological study were thematically themed as leveraging of meaningful past experiences, situational learning, and building relationships with key stakeholders. The unpredictability and stress of this upward move to AP is captured by Armstrong (2010a) who noted that the transition was “characterized by

unexpected crossroads and boundaries and requires them to make critical pathway choices” (p. 54). In order to cope with these changes, APs leveraged their past experiences which brought a level of familiarity to the new requirements of their new role as AP. Coupled with situational learning, APs expressed a strong ability to problem-solve which was accomplished through relationships with key stakeholders and peers.

Daisy expressed that when she needed guidance or assistance, she would seek the “assistance of [her] principle or one of [her] colleagues.” Daisy noted three characteristics of an AP as approachable, highly visible, and dedicated. This allowed for her to leverage her areas of liabilities in order to meet the demands of the job. Being flexible was also expressed as a key factor in coping with the transition as it relates to situational learning. Faith stated that she felt supported by her team because due to the pandemic, they “were all learning together.”

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from the current research study reveal several implications for supports needed for the AP transition. These implications are discussed in the following sections along with recommendations for policy and practice. Indicating a need for structured PD, the implications for policy and practice are training and development requirements for individuals desiring to transition to AP and for those within their first year of their AP transition. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011) expressed that institutions should implement orientation programs to assist individuals in knowing what is expected of them. Once they “know the ropes,” they move from the “moving in” phase to the “moving through” phase (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 57).

Implications for Policy

School districts should consider policies outlining minimum training requirements for individuals desiring to become an AP layered with required professional development program to support APs in their first year of transition. Structured supports play a pivotal role in the success of the AP transition. Armstrong (2010a) notes that “high-stakes accountability requires evidence of improved student learning outcomes that cannot be achieved without effective leadership” (p. 397). There is a call for the reconceptualization of the AP role to make the position more “salient to matters of instruction and learning” (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017, p. 398). Assuming diverse roles, APs need structured support through professional development to enhance the overall school’s performance through effective and efficient leadership.

Implications for Practice

The research findings of the current study suggested that effective, timely, and meaningful PD is desired and would positively impact the transition of individuals to the role of AP. While beneficial for all individuals who transition to the role of AP, it cannot be assumed that these factors will be present in all school districts. Because of this, it is important for school districts to direct efforts and resources to this area. One way that this can be accomplished is through a stratified leadership training and development program.

Individuals desiring to become an AP should undergo a leadership training program that provides them with exposure to some of the common tasks and duties of this role. This can be accomplished through simulations, shadowing, and informational sessions. Newly minted APs should undergo leadership development geared towards clarifying and building upon leveraging the available resources to meet the expectations of their tasks and supervisory role.

Kwan (2019) also recommends that mentorship as a viable strategy of support that facilitates the AP transition. The participants' responses indicated that they unofficially sought mentorship and guidance to support their transition to AP. Demonstrating that mentorship opportunities may be needed to assist APs in their transition.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The application of Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory allowed for the lived experiences of the participants in this phenomenological study on the transition experiences of APs allowed for the strengths and liabilities of this experience to be categorized using the 4S model, situation, self, strategies, and support. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011) emphasize the implementation of orientation programs to assist individuals in their transition; this allows for individuals to know what is expected of them throughout the process. The need for well-aligned PD was identified by the participants in this study as an area need in the moving in and moving through phases of their transition process. In the first phase, "moving in", of the transition theory, Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) identified some common needs such as the individual becoming "...familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations" (p. 15). As a self-renewal process (Bien, 1982) in the moving in and moving through phases (Schlossberg, 1995), the theme of relationships identified changes in the participants' relationships with their peers and other members of the organization which also aligns to the self category of the 4S model for taking stock of strengths and liabilities.

The participants' responses to the interview and focus group questions aligned to sub question two and sub question three were thematically categorized into the three themes that emerged: meaningful past experiences, situational learning, and relationships which aligned to the strategies and support categories of the 4S model. The theme of meaningful past experiences

in the moving through phase of their transition served as a strategy for coping with their new AP duties and responsibilities. Feelings of being overwhelmed were expressed by the participants in the moving through phase which does coincide with the research. Wilson (2019) the moving through phase as a period in the transition process where individuals can feel “vulnerable overwhelmed, confused, disoriented, and detached”; it is a time where structure is lost but there is maximum potential for change (p. 843). Hence the need for the participants to restructure their relationships with their peers and other key stakeholders which is a salient theme that emerged from the findings. The establishment and reframing/restructuring of relationships is another strategy that was employed by APs during their transition in order to situate and structure their new identity/role.

Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory allowed for the lived experiences of the participants to be stocked into categories which facilitated the analysis process and the development of themes that were salient using the 4S model. This transition theory provided a viable construct for the researcher to deconstruct the phenomenon; Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory served “as a vehicle for analyzing human adaption to transition” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 2). Individuals adapt differently to change. However, in order to understand and respond to the transition process and experiences, Schlossberg’s (1981) transition theory not only address the organizational socialization which is focused on by Kwan (2019), but also addresses professional socialization which is characterized by the skills, knowledge, and disposition needed for the execution of an individual’s duties and responsibilities.

