

LESSONS LEARNED AND WISDOM EARNED: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
THE LIVED MENTORING EXPERIENCES OF ONTARIO'S VICE-PRINCIPALS

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ABSTRACT

Succession planning, leadership development, effective instructional methods, and successful mentorship practices are vital to the growth of today's school boards. Existing research shows those willing to grasp the reins of leadership have benefitted from a district's formalized mentoring program. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to determine the mentoring needs of beginning Vice-Principals and determine their views of the most critical areas that need addressing in the mentoring program at the Ottawa Valley District School Board (a pseudonym). This study uses a phenomenological design to explore the experiences of ten administrators who are new to the role of Vice-Principal. The setting for this study is the Ottawa Valley District School Board. Interviews, observations, and a focus group were used to collect data. Data was analyzed by organizing data into computer files. In turn, these files were converted into appropriate text units for analysis by hand and computer. Moustakas' (1994) *Seven Steps of Data Analysis* were used to arrive at meaning and essence for the participants. Triangulation, member checking, rich thick description, and bracketing are used to address issues of trustworthiness.

Key words: mentoring, instructional leadership, self-efficacy, leadership development

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. This doctoral journey has robbed you of countless hours whilst I studied, read, and wrote in our basement. Each of you are beautiful, intelligent, funny, discerning, and forgiving. People who come into your presence always remark how welcome and happy you make them feel and that you always lift their spirits. This is a gift that not many people have, and it is a gift you have been entrusted with; something to be nurtured. Wherever your future takes you, my hope is that you embrace the things having eternal significance and that you continue to make a positive impact on the lives around you.

To my Heavenly Father, where do I even begin? I fail, I stumble, I fail again, and yet your mercy and grace have time and time again to be more than sufficient for me. Thank you for the songs you place in my heart each day and for the beauty this world beholds. I selfishly ask that you deepen my faith, strengthen the ties that bind, and create in me a clean heart each day.

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List of Abbreviations

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

Leadership Assessment Pool (LAP)

New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP)

Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)

Ontario Principal's Council (OPC)

Ottawa Valley District School Board (OVDSB)

VP (Vice-Principal)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Ontario Leadership Framework (2013) defines leadership as the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals (p. 5). Embedded within this framework are topics such as succession planning, leadership development, effective instructional methods, and successful mentoring practices. All are viewed and accepted as being vital to the growth of existing school boards as well as to Ontario's continued rise in its confidence level towards public education. Existing research (Bartell, 2005; Bass, 1984; Buck, 2004; Candis Best, 2011; Darwin, 2000; Funk, 2013; Hezlett & Gibson, 2005; Merriam, 1983; O'Neil & Marsick, 2009) shows those willing to grasp the reins of leadership have benefitted from a school district's formalized mentoring program. Alexander (2010), Fullan (2008), and Leithwood, Anderson, & Seashore-Louis (2012) argue that the principal is vital for raising student achievement in today's schools. However, school boards are finding shortages of motivated and qualified principal candidates. Those that once considered moving into administration are now reconsidering it because of the associated pressures and the ever-increasing workload accompanying today's administrative position.

Background

The role of the Vice-Principal has transformed over time and will continue to evolve as the needs of society change. Mirroring that of the principal, today's role of the Vice-Principal is seen as a highly political role because they have to juggle instructional leadership responsibilities, secure the public's confidence, ensure the mandated curriculum is taught at an exemplary level, and that the needs of all learners are met each day in the classroom. Clawson

(2008) cites demands and pressures on principals as a hindrance to taking on the principalship while others (Connelly & Ruark, 2010; Fink, 2004) have cited litigation, union attacks, and the pace of change as reasons not to go into administration. Many that have made the jump into administration have noted feelings of aloneness, depression, and the sense that their professional capacity as an educator has suffered a setback.

A plethora of research exists (Hall, 2008; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Klinge, 2015; Retelle, 2010; Schechter, 2014; Shen, Cooley, & Wegenke, 2004) exhorting the benefits of a mentoring program for beginning teachers; however, research is just beginning to uncover the benefits of a mentoring program for novice administrators. Fullan (2008) has reported that the need for direct support for Ontario's beginning administrators is increasing due to the pressures placed on them to lead their staffs to higher levels of student achievement. This lack of mentoring support is reflected in the writing of Alexander (2010) who posits that women have been hindered in career advancement due to internal false perspectives and pressures that have limited their rise up the leadership ladder.

Research also supports the need for mentors and mentees (also referred to as protégés in the literature) to work side-by-side in tackling the issues of the day. Fullan (2009) states that leadership development needs to be job-embedded, organization-embedded and system embedded; however, little research exists describing how mentoring could address this phenomenon. Villani (2006) and Darling-Hammond (2009) support a structured mentoring program citing the fact that principals are vital to the development of the school's vision goals, the instructional and learning climate, and the establishment of professional learning networks.

Leaders face new and varied challenges through changing educational policies and escalating demands; hence, existing research supports the benefits of structured and monitored

mentoring programs. Numerous studies have examined mentoring practices for new teachers (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005) but very little literature exists on such programs specific to Vice-Principals. Allen, Eby, O'Brien, and Lentz (2008) conducted a meta-analysis study on mentoring research and found that the number of qualitative studies pales in comparison to the number of quantitative studies completed; this said, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of Vice-Principals who have participated in a formal mentoring program in Ontario, Canada. It is hoped that findings from this study will “give voice” to Vice-Principals who have accepted the challenge of moving into leadership (Creswell, 2013) and that school districts will examine their current practices and make the necessary programming enhancements.

Situation to Self

I have been in education for 24 years with 19 of them being in an administrative position. I was a vice principal for 2.5 years and have been a principal for the last 16.5 years. My transition experience from the classroom to administration was a good one made possible by two outstanding principals who took the time to effectively mentor me. Since then, experience has shown me that not all of my colleagues have enjoyed the same positive transition experience and that there exists a wide range of mentoring experiences for all of my colleagues. Some of these have been positive, but many of them have been challenging or non-existent. As a result, the guiding philosophy behind this qualitative study is ontological in nature. This was chosen because an “ontological issue relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Since the intent of this study is to report the multiple realities of the

participants, I am interested in discovering whether mentoring has been successful in helping individuals transition into their leadership roles.

This study's epistemological assumption is that "knowledge can be known through the subjective experiences of people" (Creswell, 2013, p. 20); therefore, I will be among the participants during the study. Regarding axiological assumptions, this study recognizes my personal values and biases because I was a Vice-Principal before I became a principal 16.5 years ago. As mentioned above, I had two mentors during the 2.5 years I served as a Vice-Principal. Although the mentoring experiences I had with each of them was markedly different, each individual helped me effectively prepare me for the role of the principalship through the imparting of their wisdom and experiences with me.

As a qualitative researcher, I subscribe to a social constructivist paradigm since rapport and trustworthiness are commonly associated with this. I was fortunate to have experienced this with my mentors; in turn, I have stressed the importance of these same principles when mentoring the seven Vice-Principals who have worked with me in the past. All of these individuals have successfully transitioned into the principalship immediately after working me. Creswell (2013) writes, "In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences. The goal of the research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (p. 24). This is the focus of this study: to give voice to the participants who are currently being mentored while in the Vice-Principal role. However, my mentoring experience has to be set aside, and I cannot let it cloud my findings. To accomplish this, I will have to bracket out my own experiences as a means of reducing potential bias (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

A qualitative phenomenological study is being employed to investigate Vice-Principals' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, frustrations, challenges, and other emotions experienced during this transitional phase. Specifically, I am interested in examining the development of self-efficacy in Vice-Principals. Creswell (2013) defines phenomenological study as “. . . the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon . . . this description consists of ‘what’ they experienced and ‘how’ they experienced it” (p. 76). Through the use of purposeful sampling as described by Creswell (2013, pp. 154-55), fifteen Vice-Principals will be selected from the Ottawa Valley District School Board (a pseudonym) to participate in this study. The 15 participants selected represent those who have experienced the phenomenon (p. 155). The participants selected for this study are 100% Caucasian because that is the demographic reality of the OVDSB. Seven administrators are male, eight are female, and each participant has at least one year of experience in the role of Vice-Principal.

A phenomenological study is the correct research approach because phenomenology best meets the needs of the problem under investigation: (a) What are the supports, as perceived by administrators, needed to ensure a successful transition from the classroom into the Vice-Principal role; and (b) How has the mentoring experience assisted Vice-Principals in their transition from a classroom teacher, and how has it prepared them for the role of the principalship? This study hopes to contribute to the data and discussion around effective mentoring program practices for beginning administrators.

Multiple means of data collection shall be used in order to triangulate the data and ensure the data interpretation is trustworthy. Data obtained from three sources will be triangulated. The three sources of data include: (a) individual semi-structured interviews; (b) observations and field note taking; and (c) focus groups. Data analysis will include observation notes from the

field, verbatim transcripts of interviews held with each participant, and the focus group. Data will be organized into computer files, and then the files will be converted to appropriate text units for analysis by hand or computer (Creswell, 2013, p. 182).

Problem Statement

Creswell (1994) defines a problem “as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study” (p. 50) as is the case in the province of Ontario today. Williams (2001) found that Ontario, like many other jurisdictions, is facing an imminent shortage of administrators and unless specific measures are put into place which attract the brightest and the best educators, Ontario may find itself in a very precarious situation. Those in existing administrative positions have voiced concerns over the adequacy of time to plan mandated changes; the amount of in-school staff support for the principal given current workload requirements; parents demands; and the lack of time spent learning and working with teachers (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2015; Holten & Brenner, 2015; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Karadag, Bektas, Cogaltay, & Yalcin, 2015; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012; Reames, Kochan, & Zhu, 2014; Retelle, 2010; Schechter, 2014). Simply put, those considering a career change into administration are pausing and giving serious reconsideration to such a move because of increasing immense pressures that accompany the position; as well, the lack of perceived benefits.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the mentoring needs of beginning Vice-Principals who have participated in the mentoring program offered at the Ottawa Valley District School Board (OVDSB; a pseudonym) in Ontario, Canada. More precise, this

study will describe the views of the Vice-Principals (the mentees) regarding areas of the mentoring program which were useful in helping them transition to their leadership position, and what suggestions they might offer in helping to enhance the OVDSB's mentoring program. At this stage in the research, mentoring is defined as "facilitating partnerships in ever-evolving relationships focused on meeting the mentee's goals and objectives" (Zachary, 2004, p. 177).

The theory guiding this study is Albert Bandura's (1986, 1997) self efficacy construct associated with *Social Cognitive Theory*. More precisely, this study examines whether or not a school district's mentoring program has helped, or diminished, beginning Vice-Principals' sense of self-efficacy in performing their work. Bandura (1986, 1997) defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. These beliefs were described as determinants of how people think, feel, and behave in the situations they are encountering in the moment. Bandura posits that there are four sources of self-efficacy: experiences provided by social models, mastery experiences, social persuasion that the individual has the tools to succeed in the present situation, and inferences from somatic and emotional states indicative of personal strengths and vulnerabilities (Fisher, 2011, pp. 93-94). This study researches the lived mentoring experiences of beginning Vice-Principals to see if participants' self-efficacy levels increased or diminished as result of their mentoring experience.

Significance of the Study

Society understands how critically important schools are to its sustainability and its growth. Many mentoring programs exist in other professions; in fact, Ontario has a mandatory two-year program that all beginning teachers must successfully complete in order to be officially recognized as a teacher by Ontario's College of Teachers. This program is known as the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), and it has enjoyed tremendous success in helping beginning

teachers get firmly established in the profession. Unfortunately, no such program exists in Ontario for principals and Vice-Principals despite the fact they are recognized as instructional leaders in their schools who must build public confidence while at the same time, remaining calm and clear-minded in difficult situations. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) write:

Principals' efficacy beliefs influence the level of effort and persistence that is expended in their daily work, as well as their resilience in the face of setbacks. It is not enough to hire and retain the most capable principals; they must believe that they can successfully meet the challenges of the task at hand. (p. 580)

This study hopes to contribute to the literature discussion by identifying the successful elements of a mentoring program that best meet the needs of novice administrators. This study seeks to examine the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the participant's mentoring experience. As well, this study seeks to give voice to the participants so that school districts can re-examine their existing programs and make the necessary changes that will strengthen the leadership growth of its participants and enable effective succession planning practices to occur.