By focusing on APs, being systematic about the provided support and expounding on and understanding the hurdles, challenges, and dilemmas faced, schools and districts “will have a

more robust leadership pipeline and more satisfied and effective APs” (Marshall & Phelps Davidson 2016, p. 272). The successful coping strategies employed by the APs in this research study align to the recommended support provided in the literature of mentorship and PD (Owleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012; Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014; Superville, 2021). Those who are astute “will seek sponsor-protégé relationships with role models” (Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016, p. 273). These relationships with key stakeholders allowed the AP task-learning opportunities which facilitated the acquisition of skills and knowledge needed to execute the new responsibilities that the APs were required to complete.

Each participant described an array of various duties and assignments that they were tasked with which aligns to the multitude and variety of expectations described in the literature (Gordon, Taylor-Backor, & Croteau, 2017; Hawkins, 1975). The variations in the job description, duties, and assignments of the participants led to feelings of being overwhelmed and pushed the AP into situational learning experiences in order to gain the necessary skills to execute their responsibilities (Armstrong, 2015; Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017; Bayar, 2020; Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014). Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2011) emphasize the implementation of a comprehensive orientation program which would assist individuals in their transition; this would allow for individuals to know what is expected of them throughout the process.

The results of this phenomenological research study also identified self-efficacy as a characteristic of individuals who transitioned to the role of AP. The participants’ perception of their ability provided an avenue for the resourcefulness which ultimately assisted their coping strategies in moving through their transition process (Bandura, 2001; Chingara & Heystek,

2019). Taking stock of their strengths and liabilities informed critical areas of PD needed to provide viable development opportunities and experiences for APs.

This research study provided a supportive foundation for creating clear outlines for the AP job description, listing specific duties and tasks with descriptive documents outlining those duties with a uniform alignment across schools and districts. This is also supported by the literature which consistently note the ambiguity in AP roles, duties, and responsibilities (Armstrong, 2012; Kwan, 2019; Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016).

Some of the challenges faced by APs during their transition can be attributed to an inadequate job description and ambiguity in practices and processes (Morgan, 2018; Oleszewski et al., 2012). There is no consensus in the literature about what the AP's job duties and responsibilities should entail outside of a brief description of instructional leadership appearing in the mid-1980s to mid-1990s (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Superville, 2021). The ambiguity in practices, process, and AP duties were also concerns expressed by the participants in this phenomenological study leading to feelings of being overwhelmed which aligns to the research indicating high levels of anxiety and stress experienced by administrators in the absence of clearly defined roles, expectations, and support (Bayer, 2020; Shore & Walshaw, 2018). One participant in Armstrong's (2012) study notes that "the job does not afford you a way to ease in slowly, and so it is a baptism by fire" (p. 410). APs are in need of well-structured, customized mentoring and PD to aid in the development of their job-embedded training (Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017; Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014).

PD programs and systematic support structures aligned to AP development must evolve to focus on the current needs of the AP (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). The trial by fire experience of on-the-job training does not provide APs with a formal support system for development

(Armstrong, 2010b; Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; May & Lee, 2015; Superville, 2021). Sparks (2017) and Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Riddick (2018) identifies a commonality of high-performing educational systems is their creation of a cohesive, structured support system at varying levels of leadership that identifies and develops talents at varying levels within the organization.

Limitations and Delimitations

This phenomenological study was delimited to APs in XCPS who transitioned to the role of AP within the district. This group was selected because there was a gap in the literature discussing the lived experiences of the AP transition (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, 2017). The school district selected is demographically similar to its neighboring metropolitan school districts.

With these delimitations stated, there were several limitations of the current study. One limitation of the study was the variation in ethnicity and gender of the participants. The spread of the participants only included one male and only persons of the African American subgroup. The findings would be more generalized if various districts were incorporated to include a wide range of ethnicities and balanced gender representation to provide more confidence that the results are not specific to one district.

A second limitation of this study was the focus of the AP's transition experiences during their first year which allowed for descriptions aligned to moving in and moving through the transition as described by Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory but did not reach the phase of moving out of the AP transition. The moving out phase can serve a critical role in informing the PD that was most impactful in the AP transition. However, there is a great deal of literature

associated with the principal transition which informs the transition phase of individuals such as APs to the next level in their career which is often to the position of principal.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research based on the findings of this research study. The AP as instructional leader has been neglected in educational leadership literature and research (Armstrong, 2010; Barnett, Shoho, & Okilwa, 2017; Marshall & Phelps Davidson, 2016; Sun & Shoho, 2017). The first recommendation is that future studies should focus on the first three years of the AP transition to gain insight into the three phases of transition as described by Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory: moving in, moving through, and moving out of the transition to capture the full experience of this phenomenon. Additionally, expanding the participant pool to include participants from several school districts that closely represent the demographic and subgroup spread would allow for a more comprehensive alignment of themes based on the varied experiences of participants during their AP transition. Lastly, future research studies can specifically explore the role personal characteristics (role of Self) on an individual's ability to cope with and assimilate to the role of AP. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001; Chingara & Heystek, 2019) had a positive influence on the participants' ability to be resourceful and adapt to their change in role. Understanding the individual's characteristics that leads to self-efficacy can prove to be a viable study in taking stock of trends that facilitate the AP transition process.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological study gave voice to the persistence experiences of individuals who transition to the role of AP. This was achieved through individual interviews, captioned image submissions, and a focus group session which allowed participants to describe their lived experiences as it related to the situational conditions, personal characteristics, social

supports, and coping strategies of their AP transition which were then aligned to the 4S factors of influence as outlined by Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory. Results of this study indicate that assets and liabilities in supports such as mentoring, professional development, relationships, and intrinsic coping abilities greatly impact an individual's duration of the AP transition in relation to coping and assimilation to the role of AP. Participants of this phenomenological study revealed that personal factors such as tenacity, patience, problem-solving, and perseverance were important personal characteristics that aided their transition process.

These results add to the body of research in describing the AP transition. The findings indicate that APs transitioning into the role should leverage their prior experiences, build relationships key stakeholders, and be able to learn, adapt, and assimilate quickly. The findings also indicate a need for PD that is timely, meaningful, and universal to aid in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and protocols. The results of this phenomenological study further implore districts to provide support to APs by revisiting their professional development plans to include support services, PD, training, and resources. Lastly, the findings of this research study further suggest that APs assimilate more quickly to their new role when the appropriate support services are in place and these supports are perceived as adequate, timely, and meaningful.

References

- Akkerman, S. F., & Meijer, P. C. (2011). A dialogical approach to conceptualizing teacher identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*(2), 308-319.
doi:10.1016/j.tate.2010.08.013
- Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., & Schlossberg, N. K. (2012). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world*, 4th Ed. New York: Springer Publishing Company, LLC.
- Armstrong, D. E. (2010a). *Administrative passages: Navigating the transition from teacher to assistant principal*. Netherlands: Springer Netherlands.
- Armstrong, D. E. (2010b). Rites of passage: Coercion, compliance, and complicity in the socialization of new vice principals. *Teachers' College Record, 112*(3), 685-722.
- Armstrong, D. E. (2012). Connecting personal change and organizational passage in the transition from teacher to vice principal. *Journal of School Leadership, 22*(3), 398-424.
doi:10.1177/105268461202200301
- Armstrong, D. E. (2015). Listening to voices at the educational frontline: New administrators' experiences of the transition from teacher to vice-principal. *Brock Education Journal, 24*(2) doi:10.26522/brocked.v24i2.429
- Austin, B. D., & Brown, H. L. (1970). Report of the assistant principalship: The study of the secondary school principalship. *NASSP Bulletin, 3*.
- Baker, A. M., Guerra, P. L., & Baray, S. (2018). Assistant principal dilemma: Walking the line between compliance and leadership. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 21*(1), 66-77. doi:10.1177/1555458917723952

- Bandura, A (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215.
- Bandura, A (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review Psychology*, 52, 1-26.
- Bayar, A. (2020). School administrators' perceptions and experiences with isolation and social loneliness in the workplace. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 44(2), 3-27.
- Blackburn, B., & Williamson, R. (2009). The characteristics of a rigorous classroom. *Instructional Leader*, 22(6).
- Barnett, B. G., Shoho, A. R., & Okilwa, N. S. A. (2017). Assistant principals' perceptions of meaningful mentoring and professional development opportunities. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 6(4), 285-301.
- Barnett, B. G., Shoho, A. R., & Oleszewski, A. M. (2012). The job realities of beginning and experienced assistant principals. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 11(1), 92–128.
- Bien, Y. (1982). A league of co-operating schools creates an educational and communal 'self-renewal process'. *Research in Education*, 27(1), 23-39.
- doi:10.1177/003452378202700103
- Buchanan, B., II. 1974. "The Socialization of Managers in Work Organizations." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 18(4): 533–546.
- Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Calabrese, R. & Tucker-Ladd, P. R. (1991). The principal and assistant principal: A mentoring relationship. *NASSP Bulletin*, 75, 64-74.

- Carroll, T., & Creamer, D. (2004). The significance of an orientation program: Addressing the problem of retention. Retrieved on 4-28-08, from <http://filebox.vt.edu/users/tramaine/Theory%20to%20Practice%20paper%20index.htm>
- Chick, N. & Meleis, A. I. (1986). "Transitions: A nursing concern", in Chinn, P.L. (Ed.), *Nursing Research Methodology: Issues and Implementation*. Aspen, Rockville, MD, p. 237-257.
- Chickering, A.W. & Schlossberg, N. K. (1995). *Getting the most out of college*. Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Chingara, R., & Heystek, J. (2019). Leadership as agency in the context of structure. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 33(7), 1596-1609. doi:10.1108/IJEM-01-2018-0028
- Cohen, R., & Schechter, C. (2019). New assistant principals' metaphors of their relationships with their principals at the stage of entering the role. *Planning & Changing*, 49(1-2), 62.
- Colmer, K. (2017). Collaborative professional learning: Contributing to the growth of leadership, professional identity and professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(3), 436-449. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2017.1308167
- Cranston, N., Tromans, C., & Reugebrink, M. (2004). Forgotten leaders: What do we know about the deputy principalship in secondary schools? *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 7(3), 225-242. doi:10.1080/13603120410001694531
- Crawford, M. (2013). *Administrative passages; Navigating the transition from teacher to assistant principal*. New York: Routledge. doi:10.1080/00131911.2011.634201
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Third ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Creswell, J., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Decision: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications
- David, G. B., Johnson, A. D., & Alexander, D. L. (2018). Internal vs external promotion: Advancement of teachers to administrators. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 56(1), 33-49.
- Ellis, C. & Berger, L. (2003) Their story/my story/our story: including the researcher's experience in interview research. In: Holstein JA and Gubrium JF (eds) *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 467–493.
- Erol, İ., Karsantık, İ., Recep Tayyip Erdogan University, & Namık Kemal University. (2021). Difficulties and achievements throughout career stages: Vice principals' perspectives. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 17(3), 185-201.
- Evans, N.J., Forney, D.S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). Schlossberg's transition theory. *Student development in college: Theory, research and practice*. (2 Ed.). (212-226). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Furey, C. (2017). Transition to middle leadership: Developing leaders of learning: The journey at Ruyton girls' school. *Independence*, 42(2), 44-47.
- Fusarelli, B. C., Fusarelli, L. D., & Riddick, F. (2018). Planning for the future: Leadership development and succession planning in education. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 13(3), 286-313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775118771671>
- Georgia Department of Education. (2020). *School Climate*. GaDOE. <https://www.gadoe.org/schoolsafetyclimate/Pages/School-Climate.aspx>