Research Questions

In this study, newly appointed Vice-Principals are viewed as having flexibility and autonomy when making decisions that assist with the organization and management of schools; however, with this autonomy comes accountability (Wildy & Loudon, 2000). Each day, administrators face the challenges of increasing levels of student achievement; providing safe, caring, and respectful learning environments; leading the instructional program; making responsible decisions; and implementing provincial and local initiatives. Day, Harris, and Hadfield (2001) highlight the challenges and difficulties school leadership face each day, all of

which have made an administrators' role more multifaceted than ever before. As such, the primary research questions guiding this phenomenological study are:

1. What experiences and issues do Ontario practicing Vice-Principals identify as the most challenging?
2. What affect has the mentoring experience at the Ottawa Valley District School Board had on the ability and proficiency of Ontario practicing Vice-Principals to address challenges, manage change and to the lead instructional program as outlined in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*?
3. What obstacles to growth, and opportunities for growth, currently exist in the elements of the Ottawa Valley District School Board's mentoring program that can be reinforced or restructured to better prepare Vice-Principals?

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the background of the role of the principal and the Vice-Principal, and pertinent literature and research findings regarding the complexity of the role of today's principalship. A gap in the literature was discovered identifying a lack of studies focused solely on the mentoring experiences of Vice-Principals. The problem and purpose statements were discussed before the significance of the study was presented outlining the benefits of a successful mentoring program for beginning administrators (vice principals), the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the participants' mentoring experience , as well as the hope that this study will cause other school districts to review their current mentoring programs and if necessary, implement the programming changes recommended by the study's participants. Research questions, limitations, delimitations, and the research plan concluded chapter 1.

Chapter 2 begins with the literature review where an overview of the existing literature is presented. Next, the theoretical framework for this study is discussed before five themes from the related literature are synthesized and presented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The study of mentoring covers numerous disciplines such as business, education, sport, medicine, and the working trades. While the topic of mentoring is enormous, this review of literature focuses on mentoring experiences of beginning administrators; namely, Vice-Principals. First, this study's theoretical framework and the primary theorist around the importance of mentoring for beginning administrators are addressed. Finally, a synthesis of the literature relating to mentoring needs of beginning administrators is discussed.

Theoretical Framework

In an attempt to better understand the development of the skillset required for beginning Vice-Principals, Albert Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory provided the theoretical framework for this research study. Within Social Cognitive Theory is the construct of self-efficacy, and it was the study of self-efficacy that helped define the structure from which my research worked within.

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy

Previously known as Social Learning Theory, Albert Bandura renamed it Social Cognitive Theory in 1986 when he published *Social Foundation of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* which emphasized the role cognition plays in understanding and carrying out behaviors. Self-efficacy is a construct within Bandura's Social Cognitive theory, and is a person's belief that they can execute behaviors necessary for them to produce a specific performance. In the case of this study, the development of the leadership capacity skills required to successfully act as a Vice-Principal. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) found that "what

individuals think does affect how they behave” (p. 573), and it is this premise that provided the foundation from which this study was built upon.

Basing his theory of self-efficacy on two principles of social cognitive theory, self-regulation and self-reflection, Bandura (1977) found that people reflect on their thoughts and actions as they seek to control and regulate their behaviors. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance” (p. 391), and posits that the growth of a person’s self-efficacy occurs along three dimensions -- complexity, generality, and strength – with development occurring as the individual responds to cognitive and affective process (Bandura, 1993). The author continues by stating, “perceived self-efficacy is concerned not with the number of skills you have, but what you believe you can do with what you have” (Bandura, 1997a, p. 37) and that “Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives. . . efficacy expectations are a major determinant of peoples’ choice of activities, how much effort they will expend, and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations” (p. 77). Finally, Bandura (2009) shows the importance of self-efficacy and the critical role it plays in impacting our daily lives by writing:

Self-efficacy beliefs affect: whether people think productively, pessimistically, or optimistically and in self – enacting or self – debilitating ways; how well they motivate themselves and persevere in the face of difficulties; the quality of their emotional well-being they achieve and their vulnerability to stress and depression; and the life choices they make, which set the course of their life paths. (p. 185)

The importance of the principalship towards increasing the levels of student achievement cannot be ignored and since most Principals start out as a Vice-Principal, it is important that the

leadership skills required to lead a school are nurtured and developed through the Vice-Principalship. Fisher (2014) points out that newly appointed Vice-Principals have significantly high levels of self-efficacy during their first year of appointment. However, year's two to five tend to see leaders experiencing diminishing levels of efficacious behaviour before eventually levelling off. Thereafter, Fisher discovered that self-efficacy levels began to rise again and stabilized at the ten year mark. Fullan (2002) recognizes the importance of the principalship when it comes to creating the conditions necessary for systemic change. He writes that the system requires "leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession itself is necessary" (p. 16).

The development of self-efficacy is critically important if newly appointed Vice-Principals are to be successful in their leadership role. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) write, "Among the strongest cognitive influences on self-efficacy are beliefs about ability as either inherent capacity or acquired skill" (p. 502). For a recently appointed Vice-Principal struggling with difficulties coming at them from all directions as a result of their new found position, they "will experience an eroding sense of efficacy as difficulties arise, become more erratic in their problem solving, and lower their aspirations for the individuals or groups in their organization" (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008, p. 502). This thinking is supported by Bandura (1997a) who writes, "Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives. . . efficacy expectations are a major determinant of peoples' choice of activities, how much effort they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations" (p. 77). An administrator believing that their work environment is unalterable and beyond their leadership abilities, will ultimately have a negative impact on the teaching and learning environment in which they work.

However, Vice-Principals choosing to embrace these same challenges as an “acquirable skill” (Bandura, 1993) believe that their “own self-judgments change very little in response to challenging circumstances. They will continue to set challenging goals for themselves and their colleagues and remain systematic and efficient in their problem solving” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008, p. 502). The authors continue this thought and state that Vice-Principals possessing a high degree of self-efficacy believe that “through persistence and ingenuity, [they can] figure out ways of exercising some control even in environments with many challenges to change” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008, p. 502). McCormick (2001) adds to the research extolling the importance of self-confidence and found that, “Every major review of the leadership literature lists self-confidence as an essential characteristic for effective leadership” (p. 23). This sentiment is also highlighted by Seashore-Louis, Wahlstrom, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) who write:

To feel a strong sense of efficacy is to believe that you, or you and your colleagues, can act effectively and deal with difficulties as they arise. In this sense, efficacy is fundamental to moving from the desire for change to actual changes in behavior. Even those who feel a strong sense of efficacy, however, benefit from supportive conditions in which to act. (p. 31)

Applying Bandura (1997a) to self-efficacy beliefs of school administrators, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), write, “A principal’s sense of efficacy is a judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads” (p. 573). The importance of this cannot be underestimated given the political and societal pressures placed on administrators today as they juggle with increasing levels of mental health issues stemming from students and staff, increased demands placed upon them from Ontario’s Ministry of Education and from senior level administrators; as well, struggling

themselves to maintain a healthy work/life balance (Pollock, 2017). “Successful leadership involves using social influence processes to organize, direct, and motivate the actions of others. It requires persistent task-directed effort, effective task strategies, and the artful application of various conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills” (McCormick, 2001, p. 28).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found that individuals possessing strong self-efficacious skills will persist on a given task much longer than individuals who aren't as strong. They write, “People who persist at subjectively threatening activities that are not actually threatening gain corrective experiences that further enhance their sense of efficacy” (p. 501). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) posit that high self-efficacy levels not only assist leaders in setting goals, but in attaining them as well. The authors write, “Self efficacy has a significant impact on goal-setting, level of aspiration, effort, adaptability, and persistence” and it's “These beliefs [that] affect the development of functional leadership strategies, and the skillful execution of those strategies” (p. 573). Assisting Vice-Principals at the outset of their leadership journey by helping them to succeed, but also offering them support and guidance when they fail, helps better the leadership capacity of the administrator; moreover, creates the conditions necessary in our schools for our communities to thrive and to flourish.

So how does one develop their self-efficacy levels? Bandura (1986) identified four sources of self-efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences; vicarious experience; social persuasion; and physiological response. Mastery experiences are obtained after an individual has experienced several successful performances on a specific task thereby increasing their self-efficacy levels. On the other hand, consistent failures undoubtedly lead to lower levels of self-efficacy in an individual. Vicarious experience, also known as modelling, is when an individual's self-efficacy levels increase because they have observed another person succeeding at the same task. The

result is that the individual observing success thinks to themselves, “If they can do it, so can I.”

To help illustrate this, Versland (2016) writes:

describes how people learn from watching and imitating the behavior of others. . . . If the successful person appears to be of similar competence to the vicarious learner, the vicarious learner seeks to replicate the efforts and strategies to achieve similar success. If the model experiences failure, the vicarious learner changes tactics to avoid a similar failure. (p. 300)

Social persuasion, the power of words, is a third source of self-efficacy impacting the leadership capacity of Vice-Principals. The spoken word is extremely powerful and when the same message is repeated often enough over time, it can serve to encourage or discourage the growth of an administrator. Versland (2016) explains social persuasion as:

feedback (in the form of praise and encouragement) people get from others about a specific capability. When people receive positive feedback about their capabilities from experts in the particular area in question, they view themselves to be more competent and their actual performance can be enhanced. However, if social persuasion (feedback) is negative, performances that were once adequate can suffer. (p. 301)

The final source of self-efficacy is the physiological response described by Bandura (1986) as occurring when, “People read their somatic arousal in stressful or taxing situations as ominous signs of vulnerability to dysfunction” (p. 401). Simply put, when a Vice-Principal is put in a stressful situation, such as speaking at a school-wide assembly, do they embrace the challenge or do they feel faint, shake uncontrollably, or feel nauseous? If the challenge is welcomed, their performance on the task at hand is experienced with success thereby strengthening their self-efficacy. Bandura (2009) posits that it is in how people perceive their own capabilities, not their

currently possessed skillset, that is the main driving force towards achieving the goals they have set for themselves.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) posit that as a principal develops strong self-efficacy beliefs; four areas of the learning organization are affected: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. These four leadership capacities would later be mirrored and added to the revised 2013 edition *The Ontario Leadership Framework: A School and System Leader's Guide to Putting Ontario's Leadership Framework into Action*. Here, Ontario's Ministry of Education identified five core leadership capacities deemed essential to meeting Ontario's educational goals. These include: (1) Setting goals; (2) Aligning resources with priorities; (3) Promoting collaborative learning cultures; (4) Using data; and, (5) Engaging in courageous conversations. All of these essential leadership capacities are made stronger through a leader's strong sense of self-efficacy; a theoretical framework that helped define the structure from which my research worked within.

Related Literature

The Lack of Willing Participants Moving into Administration

The success of any organization lies in its ability to successfully identify, recruit, prepare, and induct future leaders so that the reins of leadership do not falter whenever retirements or unexpected occurrences arise necessitating a change in leadership. The field of education is not exempt from leadership's constant change and evolution so it would stand to reason that individuals would seize upon these opportunities and qualify themselves for leadership positions. However, this is not the case as fewer and fewer teachers are willing to take on the added responsibility and headaches that come with the position of Vice-Principal and principal. Please note, the terms Vice-Principal and Assistant Principal are used interchangeably throughout this

study, but they do refer to the same position; that is, an individual working in a leadership capacity in a school setting under the guidance and supervision of the principal.

The complexity of the Vice-Principal's role in Ontario has evolved greatly since administrators were removed from teacher unions in 1998. Along with the principal, today's Vice-Principal is seen as an agent of change, a system player who contributes to and benefits from system improvement, and a lead learner who models learning and helps shape the conditions for all to learn (Fullan, 2014). Leading in today's schools is hard and difficult work, and it is a calling that requires the individual to balance personal and professional commitments. It is also a position that requires the individual to possess the hard and soft skills required to lead in a climate of constant scrutiny and change. Consequently, fewer and fewer educators are willing to take on leadership roles. Supporting this position, Fullan found that:

75% of principals feel that their job has become too complex, half of the principals feel under great stress 'several days of a week' and the percentage who say they are satisfied in their work has dropped from 68 to 59% since 2008. (2014, p. 5)

Highlighting this concern around fewer and fewer teachers wanting to delve into administration is Armstrong (2009) who reports, "The transition from teaching to administration is a complex social and emotional journey that impacts newly appointed principals and Vice-Principals, school constituents, and future district and provincial leadership in significant and unexpected ways" (p. 8). When examining the changing nature of principal's work, Pollock, Wang and Hauseman (2014) found that "too few educators aspire to the principalship" and as a result, "Principal shortages have been reported in Ontario and in other parts of the world, while current forecasts for the future are not encouraging" (p. 6). The reason for so few teachers wanting to go into administration was cause for concern for Ontario's Ministry of Education who

in 2008 launched the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS) to “foster leadership of the highest possible quality in schools and boards across the province to support student achievement”

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4). The goals of the OLS are to:

1. Attract the right people to leadership roles;
2. Develop personal leadership resources in individuals and promote effective leadership practices in order to have the greatest possible impact on student achievement and well being and;
3. Develop leadership capacity and coherence in organizations to strengthen their ability to deliver on education priorities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 9).

Fink and Brayman (2004) found fewer and fewer individuals were attracted to the principalship because of increased work demands. They report that leadership succession in education is highly dependent on the role of the principals themselves and write, “Succession plans must link leadership recruitment, preparation, selection, assignment, induction and on-going development in a coherent future-oriented way” (Fink & Brayman, p. 445). Acting on these comments is Barnett (2004) who calls for a systematic overhaul in leadership programs and posits that university programs need to be a part of this systemic change if individuals are to want to assume the reins of leadership. He writes:

. . . the leaders they train will have a direct impact on the achievement of P-12 students.

Embracing and expanding opportunities for partnering with P-12 schools should not only improve achievement for P-12 students, but enrich university preparation programs as well. (p. 127)

Research has shown that “leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its influence on student achievement” (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 5). If

administrators are this influential when it comes to student achievement, why is it that fewer and fewer teachers are choosing not to pursue a career in administration? Pollock *et al.* (2014)

attempts to answer this when writing:

If principals are to be assisted in their current work, if school systems are to attract and retain the best candidates, and if universities and other institutions are to adequately prepare prospective principals for challenging jobs, then we need to better understand the current changing nature of administrative work and the kinds of contextual issues which influence that work. (p. 6)

A study conducted by Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012), found that the role of the Vice-Principal lacked any formal job description, and it characterized the role of assistant principals as having “excessive workload demands” (p. 104). Participants in this study disclosed the fact that the role had become too cumbersome, and they found that the “specific roles and duties of assistant principals range from relieving the principals’ burdens to providing administrative support for teachers, to attending to the welfare of students” (p. 93). It is of particular importance that while maintaining a safe and respectful learning environment is critical to the success of today’s student, the participants shared with Barnett *et al.* (2012) that “constantly dealing with discipline and student management can negatively influence assistant principals’ effectiveness and job satisfaction” (p. 95).

Other studies have reported that the vast array of duties performed by Vice-Principals is unrealistic. Peters, Gurley, Fifolt, Collins, and McNeese (2016) identified 27 different roles assistant principals have been asked to perform and reported, “Regarding their professional responsibilities, key aspects of their daily routine were discussed in great detail. Whether the AP role is truly a rite of passage or a perception in the minds of those *en route*, the perception is

reality” (p. 194). Yet for all the complexities and nuances the role of Vice-Principal entails, “there are some aspects of the job that can never be taught in a classroom but can only be learned on-the-job and in the specific school setting to which they had been assigned.” (p. 194).

Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012) posit that additional evidence and inquiry is needed to determine what works best in helping administrators transition into their new role when writing:

We look forward to seeing increased documentation by researchers and programs themselves about what leadership preparation programs do and with what results for principals’ capacities, actions, and outcomes. It is imperative that the field be able to move forward with purposeful use of information about what works so that programs can better arm principals for the challenging and important work they must undertake. (p. 43)

The struggles and headaches faced on a daily basis by aspiring leadership were also shown to have significant impact on individuals. Peters *et al.* (2016) found that “Leadership exacted a heavy toll as many struggled to balance their work and home lives. They spoke of their inability to leave school concerns at the workplace. There was an unabashed and strong commitment to understanding and caring for all students” (p. 194). Meanwhile Barnett *et al.* (2012) found that many participants were unwilling to wade into administrative waters because, “Transitioning from a teaching role to an assistant principal position can result in conflicts working with adults. In their previous experiences as teachers, assistant principals worked primarily with students. As assistant principals, however, they must regularly communicate with adults” (p. 96) and oftentimes these communications involve conflict either directly or indirectly. As well, newly appointed Vice-Principals have to leave the world of their classroom behind and

assume a larger system view. Michel (1996) saw this as “moving from the isolated environment of classroom to the more open and interactive atmosphere of the administrative office” (p. 8).

A lack of a clear job description for Vice-Principals is also highlighted in the literature. Barnett *et al.* (2012) state, “Many job descriptions are unclear, and the explicit responsibilities of an assistant principal vary between districts and schools” (p. 92) and indicate that “Studies from around the world indicate their duties may include, but are not limited to, resource and student management, teacher growth and development, classroom observations, and instructional leadership” (p. 94). Moreover, newly appointed Vice-Principals reported facing four types of difficulties. These included:

1. Experiencing resistance and tension when working with teachers who are weak, have low morale, or are not child centered;
2. Being compared with their predecessors, resulting in pressure to match previous administrators’ accomplishments;
3. Feeling overwhelmed with the workload demands, particularly paperwork and time management; and
4. Increasing student performance at the behest of vocal policy makers (Barnett *et al.*, 2012, p. 96).

These four points are crucial to the daily operations of a school but in reality, they are almost unachievable because as Good (2008) claims, “books, behinds and buses” are each day’s priority (p. 46).

Spillane and Lee (2014) report on the diversity and complexity of the role of principal and see it as a factor in dissuading individuals from entering leadership positions. They write:

Principals' roles are diverse: They span activities across managerial, instructional, and political realms, and these varied realms all compete for the principals' time and attention. Principal works also tends to be fragmented, fast-paced, and varied; it involves long hours and a relentless workload, along with demands from multiple, diverse stakeholders. Together these conditions contribute to high levels of stress and burnout among principals. (p. 432).

Spillane and Lee (2014) also highlight the many struggles novice administrators face when first entering the profession. Among these struggles is a sense of "aloneness". They write, "New principals often struggle with feelings of professional isolation and loneliness as they transition into a role that carries ultimate responsibility and decision-making powers. Oftentimes, beginning principals also have difficulty dealing with the legacy, practice, and style of the previous principal" (p. 433). The authors also found that "new principals frequently have difficulty managing and prioritizing the multiple tasks expected of them" (p. 433).

Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, Lapointe, and Orr (2009) examined eight effective leadership programs and concluded that high performing administrators can be created. Principal training and on-the-job support were closely examined by the authors who concluded that future leaders can be drawn into the principalship when supportive and constructive environments are in place. Other research (Dormann & d'Arbon, 2003) has shown that the general perception of today's school leader is negative in nature. They write, ". . . the role of the principal has been redefined and expanded with its sheer complexity and associated stress levels" (p. 136).

Stress and burnout were identified as determinants by Queen and Schumacher (2006) who report that principals are "faced constantly with insufficient time to address multiple priorities, work in a culture of stress, that combined with growing or constant anxiety, has

produced the phenomenon known as principal burnout” (p. 18). Shen, Cooley, and Wegenke (2004) describe the role as “a powerless position mired in a bureaucracy and characterized by bickering, infighting, and nonexistent teamwork between teachers and administration” (p. 59).

Compounding this difficulty of stress are staff members resistant to change and the ever-increasing demands from the public in this data-driven age. Spillane and Lee (2014) found:

Ineffective and resistant staff members also pose significant challenges for beginning principals. The new principal often finds that supporting, reprimanding, and counseling out these individuals is difficult and stressful. Other, more technical challenges – such as managing the budget and maintaining the school building – also loom large for novice principals, as well as difficulties related to implementing new government initiatives. (p. 433)

However, developing a new leader in any organization is a difficult, and oftentimes, complex task involving many key individuals. Bass (1990) highlights this process by stating, “Leadership development is a continuing process. Thus, peers, superiors, as well as family and friends, shape one’s subsequent performance as a leader” (Bass, 1990, p. 911). Muir (2014) viewed leadership development as a process leading to the development of one’s identity. Muir (2014) summarizes Petriglieri (2011) who saw leadership learning “as an identity workspace in which it is important to work within three areas: the participant’s experiences of leading and following, making sense of their life stories as part of their identities, and their emotions and the unconscious” (p. 350).

Avolio and Gardner (2005) highlight the importance of knowing one’s self by stating,

Self-awareness is not a destination point, but rather an emerging process where one continually comes to understand his or her unique talents, strengths, sense of purpose,

core values, beliefs and desires. It can include having a basic and fundamental awareness of one's knowledge, experience, and capabilities. (p. 324)

Mentor and Protégé Matching

Research shows that a successful mentor-mentee relationship is beneficial to the mentor, mentee, school, students, and system. As educators transition into the principalship they are expected to know the subtle nuances of their community, be experts in all areas of pedagogy, and to be competent data-based decision makers. This is why mentoring is a vital component of the educational system. Mullen (1994) describes the mentoring relationship as follows:

A mentoring relationship is a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced member (mentor) and a less experienced member (protégé) of the organization or profession. The relationship is developed to promote the professional growth and personal growth of the protégé through coaching, support, and guidance. (p. 259)

Daresh (2004) writes, "Awareness is growing within the educational systems that mentoring is an important practice, enabling prospective and beginning principals to both experience a better transition from the teaching role to the administrative one" (p. 8). Hansford and Ehrich (2006) add to the rich discussion around the need for school boards to support mentoring programs. In particular, they highlight the importance of mentor and protégé matching after reviewing 40 research-based programs on mentoring for principals and conclude, ". . . we would argue that mentoring programs are an important type of professional development activity for enhancing the learning and growth potential of novices and more experienced principals" (p. 49).

Schechter (2014) highlights the importance of proper matching at the outset of a mentoring program by stating, "Characteristics of mentoring programs include helping mentees

develop skills to create mission statements, develop as transformational leaders, learn about instructional leadership, become resource managers, and interface school and community (p. 52). Bozeman and Feeney (2008) extend this thinking when claiming that a productive mentor-mentee relationship allows for relevant knowledge to be imparted, greater influence and achievement for students and staff development, career mobility, and a greater sense of self-efficacy to occur in both participants. Adding a slightly different flavour are Crow and Matthews (1998) who cite the need for a mentor to go beyond acting as a good role model and call for an emphasis on reflective thinking and role clarification. The authors posit that a mentor must be able to ask the critical questions and not simply provide the simple answers.