- Gonzales, M. M., & Roberts, M. (2022). The impact of a franchise model school framework on the leadership development of assistant principals. *Journal of School Leadership*, 32(5), 537-561.
- Gonzalez, C. (2010). Leadership, diversity and succession planning in academia. research & occasional papers series: CSHE 8.10. *Center for Studies in Higher Education*. University of California, Berkeley, 771 Evans Hall #4650, Berkeley, CA 94720-4650. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/762466674?accountid=14048>
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K., & Anderson, M. L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory*. (3rd ed.). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Gordon, S. P., Taylor-Backor, K., & Croteau, S. (2017). Recommended capacities for educational leadership: Pre-reform era scholars versus reform-era scholars versus national standards. *NASSP Bulletin*, 101(3), 188-214. doi:10.1177/0192636517726856
- Graham, D. (2015). Collegial administrative support: Reflections from a principal at an at-risk public high school. *Principal's Research Review*, 10(3), 1.
- Grissom, J. A., Loeb, S., & Mitani, H. (2015). Principal time management skills: Explaining patterns in principals' time use, job stress, and perceived effectiveness. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(6), 773-793. doi:10.1108/JEA-09-2014-0117
- Gurley, D. K., Anast-May, L., & Lee, H. T. (2015). Developing instructional leaders through assistant principals' academy: A partnership for success. *Education and Urban Society*, 47(2), 207-241. doi:10.1177/0013124513495272
- Gurley, D. K., Anast-May, L., O'Neal, M., Lee, H. T., & Shores, M. (2015). Instructional leadership behaviors in principals who attended an assistant principals' academy: Self-reports and teacher perceptions. *Planning and Changing*, 46(1/2), 127.

- Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49, 125–142
- Hamm, L. (2017). Becoming a transformative vice-principal in culturally and linguistically rich diverse schools: Pace yourself – It’s a marathon, not a sprint. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 6(2), 82-98. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-11-2016-0072
- Hattie, J. (2015). *High-Impact leadership*. *Educational Leadership*, 72(5), 36-40.
- Hattie, J. (2018). Does school and college leadership really matter? *Cognition Education*, 1-2.
- Hausman, C., Nebeker, A., McCreary, J., & Donaldson, G. (2002). The worklife of the assistant principal. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40(2), 136-157.
doi:10.1108/09578230210421105
- Hayes, S. D., & Burkett, J. R. (2021). Almost a principal: Coaching and training assistant principals for the next level of leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, 31(6), 502-525.
- Heck, R. & Hallinger, P. (2009). Assessing the contribution of distributed leadership to school improvement and growth in math achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(3), 659-89.
- Herman, R., Gates, S. M., Arifkhanova, A., Bega, A., Chavez-Herrerias, E. R., Han, E., Wrabel, S. L. (2017). *School leadership interventions under the every student succeeds act: Evidence review*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.
- Hollingsworth, L., Olsen, D., Asikin-Garmager, A., & Winn, K. M. (2017). Initiating conversation and opening doors: How principals establish a positive building culture to sustain school improvement efforts. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 1–21.

- Hoppe, S. L. (2003). Identifying and nurturing potential academic leaders. *New Directions for Higher Education*, (124), 3-12. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/62011765?accountid=14048>
- Ihde, D. (1977). *Experimental phenomenology*. New York: G. P. Putnam.
- Kelleher, J. (2016). You're ok, I'm ok. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 97(8), 70–73.
- Kearney, W. S., Okilwa, N., & Goldhorn, J. (2016). Who is preparing school leaders to transition into the job of urban school principal? analyzing the impact of a regional principal readiness education program on principal self-efficacy. *School Leadership Review*, 11(2), 17-33.
- Klar, H. W., Huggins, K. S., Andreoli, P. M., & Buskey, F. C. (2020). Developing rural school leaders through leadership coaching: A transformative approach. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 19(4), 539-559.
- Komives, S. R., & Brown, S. C. (2008). *A facilitator guide for seniors: Four years in retrospect*. Retrieved on 4-28-08, from <http://www.newsreel.org/guides/seniorsg.htm>
- Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2017). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. part 2: Context, research questions and designs. *European Journal of General Practice*, 23(1), 274-279. doi:10.1080/13814788.2017.1375090
- Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120-124. doi:10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092
- Kwan, P. (2019). Learning the ropes - the transition from a teacher to an administrator. *School Leadership & Management*, 39(5), 394-414. doi:10.1080/13632434.2018.1483912

- Kwan, P. & Li, B. (2016). Striving for a way out from a rock and a hard place: Vice-principals' development in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 5, 239-252. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-04-2016-0037.
- Leaf, A., & Odhiambo, G. (2017). The deputy principal instructional leadership role and professional learning: Perceptions of secondary principals, deputies, and teachers. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 55(1), 33-48. doi:10.1108/JEA-02-2016-0029
- Learning Forward (2017). Standards for professional learning. Retrieved from <https://learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning>
- Leibowitz, Z. B., & Schlossberg, N. K. (1982). Critical Career Transitions: A Model for Designing Career Services. *Training & Development Journal*, 36(2), 12.
- Leithwood, K., Anderson, S.E., Mascall, B. and Strauss, T. (2009), "School leaders' influences on student learning: the four paths", in Bush, T., Bell, L. and Middlewood, D. (Eds), *The Principles of Educational Leadership and Management*. Sage Publishers: London, 13-30.
- Leithwood, K., & Azah, V. N. (2017). Characteristics of high-performing school districts. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 16(1), 27-53.
- Levin, H. M. (1974). Educational reform and social change. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 10(3).
- Liang, J., & Augustine-Shaw, D. (2016). Mentoring and induction for new assistant principals: The Kansas educational leadership institute. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 5(3), 221-238. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-05-2016-0044
- Liou, Y., Grigg, J., & Halverson, R. (2014). Leadership and the design of data-driven professional networks in schools. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 2(1), 29-73.

- Marshall, C., & Hooley, R.M. (2006). *The AP: Leadership choices and challenges*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Marshall, C., & Phelps Davidson, E. (2016). As assistant principals enter their careers: A case for providing support. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 5(3), 272-278. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-04-2016-0038
- May, L., & Lee, H. T. (2015). Developing instructional leaders through assistant principals' academy: A partnership for success. *Education and Urban Society*, 47(2), 207-241. doi:10.1177/0013124513495272
- McBrayer, J. S., Jackson, T., Pannell, S. S., Sorgen, C. H., De Blume, Antonio P. Gutierrez, & Melton, T. D. (2018). Balance of instructional and managerial tasks as it relates to school leaders' self-efficacy. *Journal of School Leadership*, 28(5), 596-617.
- Meleis, A. I. (2015). "Transitions Theory", in Smith, M. and Parker, M. (Eds), *Nursing Theories and Nursing Practice*, FA Davis Co: Philadelphia. Pp. 361-380.
- Meleis, A. I., Sawyer, L. M., Im, E. O., Hilfinger Messaias, D. K., and Schumacher, K. (2000). Experiencing transitions: An emerging middle-range theory. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 23(1), pp. 12-28.
- Miller, K. I., Considine, J., & Garner, J. (2016). "Let me tell you about my job": Exploring the terrain of emotion in the workplace. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 20(3), 231-260. doi:10.1177/0893318906293589
- Mitchell, C., Armstrong, D., & Hands, C. (2017). "Oh, is that my job?" Role vulnerability in the vice-principalship. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 45(1), 3-18.

- Moorosi, P. (2014). Constructing a leader's identity through a leadership development programme: An intersectional analysis. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(6), 792-807. doi:10.1177/1741143213494888
- Morgan, T. L. (2018). Assistant principals' perceptions of the principalship. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 13(10) doi:10.22230/ijepl.2018v13n10a743
- Morris, E. A. Brooks, P. R., & May, J. L. (2003). The relationship between achievement goal orientation and coping style: traditional vs. nontraditional college students. *College Student Journal*, 37(1), 3.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications
- National Association of Secondary School Principals. (1991). *Restructuring the role of the assistant principal*. Reston, Virginia.
- Neumerski, C. M. (2012). Rethinking instructional leadership, a review: What do we know about principal, teacher, and coach instructional leadership and where should we go from here? *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(2), 310-347. Doi: 10.177/0013161X12456700
- Oleszewski, A., Shoho, A., & Barnett, B. (2012). The development of assistant principals: A literature review. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 50(3), 264-286.
doi:10.1108/09578231211223301
- Pellicer, L. O., Anderson, L. W., Keefe, J. W., Kelley, E. A., & McCleary, L. E. (1990). High school leaders and their schools. *NASSP Bulletin*, 2.
- Petrides, L., Jimes, C., & Karaglani, A. (2014). Assistant principal leadership development: A narrative capture study. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 52(2), 173-192.
doi:10.1108/JEA-01-2012-0017