Braun and Carlson (2008) also help illustrate the importance of mentor/protégé matching when discovering that principals need a network of support at any stage of their career. They write, “. . . principals learn best when they have opportunities to interact with leaders with varying levels of expertise and perspective” (p. 67). The value embedded within exposure to diverse learning opportunities extends to both genders as reported by Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) who write, “Women have much to contribute to the leadership of our educational institutions; their talents and abilities should be utilized to the fullest” (p. 22). Simply put, the value and importance of strong educational leadership extends equally to both genders, and it benefits a leader regardless of their years of experience.

The professional benefits for the mentor, mentee, and school system are numerous and supported in the research. Schechter (2014) states, “Beginning principals who received proper support from their mentors and the school system during their preparation reported a higher sense of productivity” (p. 54). Mentors and mentees have reported that this heightened sense of productivity leads to a greater sense of job satisfaction, as well as the opportunity to challenge

one another's thinking. In doing so, Muir (2014) writes, "The mentors played an active role in this development because they allowed the protégés to feel safe, encouraged them, and built up their self-confidence as they assumed more demanding leadership roles" (p. 369).

Meanwhile, Daresh (2004) focused on the benefits for the mentor and posited, ". . . attentive mentors, can turn this potential to a new source of knowledge, insight, and talent, later to be integrated into their own professional growth and advancement process" (p. 505). Hall (2008) extends this thinking and makes an interesting illustration by likening the mentor-mentee relationship to that of a craftsman and their apprentice. Hall writes, "Perceiving a mentor as a master craftsperson who supports and guides a leadership candidate, rather than evaluating him or her, serves as a scaffold for a joint learning process" (p. 450). Scaffolding is a term common to classroom instructional practices and is also easily applied to the learning processes of educational leaders.

Taylor-Backor and Gordon (2015) highlight the importance of induction support through the successful matching of the mentor and the mentee as a means of creating self-confidence. However, they also found that many participants could not provide a detailed description as to what that support should look like. They write:

The interviewees did not provide a detailed map of what such support should look like, but their idea that the university which prepared the principal has a role to play in the induction process makes sense, and online networks, cohort support, ongoing professional development, and mentoring all are promising strategies for supporting the new principal. (p. 122)

Muir (2014) supports the benefits of successful mentoring pairing, and the subsequent growth of leadership skills within the organization, by calling it "the natural outcome of the building up of

social capital” (p. 352). Muir continues by stating, “In a mentoring relationship, protégés are given the opportunity to observe and interact with members of the organization in leadership positions. This part of mentoring is vital because it helps participants develop a more mature and strategic perspective of the organization” (p. 351).

A successful mentoring program is a positive means of reducing the negative stigma surrounding a transition into leadership, and it has shown itself to be a positive mechanism for strategically supporting the successful transition of newly appointed administrators. Muir (2014) writes, “As protégés are exposed to more challenging assignments, they will become more confident and successful in their roles as leaders” (p. 374). Cranston (2007) calls for district and school leadership to do a better job in communicating the positive aspects of the role by stating:

One of the key drivers of assuring there is such a pool will be determined by the motives and intentions of potential aspirants in seeking promotion, depending in large part on just what potential aspirants actually think about school leadership and the principalship in particular. (p. 110)

Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent (2004) reported on 300 research-based articles surrounding mentoring programs and conclude that beginning administrators, regardless of their gender or race, benefit from a structured mentoring program when roles are clearly established at the outset. The benefits of a mentoring program far outweigh the drawbacks and the authors call for awareness, support for the program, mentor training, careful selection of mentors, and a systematic evaluation of the program each year. They conclude, “. . . mentoring has enormous potential to bring about learning, personal growth, and development for professionals” (p. 536). Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) echo these sentiments when making several recommendations for a district’s mentoring program. Among them they write, “Begin mentoring programs and

establish mentor/protégé pairs before the onset of the school year; provide concurrent initial mentor/protégé training and require combined socialization activities, but develop separate skill training for protégés and mentors as well as superintendent versus principal participants” (p. 184).

Schechter (2014) examined a mentor-mentee principal preparation program in New York City and in the data analysis found three main categories as being important in a productive mentor-mentee relationship: personal characteristics, professional discourse, and time and frequency of communication. Similarly, Retelle (2010) examined three novice assistant principals’ mentoring experiences with their school principals during the 2000-2001 school year and found that the assistant principals wanted the principals to mentor them and believed that a mentoring experience would enhance their development as school leaders. Retelle went on to discover that the principals’ and assistant principals’ understanding of mentoring differed in important ways that put the assistant principals at a disadvantage.

Schechter (2014) cites numerous studies highlighting the importance of clearly established roles for the mentor and the mentee. A failure to do so can diminish the sense of belonging for the mentee as well as a reduction in their self-confidence. To be more precise, clearly established roles for both participants allows for the “exchange of professional opinions that creates an opportunity to develop a better awareness of personal values and definitions” (p. 55). Mentoring another professional takes time and energy, and both parties have to be firmly committed to the relationship. “The fact that the mentors could not devote sufficient time to address the demands of the mentoring role due to the burden of other responsibilities... was considered by mentees as a major inhibiting factor” (Schechter, 2014, p. 56).

For the individual transitioning into the leadership role, they must be able to see through the window of an experienced administrator's daily life. Clearly established roles at the outset of any formalized mentoring program allows for this viewing to occur. Daresh (2004) writes, "... it enriches the mentee's understanding of the subtle relationship between theories and the daily practice, such as the interactions with parents, teachers, staff, and students" (p. 504). Mentees need to have a clear understanding around the totality of the principalship and the literature makes it clear that direct observation allows the mentee to view firsthand the challenges leaders encounter every day. As evidenced by the literature, the mentoring experience can be an experience that is rich and rewarding to both the mentor and the mentee. What is equally clear is the understanding that an unhealthy relationship between participants is detrimental to both professionals.

School Leadership as Instructional Leader

Instructional leadership can sometimes be the most neglected form of the Vice-Principal's work. It is an evolving position and one that has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. Today's focus on high levels of student achievement, sound management practices, and data-based decision making has made the principalship more important than ever. Transitioning from classroom teacher to Vice-Principal can be a daunting task for individuals who struggle in discovering their own leadership identity let alone attempting to define the term leadership. This is supported in the writing of Leithwood and Duke (1999) who found it hard to accurately define the term because "it has not depended on any clearly agreed upon definition of the concept, as essential as that would seem at first glance" (p. 45). A clear definition of instructional leadership was also difficult as indicated by Barnett *et al.* (2012) who discovered that "few assistant principals actually take on instructional leadership duties" (p. 95), a problem

exacerbated when the administrator has less than five years teaching experience. They found that leaders facing this lack of teaching experience “may not have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to guide older and more experienced teachers” (p. 95). Continued further, they state, “As a result, many assistant principals do not feel confident taking over the school when their principals are absent, especially regarding administrative and financial matters” (p. 97).

Fullan (2007, 2008) writes about the core values and practices of leadership required at all levels of school leadership, business, and nonprofits. However, when it comes to educational leadership, knowing thyself has shown to be critically important. When writing about moral purpose, understanding change, relationship and knowledge building, the need for coherence making, Fullan (2007) states that the principal is second to the teacher in terms of affecting achievement levels of students. Fullan discusses at length the meaning of educational change and affirms that principals are instructional leaders having a significant impact on student learning. He concludes by calling for an effective meshing of effective teaching and learning practices; a practice mentoring could facilitate in helping Vice-Principals ready themselves for the principalship.

Finding the time to be an instructional leader in the school was a difficulty researchers have discovered. Peters *et al.* (2016) identified dull and boring tasks, and time management skills, as struggles that newly appointed administrators face when attempting to act as instructional leaders in their schools. They shared that “many responsibilities assigned to APs are menial tasks that, from their perspective, do not provide the skills necessary to become an effective instructional leader” (p. 195). Moreover, many participants identified their loss of technological skills when leaving the classroom and assuming the instructional leadership role as having a profound effect upon their self-efficacy. “Instructional leaders must lead from the front

with regard to technology and therefore identifying this gap and addressing the matter is critical” (Peters *et al.*, 2016, p. 195). Once removed from the classroom, participants reported feeling left behind in the professional development opportunities that were once afforded to them.

The ability to successfully manage time was cited as being problematic in the literature as well. Barnett *et al.* (2012) found this to be an ongoing concern facing beginning Vice-Principals who were striving to establish credibility with their colleagues; especially, if they were assigned to a school where they had previously not worked. The authors identified the establishment of solid working relationships with people within the school and outside the school environment, and the importance of understanding curriculum and instructional strategies for teacher and school improvement as vitally important to their induction success (pp. 115-116).

To address these gaps in time management skills, instructional leadership abilities, and successfully handling tasks that were viewed as mundane, Peters *et al.* (2016) posit developing strong mentoring relationships inside and outside their school settings, developing a knowledge base of social service providers in their area, and a request that course providers maintain a “continued emphasis on the practical application of coursework to real life demands that will be presented in the school leadership role is of paramount importance.” (p. 196). Barnett *et al.* (2012) cite several research studies who recommend a myriad of solutions to help assist newly appointed administrators in their instructional leadership skills. Among them, they propose the reading of a variety of materials and to retain important articles for future reference; that they participate in staff development activities, learning communities, and team meetings with other teachers; that they attend and participate in professional development activities with their teaching staff; that they visit classrooms regularly to observe best practices; and that they “find mentors to expand their instructional leadership capacities” (p. 95).

In the literature, relationship building is viewed as a method for improving administrators' instructional practice. Fullan (2001) writes, "The role of the leader is to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results" (p. 68). This can be difficult given the demands placed on them by board and ministry directives. Marsh (2000) echoes this sentiment and views relationship building as a new form of instructional leadership and one that creates a culture of learning between school leaders, teachers, and students.

The literature also points to principal preparation programs as a key element in preparing administrators to assume the role of instructional leader. Blase and Blase (2004) state, "Recent research – ours and that of others – has produced significant findings that confirm the importance of instructional leadership for school success" (p. 173). Taylor-Backor and Gordon (2015) write:

Although the current knowledge base includes a great deal of literature on effective instructional leadership as well as on the need to reform principal preparation programs, there is little research on how principal preparation programs should prepare aspiring principals to be instructional leaders. (p. 107)

As mentioned above, today's administrators are regarded as instructional leaders. Unfortunately, school leadership faces the daunting task of improving levels of student achievement for all students and meeting the increased demands placed upon them by senior administration. Creasap (2007) sees this as a real struggle for some since newly appointed administrators lack the skills needed to lead teachers and students in these efforts. Creasap states that "the instructional leadership activities that tended to be the best predictors of student achievement included the amount of time principals spent in classrooms and an emphasis on data-driven dialog . . ." (p. 35). Taylor-Backor and Gordon (2015) argue:

Although leadership for the improvement of instruction should include teachers, it begins with the school principal as the leader of leaders. The development of principals as instructional leaders is the responsibility of principal preparation programs. It is imperative that preparation programs be assessed to determine their level of effectiveness in developing instructional leaders, and be redesigned when necessary to assure they are fulfilling that critical mission. (p. 123).