- Pillow, W. S. (2003) Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, 16: 175–196.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Rhodes, C., & Brundrett, M. (2009). Leadership development and school improvement. *Educational Review*, 61(4), 361–374.
- Sargent, A. G. & Schlossberg, N. K. (1988). Managing adult transitions. *Training & Development Journal*, 24(12), 58.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9(2), 2–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001100008100900202>
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1990). Training counselors to work with adults. *Generations*, 90(14), 7.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1995). *Counseling adults in transitions: Linking practice with theory*. New.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (2008). *Overwhelmed: Coping with life's ups and downs* (2nd ed.). Lanham, MD: Evans and Company.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 48(4), 159-162.
doi:10.1002/j.21611920.2011.tb01102.x
- Schlossberg, N. K., Lynch, A. Q., & Chickering, A. W. (1989). *Improving higher education environments for adults. Responsive programs and services from entry to departure*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schlossberg, N. K., Waters, E. B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (2nd ed.). New York: Springer Publishing Co

Schoolnet (2022). Accessed on May 3, 2022, from

https://rockdale.schoolnet.com/Account/KPIDashboard.aspx?district_key=1

Shore, K., & Walshaw, M. (2018). Assistant/Deputy principals: What are their perceptions of their role? *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 21(3), 310-326

Schumacher, K. L., & Maleis, A. I. (1994). Transitions; A central concept in nursing. *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 26(2), pp. 119-127.

Searby, L., Browne-Ferrigno, T., & Wang, C. (2017). Assistant principals: Their readiness as instructional leaders. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 16(3), 397-430.

doi:10.1080/15700763.2016.1197281

Sparks, S. D. (2017). Principal-training secrets shared by the world's top school systems.

Education Week. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2017/10/School_leadership_training_around_the_world.html

Sparks, S. D. (2019). School leadership; "understanding and addressing principal turnover: A review of the research". *Education Week*, 38(28), 4

Stiles, L. J. & Robinson, B. (1973). An evaluation of TCITY, the Twin City Institute for Talented Youth in *AREA Monograph Series on Curriculum Evaluation* (7). Chicago, IL.

Sun, A., & Shoho, A. R. (2017). Assistant principals' perceptions of value added to school success. *Journal of School Leadership*, 27(4), 456-490.

doi:10.1177/105268461702700401

Superville, D. R. (2021). Is the assistant principal the most overlooked, undervalued person at school? *Education Week*, 40(31), 9-9.

- Turner, V. (1987). "Betwixt and between: The liminal period in the rites of passage", in Mahdi, L.C., Foster, S. and Little, M. (Eds). *Betwixt and between: Pattern of masculine and feminine initiation*, Open Court, La Salle, IL, pp. 3-19.
- US Census Bureau (2010). "Population and Housing Unit Estimates Tables." The United States Census Bureau, 18 May 2020, www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/data/tables.2019.html.
- Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
doi:10.4324/9781315173474
- Van Maanen, J., & Schein, E. H. (1979). Toward a Theory of Organizational Socialization. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 209–264.
- Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. NY: Routledge.
- Walker-Donnelly, K., Scott, D. A., & Cawthon, T. W. (2019). *Introduction: Overview and application of career development theories*. Wiley Subscription Services, Inc.
doi:10.1002/ss.20303
- Wilson, R. (2019). Transitions theory and liminality in information behaviour research: Applying new theories to examine the transition to early career academic. *Journal of Documentation*, 75(4), 838-856. doi:10.1108/JD-12-2018-0207
- Woo, D. (2021). Assistant Principal Mobility and Its Relationship with Principal Turnover. *Educational Researcher: A Publication of the American Educational Research Association*. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X21993105>

Appendix A

IRB Approval

Date: 1-15-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY21-22-145

Title: Crossing over to assistant principal: A phenomenological study

Creation Date: 8-19-2021

End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Makeisha Hinds

Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Limited	Decision	Exempt - Limited IRB
-----------------	---------	-------------	---------	----------	---

Key Study Contacts

	Member	Role	Contact
	Matthew Ozolnieks	Co-Principal Investigator	██████████
	Makeisha Hinds	Principal Investigator	██████████
	Makeisha Hinds	Primary Contact	██████████

Appendix B

Pre-Screening Survey

Crossing Over to Assistant Principal: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Makeisha Hinds

You are invited to participate in this research study. To participate, you must have served as an Assistant Principal, and your transition to this role occurred in this district. Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

The purpose of this study is to provide a rich, textured description of the Assistant Principal transition. This research study also aims to inventory the coping strategy and resources used to mitigate this transition.

If you agree to this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete the initial screening survey (5 minutes)
2. Complete an interview (30 minutes)
3. Participate in a focus group (60 minutes)
4. Submit a captioned image (5 minutes)

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. Benefits to society include but are not limited to a deeper understanding of the Assistant Principal transition experience. The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

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 information will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes. Interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password-protected computer, and all electronic records and written notes will be deleted and destroyed upon completion of this study. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. Members of the focus group will be asked not to share any information discussed during the meeting.

The researcher serves as an Assistant Principal in this district. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at

██████████ Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

9/2/2021 The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

* Required

1. By typing your first name and last name, you consent to participate in this study if selected. *

2. Are you or have you served as an Assistant Principal? *

Yes

No

3. Did you first become an Assistant Principal in RCPS? *

Yes

No

4. Phone Number *

The value must be a number

5. E-Mail Address *

Appendix C

Site Approval



Dr. Terry D. Oatts
Superintendent

Santana Flanigan
General Counsel

Board of Education
Walter F. Barlowe
Pamela J. Brown
Heather Duncan
Sandra Jackson-Latt
Jim McClintock
Mandrill North
Abba Palmer

September 7, 2021

Ms. Makeisha Hinds

Dear Ms. Hinds:

I have reviewed your research proposal: "*Crossing over to assistant principal: A phenomenological study*" and have approved it with the following conditions:

- All participation must be on a voluntary basis during **non-duty hours** only.
- All resources and/or supplies will be provided by the applicant. (District resources will not be used.)
- Written authorization is required from the principal before conducting surveys.
- No individual participant(s) or school(s) will be identifiable through the research project.
- Due to the system's comprehensive academic program, research activities will be conducted during the following months unless special arrangements have been approved: **September - November AND February-April**

I wish you every success as you begin this very important project. I would appreciate a copy of the final report along with any recommendations that your research may offer Rockdale County Public Schools.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Laura Grimwade

Laura Grimwade
Director of Assessment & Accountability

C: Michele Stephens, Director of Human Resources

Appendix D

Image Submission Instructions

Please respond to this email with an image that best represents your transition to Assistant Principal.

The image can be a photo, drawing, clip art, or quote that represents your transition to the role of AP. These images will be used during our focus group session.

Appendix E

Member Check Form

Member Check Form

By completing this form, I agree that I participated in the Crossing Over to Assistant Principal: A Phenomenological Study interview process, and have read the transcript of my interview, and I attest to the following statements:

* Required

1. Check all appropriate boxes *

- I have verified the accuracy of the interview transcript.
- The interview transcript is not accurate (see comments below).
- I agree that the description in the interview transcript is complete and realistic.
- The description in the interview transcript is not complete or realistic (see comments below).

2. Comments:

3. Signature (please type your first and last name)

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Interviewee: [Participant Number]

Interviewer: Makeisha Hinds, Student Researcher

Date:

Time of interview:

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS). Data collection will include individual interviews with Assistant Principals.

Introduction

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in an interview for this doctoral study. You have been identified as someone who has perspective and insights to share about the experience of transitioning to the role of Assistant Principal. My research project focuses on the lived experiences of individuals who transitioned to Assistant Principal in RCPS. The central research question for this study is the following: What is the lived experience of individuals who transition to the position of assistant principal?

Specifically, I hope to gain insights on the situational conditions, personal characteristics, social support, and coping strategies of your transition to Assistant Principal. A key benefit of the study would be to identify ways that new Assistant Principals can effectively transition to this role.

*To comply with the ethics requirements at the university, study participants must sign a consent form confirming that they have read, understood, and agree to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. I have received your signed consent form. Do you have any additional questions about the form or its contents? **[Answer any questions]***

*Because your responses are central to this study, and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Only the audio will be recorded; your camera feed should remain off for the duration of the interview. Do I have your permission to record the audio of this interview? **[If yes, thank the participant, and let the participant know that I will ask the question again as when I start recording.]** I will also be taking notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a participant number and/or pseudonym will be used when quoting from the interview transcript. Pseudonyms will also be used for the names of any other individuals you reference during the interview. The audio recordings of the interview will be destroyed once the interview has been transcribed and approved.*

The interview should last 30 to 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. You are free to decline from answering any question if you feel uncomfortable for any reason. Do you have any questions of me at this point? [If yes, answer questions. If no further questions, I will ensure that the participant's camera is off and inform the participant that the audio recording will begin. Begin recording.] We are now recording. To confirm your agreement to be recorded, do I have your permission to record the audio of this interview? [Wait for approval.] Thank you. Let's begin the interview.

Individual Interview Questions

1. *Introduce yourself to me as if it was the first time you were meeting me.*
2. *What is your position in the district?*
3. *Tell me about your work experience in education.*
4. *How has your own education and experiences served you in these roles?*
5. *Describe how you knew that you were ready to begin applying for assistant principal.*
6. *Describe your experience in the interview process for assistant principal.*
7. *Describe your experience in being named assistant principal?*
8. *Describe your first few weeks as assistant principal?*
9. *Describe your prior experiences in leadership that assisted with your transition to assistant principal?*
10. *Describe three characteristics that capture the role of an assistant principal?*
11. *Describe why you find those characteristics exemplify an assistant principal?*
12. *Describe the skills that you felt confident in as you transitioned to AP?*
13. *What was the transition process to AP like for you?*
14. *Describe who or what facilitated the transition from your previous role to your role of AP?*
15. *Describe how you dealt with areas where you lacked understanding and/or competency?*
16. *What expected events occurred in your transition to AP?*
17. *What unexpected events occurred in your transition to AP?*
18. *What did you expect to occur that did not in your transition to AP?*
19. *What is one word that you would use to describe your transition experience to assistant principal?*

Closing

That concludes the questions for the interview. Do you have any further comments that you would like to share or any questions for me?

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. You will be receiving an email within a week to confirm the transcript of this interview and instructions on next steps. Please verify and complete the member check form included in that email. [End audio recording.]