Spending time in classrooms, making data-based decisions, conducting staff performance appraisals, modelling instructional leadership, and attending to the increased demands from parents, are all areas that beginning Vice-Principals have reported struggling with. As a means of addressing the pressure to become the instructional leader in a school, Taylor-Backor and Gordon (2015) posit:

If instructional leadership is to be successfully integrated into principal preparation, it will be necessary for preparation programs to include faculty members who have expertise in this area. Indicators of such expertise include successful practice in instructional leadership, advanced academic preparation in the area, and either a scholarly track record or research agenda focused on instructional leadership. (p. 122)

The authors continue by calling for the establishment of advisory committees composed of practicing educational leaders as a means of improving principal preparation programs. They write:

It is critical that such advisory committees include both central office and school administrators who understand the importance of instructional leadership. Moreover, it is important that the advisory committee and faculty meet regularly to discuss how the program can continuously improve the program's screening process, curriculum, and

instructional strategies to reflect a state-of-the-art approach to instructional leadership. (p. 123)

Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer were the first to coin the term “emotional intelligence” back in 1990, but it was Daniel Goleman’s seminal work in 1995, *Emotional Intelligenc*, that claimed that unlike a cognitive abilities, a person’s emotional intelligence could be cultivated and grown. In fact, Goleman claimed a person’s emotional intelligence (EI) levels were a better predictor at business success than were their intelligence quotient (IQ) scores. A study conducted by Stone, Parker, and Wood (2005) for the *Ontario Principals Council* highlighted the findings of several researchers (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Taylor, Parker, & Bagby, 1999; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004) who examined the impact that emotional intelligence has on a person’s ability to adapt to new learning and working environments. They discovered:

. . . that the type of competencies most closely linked with emotional intelligence are strongly linked with an individual’s ability to cope with environmental demands and uncertainties. Thus emotional intelligence has come to be viewed as an important factor in the quality of one’s general emotional well-being, as well as an important predictor of one’s ability to succeed in the classroom and on the job. (pp. 3-4)

Stone *et al.* (2005) further discovered that a number of factors that contributed to an administrator’s emotional intelligence levels. They found that professional development activities for newly appointed administrators would benefit from a focus on emotional self-awareness; self-actualization; empathy; interpersonal relationships; flexibility; problem solving; and impulse control (p. 8). Of further interest is the discovery of the fact that development in all of these areas was of benefit to elementary and secondary school administrators alike.

Stone *et al.* (2005) reports on four key EI dimensions which include:

1. The ability to perceive, appraise and express emotion;
2. The ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking and behaviour;
3. The ability to understand and utilize emotional knowledge;
4. The ability to manage and regulate emotions (pp. 9-10).

Stone *et al.* (2005) also confirmed what George (2000) discovered in that “Although mass-media discussion of EI and the workplace often focus on the top of the corporate structure, the growing empirical literature is suggesting that EI abilities are linked with leadership managing behaviours at various levels within an institution” (p. 11). However, Stone *et al.* (2005) determined that it was a person’s ability to successfully manage stress as being “very important for generating and maintaining enthusiasm, confidence, and cooperation in the workplace” (p. 11).

Of particular interest in the findings of Stone *et al.* (2005) is the fact that Vice-Principals were rated higher by their staff on relationship oriented leadership. The authors claim “These results are not surprising, since Vice-Principals are often involved in more inter-personal activities with staff than principals” (p. 32). This warrants further investigation since previous studies (Armstrong, 2009, 2014; Barnett *et al.*, 2012; Busch *et al.*, 2012; Peters *et al.*, 2016; Pollock *et al.*, 2014) have indicated that Vice-Principals often feel disconnected from the rest of the staff because of the volume of student discipline, busing, scheduling, and attendance issues they are forced to sort out each day.

In spite of demands and pressures, the research has also shown that effective administrators are resilient in spite of the daily pressures. One way that Vice-Principals can be instructional leaders is by becoming a co-learner. In doing so, Vice-Principals establish

conditions where educators have permission not to know everything and where diversity of opinions is an asset. Bottoms and O'Neill (2001) support this notion of administrators learning alongside their staff by stating:

Future school leaders must use the computer and the Internet to enhance their own learning. Beyond that, they need to understand how technology can engage students in learning, what a classroom looks like when technology has been successfully integrated into instruction, and how to support teachers in learning how to use technology to advance student achievement. (p. 10)

Katz and Dack (2013) write, “. . . nothing has a bigger payoff than learning visibly and publicly alongside staff in a school” (p. 46). Fullan and Langworthy (2014) see co-learning as enabling principals to “drive transparent, collaborative reflection continually assessing what is working as well as learning from those things that didn’t work” (p. 8). Participating in teacher learning and development allows the principal to make their learning visible, and it allows them to make it public. In today’s educational environment, co-learning allows the instructional leader to have interactions with their staff that are purposeful and precise.

School Leadership and Succession Planning

As stated above, school leadership is vitally important to the establishment of a positive working and learning environment, and it has been determined to be the second most influential force on student achievement. School leadership is many times tasked with the role of identifying, recruiting, cultivating, and nurturing potential leadership candidates as part of a school district’s succession plans. Sergiovanni (2007) writes, “Those who lead – indeed those who have a responsibility to lead – are those who have the will, expertness, temperament, and the skills to help us achieve our goals in a particular area at a particular time” (p. 112). A

district's ability to have successful plans in place for inevitable retirements and promotions is highlighted by Collins (2001) who focuses attention on the importance of leadership when saying "it is critical to get the right people on the bus and insure they are in the right seats" (p. 13). Moreover, Kouzes and Posner (2006) found "Leaders are expected to look into the future, to gaze across the time horizon and communicate to us what they see. It's not about being prescient or clairvoyant. It's about being discerning and perceptive. It's about noticing what's around the corner" (p. 90). Succession planning is oftentimes an overlooked entity in the day-to-day operations of a school district; however, if left unchecked, it can lead to turbulent times for staff, students, and parents.

Fullan (2001) writes, "People stimulate, inspire and motivate each other to contribute and implement best ideas, and best ideas mean greater overall coherence" (p. 118). Funk (2013) cites Senge (1990) when describing learning organizations "as organizations that allow and encourage members to think creatively and expansively. Furthermore, Senge maintained that a learning organization continually transforms itself and is committed to facilitating the growth of the members within the organization" (p. 38). Kouzes and Posner (2006) posit, "Leaders who seed their role as serving others leave the most lasting legacies" (p. 10) while Fullan (2001) states:

Each and every leader, whether the CEO of a multi-national corporation or a school principal, can become more effective – much more effective – by focusing on a small number of core aspects of leadership and by developing a new mindset about the leaders responsibility to himself or herself and to those with whom he or she works. (p. 2)

Knowledge of a district's professional and social capital is easily found through thorough succession planning activities by those who are already in positions of leadership. When reviewing the work of Bolman and Deal (1997) and Hallinger and Heck (1998), Peters *et al.*

(2016) identified leadership as an integral part of organizational success, and the advancement of any organization is proportionate to the adapted practices of the leader. An effective leader in the schools is critical for the reason that “The challenges of school administration are simply too complex for administrators to work alone without the assistance of others in the school community” (p. 184).

Busch, MacNeil, and Baraniuk (2012) found it critically important that school leaders fully understand the demanding nature, difficulty, and complexity of the job before deciding to enter the role. Unfortunately, once the reality of the job sets in, few Vice-Principals are “afforded the professional development opportunities that teachers and principals receive” (Barnett *et al.*, 2012, p. 96). Because the role of Vice-Principal is becoming more and more complex in today’s learning environments, a study conducted by Koru (1993) found the assistant principal’s role as being inadequate and ineffective in preparing individuals for the principalship.

Barnett *et al.* (2012) found that one of the best methods of supporting individuals as they transitioned into Vice-Principal positions was through the thoughtful and precision placement of beginning administrations. “Supportive principals provide training, develop an open and honest relationship, create opportunities for assistant principals to attend and perform principal functions, and encourage their assistant principals pursue principalships” (Barnett *et al.*, 2012, p. 97). To face firsthand the potential difficulty of inadequate succession planning, Ontario’s Ministry of Education created the Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS). The Ontario Leadership Strategy recognizes the “need to take a long term, leadership approach to succession planning that starts at the teacher level” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 2).

Armstrong’s (2014) study for Ontario’s Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) entitled, *Transition to the Role of Principal and Vice-Principal Study*, found “becoming a 21st century

leader challenges newly appointed principals and Vice-Principals cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically as they adapt to new administrative identities, roles and stakeholder demands that differ significantly from teaching” (p. 7). In spite of many successfully transitioning into administration, there exists “the need for consistent, creative, and coordinated transitional supports that are responsive to newcomers’ development needs and nested within systematic processes and coordinated partnerships at the school district, Ministry, principal professional association, union, and university levels” (p. 7).

Daresh (2004) reported the clear benefits to districts, protégés, and mentors who take part in a mentorship program. Resource limitations, lack of sustainability, inadequate preparation, and the failure to see the value of mentoring, can all be overcome when a district establishes a clear focus and purpose to its mentoring programs. Daresh claims that a district can easily accomplish this by communicating the importance of mentoring when writing:

. . . it is important that future principals be made aware of the existence of mentoring as a way that will be available to assist them. In a sense, they need to begin thinking of the ways that they may be helped in their development by being ready to engage in an interactive dynamic process as they take their first jobs. (p. 512)

Wu, Turban, and Cheung (2012) point out the need for social skill influences in the overall effectiveness of succession planning since they view mentoring as a dyadic process. They also speak to the need for no-fault exits when relationships are failing between a mentor and their protégé; moreover, they call for careful management of workplace mentoring relationships since “research shows that mentoring leads to positive career outcomes. Thus, by examining the role of interpersonal skills, such as social skill, we contribute to the understanding of the dynamic of mentoring process” (p. 60).

Connelly and Ruark (2010) echo the findings of Wu *et al.* (2012) by stating that leader emotional displays are important to consider both within and outside of transformational/charismatic paradigms and that organizations must take these into consideration when planning for succession. They found “positive emotions with higher-activating potential resulted in more desirable outcomes than those lower in activating potential” (p. 745). Perhaps most important is their concluding statement: “. . . negative leader emotions may produce short-term gains in terms of group effort, but might have more negative effects if displayed on a frequent basis or over a long timeframe” (Connelly & Ruark, p. 758). Literature has shown that Principal burnout and dropout rates are problematic issues in succession planning, and they are an issue school boards throughout Ontario face each year. To help cope with burnout and dropout rates, Clawson (2008) calls for the establishment of a new set of leadership principles whereby individuals learned to manage energy better first in oneself, and then in others.

Schechter (2014) identified mentoring as a key component in succession planning because it provides “management continuity, improves employee retention, increases productivity, upgrades interdepartmental communication, and leads to a better integration of employees in organizational norms” (p. 53). Fink and Brayman (2004) draw attention to the need for districts to identify and develop future educational leaders because of impending retirements in the next five to ten years. They call for a new approach to succession planning and to identify potential leadership sooner rather than later. This is important to the needs of success planning because many educational personnel view the position of principal, or Vice-Principal, in an unfavourable light. Fink (2010) went to greater lengths when investigating the challenges of succession planning through an international lens. In doing so, he attempted to determine best

practices around succession planning, and he did this through the solicitation of opinions from future leader.

Principal Preparation Programs

The role of administrators has evolved over time and the manner in which administrators have been trained has received much discussion and focus in recent years (Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015). Research by Fullan (2003) and Halverson and Plecki (2015) found that effective leadership programs are instrumental in impacting classroom practice and achievement while Peters *et al.* (2016) report that evaluation of current preparation programs is necessary because in doing so, “Evaluation provides the information necessary to examine how well a program or initiative is being implemented and to determine whether that program is achieving desired results” (p. 184).

Citing studies conducted by Taylor-Backor and Gordon (2015), and Yirci and Kocabas, (2010) Peters *et al.* (2016) report that “reflection upon any program in higher education is of value to program faculty, institutions, and certainly to students. Faculty reflection upon the quality of program design and implementation efforts to evaluate program effectiveness is meaningful to the process of educational reform and improvement” (p. 183). Here, the authors extol the benefits of annual program reviews by claiming that doing so will provide the “information necessary to examine how well an educational leadership program or initiative is being implemented, and may help faculty members determine whether that program is achieving desired results and where changes in curriculum or instructional delivery may be indicated” (Peters *et al.*, 2016, p. 183).

Fink and Resnick (2001) found that many programs preparing individuals for the principalship “deemphasize teaching and learning . . . focusing primary attention on a myriad of

administrative competencies and devoting little time or attention to questions of learning, curriculum and professional development (p. 599). Supporting this theme are Bottoms and O'Neill (2001) who posit:

. . . most universities still require very little study in curriculum and instruction. Courses rarely address the skills needed to lead successful schools – such as the use of data to improve instruction and the use of effective teaching and learning strategies – or to make decisions about aligning courses, classroom assignments and students' work to standards (Kronley 2000 and Sykes 2000). Effective professional development and clinical supervision typically get little attention in the “curriculum” courses. Virtually no courses address the issues of change, team building, and how to apply research knowledge to school improvement. (p. 23)

Wilmore (2002) adds to the existing literature base regarding effective principal preparation programs by acknowledging the complexity with which the role of administrator has changed over time. Wilmore writes, “From their early role as the principal-teacher to the school manager in the later part of the 20th century, today's principal is being asked to assume the 21st century role as the school catalyst for all stakeholders” (p. 5), and a task as great as this is not for the faint hearted nor the ill-prepared. Stoll (1998) recognized this and reported that the role of the administrator is a complex one, and that there is a need for leadership to possess an adaptive mindset since leadership and school culture often clash through contrasting values and identities. Stoll writes, “Within this, however, there may exist several cultures: pupil culture, teacher cultures, a leadership culture, non-teaching culture, and parent culture” (p. 10). It was true then, and it is very true today. Future research can only speculate how important it will be for

tomorrow's leadership candidates to be adaptive in their practice while remaining true to their core set of pedagogical beliefs.

Principal preparation programs and the qualifications and means with which candidates are selected have received much attention. Young, Mountford, and Crow (2005) discovered that the conversation around sound principal preparation programs is a topic rich in debate and urgent in need. They write, "Across the nation, many faculty members have been working to improve leadership preparation for years. Their efforts range from realigning programs to address national leadership standards to drastically reforming and restructuring ineffective programs" (p. 3).

Adding to this discussion, Peters *et al.* (2016) found that reforms have included "structuring educational leadership programs to include greater levels of collaboration between students, and between institutions of higher education and schools and school districts, intensive coaching and mentoring of emergent school leaders, and increased levels of field-based experiences for leadership candidates" (p. 184). Peters *et al.* (2016) discovered that "real life" complexities of the job, and the preparatory programs which they received, oftentimes disagree. For example, participants in the study reported feeling culture shock after encountering students in their care who were struggling with the day-to-day pressures of their world. "Dealing with this type of emotional shock was notably mentioned as an area in which some APs did not feel prepared by their university leadership program" (Peters *et al.*, p. 195).

Historically, the role of the Vice-Principal has been that of disciplinarian, timetable creator, and manager. In highlighting these historical practices, Peters *et al.*, (2016) examined the work of several researchers who called for the re-conceptualization of the Vice-Principal's role. "These experts decried the perceived wasted potential of APs, proposing that, by refocusing the role on developing instructional leadership among APs, greater resources might be brought to

bear on improving teaching and learning in schools” (p. 185). This “re-conceptualization” is also highlighted in the writings of Barnett *et al.* (2012) who “contend that the role of the assistant principal must evolve from the traditional perspective of disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program is at the forefront” (p. 93).

Spillane and Lee (2014) make a myriad of suggestions towards further research on effective principal preparation programs. Among them, they call for an examination of “the transitions of novices into the principal position under different leadership arrangements such as co-principal and distributed leadership arrangements” (p. 457). A sense of “ultimate responsibility” was highlighted by the authors who gave voice to beginning administrators by stating:

A major “reality shock” for novice principals as they transitioned into their new occupation was a sense of ultimate responsibility. This sense of ultimate responsibility contributed to three core problems of practice – task volume, diversity, and unpredictability. While almost all novices experienced the responsibility shock as well as one or more of the practice problems, the conditions of novices’ transitions to the principalship either eased or exacerbated the level of practice problems they encountered. (p. 105)

One way of adequately preparing aspirants for the Vice-Principal’s role is to attempt to have course providers, principal associations, unions, and Ministry of Education officials arrive at a common understanding and acceptance of what the job entails. This has not received the attention it deserves as reflected in existing literature. Perhaps an easy-to-understand definition of the job description for a Vice-Principal is “everything”. Marshall and Hooley (2006) recommended that those who determine job descriptions for, and supervise, APs consider more

broadly defining the role, and therefore the potential for more effective on-the-job training for these leaders.

Barnett *et al.* (2012) add to this discussion by identifying the complexity of the job description for Vice-Principals. Their research has found “a push from district leaders and professionals organizations to re-purpose the duties of the assistant principal to include more instructional leadership responsibilities” (p. 93). Lastly, Peters *et al.* (2016) highlight the core purpose of all principal preparation programs; that is, “Preparing school leaders who are competent and well-equipped to lead schools in a multitude of ways is the ultimate goal for this educational leadership program and for others around the country.” In order to do so, “course providers must attend to the voices of recent graduates who have recently assumed key leadership roles” (p. 197).

Participants in a study conducted by Taylor-Backor and Gordon (2015) call for principal preparation programs “to integrate theory and practice and to provide for practice of typical instructional leadership responsibilities” (p. 122). Among these responsibilities is the need to include the skills necessary to desegregate student achievement data, Bottoms and O’Neill (2001) posit:

Future leaders need to understand how to use data as a discussion tool for reshaping the attitude of teachers, parents and students about changing course offerings and instructional strategies. Principals in schools that have made significant improvement in student achievement did not hide bad news but used data as a tool to get people to take ownership of the problems and to do something about them. (p. 11)

Hess and Kelly (2007) report, “Meaningful reform of principal-preparation programs must ensure that the content of these programs is well suited for the challenges confronting

principals in a new era of schooling” (p. 269). This is reflected in 2005 study by the Southern Regional Education Board which stated, “While few universities have excelled at redesign, [however] the majority fall short of implementing the conditions necessary to create high quality programs centered on preparing principals who can lead improvement in student achievement” (p. 8). Bottoms and O’Neill (2001) echo the need for preparation programs to offer courses that address the current needs of school systems. They write:

The literature is clear on this matter. Collecting, understanding and using a wide variety of data are crucial leadership skills in these times of accountability. Successful school leaders must be adept at leading their faculty in action research and using technology to analyze data. (p. 11)

They also call for program participants to actively engage in completing surveys as a means of helping to improve principal preparation programs. In doing so, they admit that surveys “are only useful if they result in revisions to the program to improve its screening process, curriculum, and delivery” (p. 123).

This is the dilemma facing all leadership preparation programs today and there remains much to be seen as to whether administrators can truly act instructional leaders given the working conditions in today’s heavily politically influenced public schools. Perhaps a better term might be instructional learner whereby the administrator models an open stance to receiving and actively participating in professional development activities alongside their staff. From the literature reviewed, it is abundantly clear that mentoring has an important part to play in succession planning and is something so strategically important that it cannot be minimized or overlooked.

Summary

At this point in the research, a gap in the literature exists regarding the study of failed mentor/protégé relationships, and the impact this failure may have on an administrator's career; in particular, a literature gap exists in the study of Vice-Principals who have left their position and returned to the classroom because of failure, either real or perceived. Grogan and Crow (2004) posit that mentoring is an integral part of an administrators' professional development. Moreover, the authors claim, “. . . further research is called for to examine the determinants of a productive mentor-mentee relationship, which fosters prospective principals' growth” (p. 465).

As well, there exists a gap in the literature regarding the selection process for aspiring administrators into most principal preparation programs. In Ontario, *The Principal Qualification Program, PQP*, consists of two parts – *PQP Parts I and II*. In order to be considered, an individual must: (1) be a member in good standing with the Ontario College of Teachers; (2) they must hold a Teacher's certificate; (3) hold an acceptable postsecondary degree; (4) hold qualifications in at least three divisions one of which must be Intermediate; and (5) have a minimum of five years successful teaching experience at the elementary or secondary level. In addition, potential candidates must possess one of: (1) at least half of a Masters degree and one subject specialist; (2) two subject specialist; (3) a master's degree that required at least 30 graduate postsecondary credits or their equivalent, or a doctorate; (4) or at least 30 postsecondary credits, or their equivalent, before they can enrol in the *Principal Qualification Program Part I*. If an individual meets the above mentioned criteria, they are able to enrol in a course provider's qualification program. Thereafter, it is up to each school board in Ontario to select the best candidate for each vacancy.

Programs such as Ontario's *New Teacher Induction Program* (NTIP) make mention of the need for no-fault exits, but very little research exists, if any, surrounding the long-term effects of failed mentor/protégé relationships. Are there career-limiting effects for the Vice-Principal? How are Vice-Principals viewed by peers and superiors if their relationship fails? What impact might a certified coach have had in mediating the relationship between the mentor and the mentee? If a relationship fails and both parties are working in the same school, what effect does this have on staff morale, community relations, and student achievement? Is coaching, or a blend of mentoring and coaching, a better fit for Vice-Principals transitioning from the classroom to administration? Future inquiry into these areas will help add to the discussion around the importance of effective leadership induction practices in our schools.

Today's leadership faces unprecedented demands and challenges that cause many to shy away from the position. Leadership is influence, and it is the ability to obtain followers. Leadership is temporary and individuals are accountable for their actions. Effective leaders do not come to the role of the principal by right; instead, they earn it through responsibility. Effective leaders clearly understand that with responsibility comes accountability. The literature reviewed for this study makes it abundantly clear that supporting beginning administrators; that is, Vice-Principals, with the best supports available through principal preparation programs; ongoing professional learning and development; and mentoring and coaching, will all help the beginning administrator to effectively transition into the leadership. A successful transition will undoubtedly have a positive influence on staff buy-in and performance, which in turn will lead to greater student engagement and achievement.

When the school's leadership is confident, capable, and personable, parents are more involved in their child's education; moreover, the communities they serve are enriched with

students who desire to maintain, strengthen, and promote the ideals of a democratic society.

Perhaps even more rewarding is the production of young adults who enter our colleges, universities, and workforce with a mindset that there is a higher purpose in all of our lives, and that purpose is to serve and enrich the lives of those around us.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Mentoring has been researched at length by both qualitative (Allen, Eby, Potent, Lentz & Lima, 2004; Allen, Eby, O'Brien & Lentz, 2008) and quantitative studies (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008); however, few studies have investigated the mentoring experiences of novice Vice-Principals who have transitioned from a classroom teaching role into the role of Vice-Principal. Consequently, this study will employ a qualitative phenomenological approach because the purpose of my research is to describe the lived mentoring experiences of newly appointed Vice-Principals. This type of methodology was chosen so that participants' voice could be heard and that their mentoring experiences could be shared and understood.

Design

This study uses a combined hermeneutical and transcendental phenomenology research approach described in Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994) as the method of qualitative inquiry to determine lived mentoring experiences of Vice-Principals in Ontario, Canada.

Phenomenology is embedded within philosophy whose beginnings can be traced back to German mathematician Edmund Husserl who viewed phenomenology as a way in which individuals experienced the world pre-reflectively before having an opportunity to conceptualize or categorize those same experiences. Echoing this view is van Manen (1990) who sees phenomenology as an "object of human experience to be studied" (p. 163) while Creswell (2013) likened it to a common meaning of lived experiences.

Moustakas (1994) defines phenomenology as being "committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analysis" and being "rooted in questions that give direction and focus to meaning." (pp. 58-59). Moustakas also acknowledges the influence Husserl's writings

had on him before expanding on the founders ideas. While many interpretations of phenomenology exist, this study will define phenomenology as the idea of seeking a deeper, richer understanding of a phenomenon by observing, interviewing, and seeking to understand the everyday, lived experiences of people associated with that phenomenon (Schutz, 1967).