Appendix G

Focus Group Protocol

Participants: [Participants' Numbers]

Interviewer: Makeisha Hinds, Student Researcher

Date:

Time of focus group session:

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS). Data collection will include individual interviews with Assistant Principals.

Introduction

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in the focus group for this doctoral study. You have been identified as someone who has perspective and insights to share about the experience of transitioning to the role of Assistant Principal. My research project focuses on the lived experiences of individuals who transitioned to Assistant Principal in RCPS. The central research question for this study is the following: What is the lived experience of individuals who transition to the position of assistant principal?

Specifically, I hope to gain insights on the situational conditions, personal characteristics, social support, and coping strategies of your transition to Assistant Principal. A key benefit of the study would be to identify ways that new Assistant Principals can effectively transition to this role.

*To comply with the ethics requirements at the university, study participants must sign a consent form confirming that they have read, understood, and agree to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. I have received your signed consent form. Do you have any additional questions about the form or its contents? **[Answer any questions]***

*Because your responses are central to this study, and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Only the audio will be recorded; your camera feed should remain off for the duration of the interview. Do I have your permission to record the audio of this interview? **[If yes, thank the participant, and let the participant know that I will ask the question again as when I start recording.]** I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a participant number and/or pseudonym will be used when quoting from the interview transcript. Pseudonyms will also be used for the names of any other individuals you reference during the interview. The audio recordings of the interview will be destroyed once the interview has been transcribed and approved.*

*The focus group session should last 60 to 90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. You are free to decline from answering any question if you feel uncomfortable for any reason. Do you have any questions of me at this point? **[If yes, answer questions. If no further questions, I will ensure that the participant's camera is off and inform the participant that the audio recording will begin. Begin recording.]** We are now recording. To confirm your agreement to be recorded, do I have your permission to record the audio of this session? **[Wait for approval.]** Thank you. Let's begin the focus group session.*

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. *Please introduce yourself to me as if it were the first-time meeting and also state how many years of experience you have in education and how many years you have serving as an AP.*
2. *Type in the chat one word that describes your transition to AP.*
3. *Describe the most challenging experience of your transition to AP.*
4. *What were some expected challenges in your transition to AP?*
5. *What were some unexpected challenges in your transition to AP?*
6. *What methods did you use to cope with these challenges?*
7. *What strategies for coping do you recommend for individuals seeking to transition to AP?*
8. *What skills did you already have that assisted with your transition to AP?*
9. *What skills should individuals develop prior to seeking a transition to AP?*
10. *Take five minutes to review the word wall provided in the shared image and be prepared to discuss which word typifies your experience of your transition to AP.*
11. *Take ten minutes to look over the images in the shared PowerPoint and write feedback on as many as you feel inclined to. You can provide feedback on what you notice, what you think, or what you wonder.*

Closing

That concludes the focus group session. Do you have any further comments that you would like to share or any questions for me?

*Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. You will be receiving an email within a week to confirm the transcript of this focus group session and instructions on next steps. Please verify and complete the member check form included in that email. **[End audio recording.]***


Appendix H

Principal Permission Request

Good day, I hope that all is well.

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 in Education. The title of my research project is Crossing over to Assistant Principal: A phenomenological Study, and the purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of individuals who transition into the assistant principal (AP) position for APs in Xander County Public Schools (XCPS).

I am writing to request your permission interview the Assistant Principal(s) at your school as part of my research. Participants will be asked to complete a screening survey, individual interview, focus group discussion, and submit a captioned image.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose not to grant permission, respond by email to 

Sincerely,
Makeisha Hinds
Ed.D Candidate at Liberty University

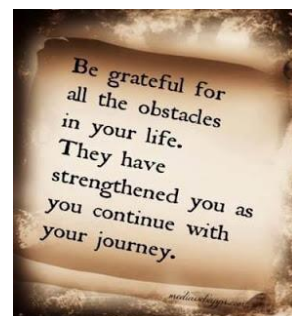
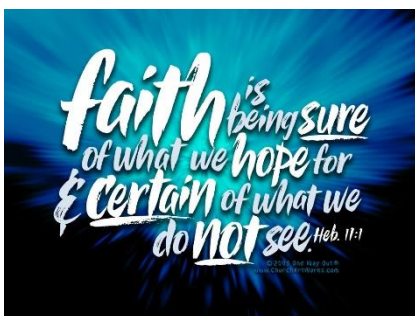
Appendix I

Sample Procedural Log (Angel)

1/11/22	Received IRB Approval
1/15/22	Emailed permission request to principals
1/23/22	Emailed potential participants
1/23/22	Angel responded her willingness to participate via completion of the prescreening survey
1/23/22	Contacted Angel to schedule interview
2/1/22	Conducted Angel's interview
2/5/22	Received captioned image submission
2/1/22	Read electronic transcript for errors/first read through
2/3/22	Sent electronic transcripts to participant for review and to correct any information
2/3/22	Subsequent reading and coding of transcript, captioned image submission annotating significant statements
2/12/22	Conducted focus group
2/12/22	Read electronic transcript for errors/first read through of focus group sessions
2/13/22	Subsequent reading and coding of focus group session transcript annotating significant statements

Appendix J

Captioned Image Submission



Appendix K

Word Collage