The study of phenomenology is defined by its two types: (a) hermeneutical phenomenology, and (2) transcendental phenomenology. When defining hermeneutic phenomenology, van Manen (1990) sees it as being both descriptive (phenomenological) and interpretive (hermeneutic) and writes:

The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) “facts” of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the “facts” of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process. (pp. 180-181)

When describing and conducting transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) writes:

The researcher following a transcendental phenomenological approach engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the Epoche process) in order to launch the study as far as possible free of pre-conceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies – to be completely open, receptive, and naive in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (p. 22)

I have worked as a vice principal at the OVDSB and participated over twenty years ago in the mentoring program they offered at that time. Since then, the components of the program

and the people charged with the responsibility of running the program have both changed dramatically. As a result, I will have to bracket out my own experiences while “collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon” under investigation (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Creswell (2013) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as the process of studying lived experience (phenomenology) and interpreting the “texts” of life (hermeneutics). As the researcher decides on a phenomenon that is of particular interest to them, Creswell states:

In the process, they reflect on essential themes, what constitutes the nature of this lived experience. . . Phenomenology 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. (pp. 79-80)

After close examination of the two types of phenomenology, I have determined that a blend of both hermeneutic and transcendental phenomenology is the method best suited to this study. I have chosen a blended approach because I am setting aside my prejudgements based on prior experiences (transcendental) and looking at meaningful lived experiences of beginning Vice-Principals to discover the lived mentoring experiences of beginning Vice-Principals. Yin (2009) posits that a well-designed methodology “is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately to its conclusions” (p. 29), and this is what this study attempts to accomplish.

Creswell (2013) describes the procedures of transcendental phenomenology as “consisting of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one’s experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 80). Van Manen (1990) describes hermeneutic phenomenology research as the study of essences through

“the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience” (p. 10). Patton (2002) describes shared experiences the following way:

These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon, for example, the essence of loneliness, the essence of being a mother, or the essence of being a particular participant in a particular program. (p. 106)

I have lived the experience of being a Vice-Principal so it is important I bracket out my own experiences, while bracketing in the experiences of the participants. I have chosen to take significant participant quotes and combine them into themes so that “a textural description, structural description, and an overall essence of the experience can be determined” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored in this study:

1. What experiences and issues do Ontario practicing Vice-Principals identify as the most challenging?
2. What affect has the mentoring experience at the Ottawa Valley District School Board had on the ability and proficiency of Ontario practicing Vice-Principals to address challenges, manage change and to lead the instructional program as outlined in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*?
3. What obstacles to growth, and opportunities for growth, currently exist in the elements of the Ottawa Valley District School Board’s mentoring program that can be reinforced or restructured to better prepare Vice-Principals?

These research questions allowed for the data to be analyzed to determine the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the mentoring program taking place at the OVDSB.

Role of the Researcher

As an elementary educator for 25 years and school principal for the past 20 years, I have seen many administrators face enormous headaches and hardships when transitioning into administration. As a current member of *Minister's Principal Reference Group* for the province of Ontario, past Chair of the Ottawa Valley District School Board's *Operations Steering Committee* and *New Teacher Induction Program* (NTIP), as well as possessing Supervisory Officer's Qualifications in the province of Ontario, I understand the value a formalized mentorship program can provide to a school district. It is unfortunate that many beginning administrators suffer extreme anxiety once appointed to the leadership role for the simple fact they do not have an experienced administrator to assist and guide them in their practice.

Phenomenological reductionism, also known as bracketing, initially presented a challenge for me as I strived to keep my own personal experiences from clouding the data. Creswell (2013) writes, "...bracketing personal experiences may be difficult for the researcher to implement because interpretations of the data always incorporate the assumptions that the researcher brings to the topic" (p. 83). I have lived on both sides of the mentoring experience so it was important that I bracketed out my own experiences and let the participants give voice to their personal leadership journey.

Participants

Nineteen Vice-Principals from the Ottawa Valley District School Board (OVDSB) were solicited to participate in this study with ten ultimately choosing to participate. These nineteen participants were chosen through purposeful sampling, because the participants selected

represent those who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Patton (2002) reports, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 46). Patton continues by stating, “Information-rich cases are those from which can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling” (p. 46). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) define purposeful sampling in a similar fashion as Patton when writing that purpose sampling “. . . uses researcher judgment to select instances that are information-rich with respect to the phenomenon being studied” (p. 348).

Purposeful sampling is appropriate for this study because the participants are representative of a homogenous group from the OVDSB; that is, all participants are practicing Vice-Principals with the OVDSB. From this sample, a focus group of five Vice-Principals were chosen; one from each of the school board’s five families of schools. The families of schools in the OVDSB represent the populated areas of the Board. Each family has one high school and anywhere from one to seven elementary feeder schools. Patton (1990) points out that “focus group interviews involve conducting open-ended interviews with groups of five to eight people on specially targeted or focused issues” and that sampling “typically involves bringing together people of similar backgrounds and experiences to participate in a group interview about major program issues that affect them” (p. 173). This study meets Patton’s requirements because each participant has served from one to five years experience as a Vice-Principal, each participant is employed at the OVDSB and part of the mentoring program, there is focus group representation from both the elementary and the secondary panels.

The ten participants selected for this study were 100% Caucasian, and all were female. This was not intentional on the researcher’s part, but it is important to note that 17 of the 19

Vice-Principals at the time of this study in the OVDSB were female. All Vice-Principals in the OVDSB were offered an invitation to participate with ten choosing to do so. All ten participants have experience working as a Vice-Principal from one to five years. Three participants work in a high school setting. Two participants work in a K-12 school, one participant works in a grade 7-12 setting, and the remaining four participants work in a K-8 school setting. All participants have a minimum of five years teaching experience, and all participants have a Master's degree in at least one discipline.

Research Site

The Ottawa Valley District School Board (OVDSB), which is a pseudonym to protect the identities of the school board and the participants, is a large rural school board in Eastern Ontario, Canada, encompassing 2,872 square miles. The OVDSB is comprised of 24 elementary schools, seven high schools, and four continuing education centers. In the elementary panel, the OVDSB employs 24 principals and eight Vice-Principals. At the secondary level, there are seven principals and nine Vice-Principals. The continuing education department is comprised of one principal who oversees four different sites and two Vice-Principals who work in central system roles. In total, there are 19 practicing Vice-Principals at the OVDSB. This study targeted ten Vice-Principals because of their length of time in the role; that is, the participants have been practicing from one to five years. The nine remaining Vice-Principals were excluded from this study.

At the OVDSB, Vice-Principals are placed in schools depending on the size of its student body. Elementary schools with more than 400 students have a half-time Vice-Principal working alongside the principal. In the OVDSB's secondary panel, each high school with a student population up to 750 students is assigned one Vice-Principal and one principal. High schools

having more than 750 students are assigned two Vice-Principals to each site. Knowing this evidence, four high schools in the OVDSB have one Vice-Principal while the other three high schools have two Vice-Principals at each site.

The OVDSB is overwhelmingly Caucasian in its staff and student composition. The current elementary headcount is 5957 and the secondary headcount is 3375 for a total enrolment of 9332 students. Geographically, it is the largest county in the province of Ontario with a size of 2864.49 square miles. More than 900 lakes can be found in the county whose population numbers 107,169 residents. 88.83% of the residents speak English only, 5.10% speak only French, 0.45% list English and French as their official languages, and 5.62% list neither French nor English as their official language. The median family income for all families is \$61,405 while 93.82% of the population is non-immigrant Caucasian.

Data Collection

Multiple means of data collection were used in order to triangulate the data and ensure the data interpretation is trustworthy. Triangulation involves at least three data sources and has been defined by multiple authors (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990) conducting qualitative research. For the purpose of this study I chose Creswell's definition of triangulation so that corroborating evidence from my three chosen data sources were able to "shed light on a theme or perspective" (p. 251) Through triangulation, validity was brought to this study. I chose three data sources so that the gathered data could be clearly understood; something Moustakas (1994), Merriam (1998), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) view as critically important to a researcher's findings.

This study triangulated data obtained from three sources: (a) individual semi-structured interviews, (b) observations and field note taking, and (c) focus groups. The sequence of the data

collection began with individual semi-structured interviews at two different points in the school year. This was followed by observations and field note taking before concluding with a focus group interview. What follows is an explanation of each method and why it was appropriate for this phenomenological study.

Interviews

This study followed a variation of a semi-structured interview format, called “responsive interviewing” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) since I referred to an interview guide “to ensure that the relevant issues are covered, but modifying the questions for each interview as warranted by the particular responses or circumstances of the interviewee” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 53).

Rubin and Rubin define responsive interviewing as the special rapport built between the interviewer and the interviewee, “specifically the ability to form a common bond and friendship that often outlasts the period of the research” (p. 36). Inevitably, a professional friendship bond type has continued to evolve with the participants through committee work, engagement at professional development activities, and through attendance at the OVDSB’s monthly Director and principal association meetings.

Prior to interviewing participants, I developed an interview guide containing questions based on the study’s research questions. Creswell (2013) describes the meaning of an interview guide when writing, “An interview protocol, or interview guide, a form about four or five pages in length with approximately five to seven open-ended questions and ample space between the questions to write responses to the interviewee’s comments” (p. 164). Moustakas (1994) highlights the importance of information gathered through the interview process in phenomenological research by stating, “Such knowledge is needed in coming to know someone or something and in the commitment to copresence and community as a way to verify,

accentuate, and extend knowledge and experience” (p. 57). The information gathered through the interview process in this study has helped to verify and extend the knowledge of the experiences of the participants.

This study incorporated methods outlined in Creswell (2013, pp. 163-166) whereby each participant was interviewed two times throughout the course of the study. Participants were interviewed at the end of term 1 in January, and once more before the end of the school year in June. As stated above, participants were chosen through purposeful sampling because all have experience as a Vice-Principal, all are experiencing the phenomena under investigation, there is representation from the six OVDSB high schools, and there is participation from each of the OVDSB’s six families of schools in this study.

Each participant was interviewed one-on-one at a location identified as convenient, free from distraction, and without a fear of interruption. Each interview lasted for about minutes, or until I observed the participant had no more information to add to their responses or when their attention beginning to wander. No additional time was needed at any of the locations, and this has helped at validating data obtained from the interviews. At all locations I ensured that two sets of lapel microphones, two video cameras, extra recording tapes, and extra batteries were readily available and in perfect working condition. Two sets of equipment were brought in case one of the devices broke down, if additional power was needed, or if there were a need for additional recording tape. I recorded all audio- and videotaped interviews for later transcription.

One month before the start of the study, I field tested interview questions with five experienced elementary and secondary principals who were not involved in the formal mentoring program. Based on the feedback received from the field test participants, I revised the final

version of interview questions before conducting site-based interviews in the office of each participant.

A semi-structured interview format is most appropriate for this phenomenological study because it allowed me more freedom to have a back and forth discussion with each participant. It also “enables the interviewer to react to the interviewee’s comments by changing question wording, changing the order in which the questions are asked, and interjecting relevant probing questions for clarification” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 53).

Before any interview took place, I had the interviewee complete an informed consent form where I reviewed the purpose of the study, the amount of time needed to complete the interview, and plans for using the results of the interviews. A copy of the report, or an abstract of it, was offered to each participant at that time (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). The following semi-structured interview questions were asked to the participants in the study:

1. Can you please describe for me your perceptions of the Ottawa Valley District School Board’s mentoring program and how it has impacted your practice as Vice-Principal?
2. Please describe to me the specific elements of the mentoring program, as well as any specific experiences, that have impacted your self-efficacy as a leader.
3. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* is built around five key outcomes: setting directions; building relationships and developing people; developing the organization to support desired practices; improving the instructional program, and; securing accountability. Please describe for me how your mentoring experience has impacted your confidence in using the *Framework* and your ability to manage change and lead the instructional program.

4. Based on your experience as a Vice-Principal so far, please identify for me experiences and issues you deem as being the most challenging to manage both professionally and personally.
5. Please describe for me the obstacles you have experienced in the mentoring program and what additional resources would you have desired during your mentoring experience.
6. Is there anything else you would like to mention that you have not already shared with me?

Focus Group

The importance of a focus group in a qualitative study has been researched by many researchers, including Propst, McDonough, Vogt, and Pynnonen (2008), who stressed the importance that focus groups “be free from distractions, be neutral, and permit participants to face each other” (p. 1). In addition, the characteristics encompassing focus groups have been studied by Krueger and Casey (2000) who defined a focus group as having five characteristics: “(a) people who (b) possess certain characteristics (c) provide qualitative data (d) in a focused discussion (e) to help understand the topic of interest” (p. 10). Focus groups can vary in size, but it is generally accepted that focus groups “are typically comprised of 5 to 10 people” (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 6.) Rubin and Rubin (2012) add, “In a focus group, a researcher brings together a group of individuals representative of the population whose ideas are of interest” (p. 30). As I acted as facilitator and posed questions to the group, “Group members respond[ed] to each other’s points agreeing, disagreeing, or modifying in any way they [chose]” (p. 30). I chose to use a focus group because some participants may feel more comfortable sharing information in a group than they would have felt during the one-to-one interview setting.

Krueger and Casey (2009) claim “the ideal size of a focus group for most non-commercial products is five to eight participants” (p. 67). Five practicing Vice-Principals comprised the focus group for this study, and who provided me with data not otherwise obtained through individual interviews. Using methods outlined in Creswell (2013) and following the same format as the one-on-one interview, I conducted a semi-structured interview with the focus group that was audio- and videotaped for later verbatim transcription (p. 160).

The focus group interview was held in a conference room at the OVDSB Learning Centre so that interruptions from the school environment were avoided. The focus group interview was 28 minutes in length and was videotaped, recorded and transcribed. I began the interview by having each focus group member complete an informed consent form. Next, I reviewed the purpose of the study, the amount of time needed to complete the interview, and the plans for using interview results.

The focus group interview questions included the following :

1. Having participated in a mentoring program with your mentor, what experiences do you feel have been most fundamental in affecting your belief in your ability to perform the role of Vice-Principal?
2. Reflecting on these experiences, what circumstances, events, and people stand out?
3. If you had to go through the mentoring program again, what experiences or interactions would you want to replicate and change?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your mentoring experience that you feel you have not already shared and important to this study?

A copy of the report, or an abstract of it, was offered to each participant (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). This was done so that member checking could take place; a process Gall, Gall, and Borg

(2010) cite as being critical because the “participants review research procedures and statements in the research report for accuracy and completeness” (p. 358). Any errors found in my verbatim transcription were corrected and shown again to each participant for approval or denial. This process continued until there was unanimous agreement with the final transcript version (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).

Observation and Field Note Taking

I acted as a nonparticipant observer by taking field notes (see Appendix A) from a distance (Creswell, 2013, p. 167) at each school site. Participants were observed at two points in the school year. I used voice recordings and note taking to capture observed decision-making behaviours and interpersonal relationship skills with students, staff, parents, and senior board personnel. I employed memoing practices while observing the participants so that important details were not missed or forgotten when I transcribed my notes. Important to the memoing process was the need to record what I saw and what I heard. I did not record my feelings or judgments towards the participant being observed.

I described observed experiences at each participant’s site and immediately reflected on, and wrote detailed notes, about these aspects when I left the site. This was done while the memories of my site visits were fresh in my mind. I also recorded and documented personal reflections, initial interpretations, insights, confusions, hunches, and breakthroughs. I spent 2.0 hours at each site during each observation week. The subsequent observation was conducted on a different day of the week, and at an alternative time of the day, so that I could capture a better understanding of each participant’s day. Hence, I created an observational protocol to record information that was later analysed and coded. Descriptive notes recorded the description of the

activities, and reflective notes helped “record the process, reflections on activities, and summary conclusions about activities for later theme development” (Creswell, 2013, p. 169).

The research question answered by this data collection strategy is question #2: What affect has the mentoring experience at the Ottawa Valley District School Board had on the ability and proficiency of Ontario practicing Vice-Principals to address challenges, manage change and to lead the instructional program as outlined in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*?

Data Analysis

In phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) reports that data analysis involves epoche, reduction, and synthesis. Epoche, or bracketing, occurs when the researcher sets aside their own experiences “to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomena under investigation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Reduction occurs when the researcher “analyzes the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Following this, I described what participants experienced and how they experienced it. Creswell (2013) identifies the *what* and the *how* as *textural description* and *structural description*. This process allows me to arrive at the overall *essence* of the experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton 2002) for the study’s participants.

This study employed the seven steps outlined in Moustakas (1994, pp.120-121) as a means to better understand the participants’ experiences of participating in a formalized mentor training program. These seven steps include:

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping
2. Reduction and Elimination
3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents
4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application

5. Developing Individual Textual Description
6. Developing Individual Structural Description
7. Developing Textual-Structural Description

Data analysis included observation notes from the field, verbatim transcripts of interviews held with each participant, and the focus group. Data was organized into computer files, and then the files were converted to appropriate text units for analysis by hand or computer (Creswell, 2013, p. 182). This process allowed me to store and organize qualitative data; locate text or image segments associated with a code or theme; locate common passages or segments that relate to two or more code labels; make comparisons among code levels; and helped to conceptualize different levels of abstraction in qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2013, pp. 204-205).

Memoing

Memoing was appropriate for this study because, “Through the use of memos, the qualitative researcher is able to engage with their research to a greater degree than would otherwise be the case” (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008, p. 69). Furthermore, the use of memoing enabled me to establish an “intense relationship with the data” and to feel a “heightened sensitivity to the meanings contained therein” (p. 69). As I immersed myself in the details, I attempted to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts (Creswell, 2013, p. 183). Notes were written in the margins of field notes and on transcripts to assist in the creation. This process enabled me to establish a database where I could identify and organize major ideas. It also allowed me to reflect on larger thoughts presented in the data and to form initial categories (Creswell, 2013, p. 184).

Bracketing

Using a process known as phenomenological reductionism, or bracketing, I bracketed in commonalities from participant responses while bracketing out my own biases and assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation. Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) define bracketing, or the epoche, as “a methodological device of phenomenological inquiry that requires deliberate putting aside one’s own belief about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation” (p. 1).

In addition, Moustakas (1994) sees epoche as “a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time” (p. 85). As stated earlier in this study, I have been an administrator for twenty years with the OVDSB. When I moved into administration as a Vice-Principal, I participated in loosely offered mentoring program organized by the school board at that time. Since then, the structural components of the program, and those who oversaw its creation and delivery, have changed remarkably through retirements and content.

Open Coding

Creswell (2013) defines open coding as “the process of aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code before assigning a label to the code” (p. 184). This process allows the researcher to develop propositions that assemble a story in the model that describes the interrelationship of categories in the model (Creswell, 2013, pp. 86-87). It allows the researcher to break down the data into pieces, compare for relations, and to uncover similarities or dissimilarities. It also allows themes to emerge and to form a common idea. Van Manen (2014) views transcripts as “sources of meaning at the level of the whole story;

at the level of the separate paragraph; and at the level of the sentence, phrase, expression, or single word” (p. 320). Once significant statements were identified, I organized and classified the data into themes. As themes began to emerge, I reviewed my transcripts to verify my findings and to see if any sub-themes were beginning to emerge.

Essence

Van Manen (1990) maintains that the essence of an experience “has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (p. 10). Moustakas (1994) furthers the description of essence by stating that the final step in the phenomenological research process “is the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). Moustakas writes:

The essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon (p. 100).

The essence identified in this study was the shared lived mentoring experience of each of the research participants. To be precise, each participant wanted more time. Time to meet with their mentor to discuss triumphs and tribulations; time to participate in more professional development sessions alongside staff members; more time to try out new pedagogical strategies and to model effective instructional leadership; and more time to build trusting relationships with staff, parents, and their students.

Trustworthiness

It is critically important that my study is deemed trustworthy. To this end, trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. While Creswell (2013) prefers to use the term *validation* to emphasize a process rather than “historical words such as *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*” (p. 250) I have chosen *trustworthiness* as the term of reference for this study. Patton (2001) describes trustworthiness as a process of being balanced, fair, and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities (p. 575). This study established trustworthiness through data triangulation, member checking; bracketing out my experiences while bracketing in participants’ experiences; maintaining an audit trail; and employing the services of an expert reviewer that reviewed my research findings (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2001).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the goal of credibility as demonstrating that the inquiry was conducted in a manner to ensure the topic was accurately identified and described. This study utilized multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). I was able to establish credibility through member checking, having prolonged engagement with the participants, triangulating the data received from observations and field note taking, individual semi-structured interviews, and a focus group interview.

Creswell (2013) defines member checkings as a process when “the researcher solicits participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (p. 252). Lincoln and Guba (1985) are even more firm around the importance of member checking by calling it “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). In this study, member checks were

completed by having the participants view “data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions. . . so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

This study required me to have prolonged contact with the participants. Having prolonged engagements with the participants is defined by *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (2008) as “spending extended time with respondents in their native culture and everyday world in order to gain a better understanding of behaviour, values, and social relationships in a social context” (p. 690). These experiences enabled me to reflect the words of Goffman (1989):

You’re empathetic enough – because you’ve been taking the same crap they’ve been taking – to sense what it is that they’re responding to. To me, that’s the core of observation. If you don’t get yourself in that situation, I don’t think you can do a piece of serious work. (p. 126)

Currently a practicing principal with the OVDSB, I have worked with the participants in the study for a number of years, I have experienced the role of a Vice-Principal, and I have worked in six elementary schools and three of the OVDSB’s six family of schools. I can empathize with the experiences shared and the interactions observed because I have experienced many of the same things the participants are beginning to experience as they set out on the leadership journey.

Triangulation helped establish the credibility of this study. Triangulation is important in phenomenological research and occurs when “researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence. Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a them or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). This study is credible because it has triangulated data

obtained from three sources: (a) individual semi-structured interviews, (b) observations and field note taking, and (c) focus groups. These three sources were chosen so that “validity” could be applied to this study’s findings (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

Holding peer debriefs provides an external check of the research process writes Creswell (2013). Creswell continues by citing Lincoln and Guba (1985) who define peer review, or debriefing, as “a devils advocate,” an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings (p. 251). This study engaged the services of a recognized qualitative research consultant who helped confirm data findings and ensured that the coding and thematic analysis were accurate.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is achieved when a study’s findings are repeated by another researcher following the same methodology. To achieve dependability, I solicited participants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). I chose this process because it increased the reliability of the study, and it allowed me to have field participants review the study’s procedures as well as statements in the research report for accuracy and completeness. I diligently maintained an audit trail to ensure the accurate recording of data as well as my thought processes. Lastly, I solicited the expertise of an externally qualified researcher for appropriateness in terms of design and analysis.

Confirmability relates to the neutrality of the conclusion of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If someone else were to replicate the study the exact same way, would they attain the same results? As previously mentioned, I consulted with another qualified researcher who conducted an external expert review of this study to achieve confirmability. I also employed

memoing, self-reflection, and self-awareness during the research process to identify and lessen potential biases I may have. Participants were afforded opportunities to provide feedback to me on my initial findings, and participant feedback was considered, and necessary changes were made, until confirmability was established.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the study's generalizability and its thick rich description of the phenomena. Patton (2001) calls thick rich description "the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting" (p. 437). It enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred because of shared characteristics. In the case of this study, whether Vice-Principals across have Ontario shared similar lived mentoring experiences as those experienced by participants of the OVDSB. Are the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of mentoring programs afforded Vice-Principals from other jurisdictions in Ontario similar to what the OVDSB's participants voicing.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before any participant identification or data collection proceeded. Doing this helped ensure the well-being of all participants as well as the governing organization. Once IRB approval was obtained, additional approval from the OVDSB was required and obtained. This helped allow the school board to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants in the study.

All potential participants received an "Informed Consent" letter explaining the purpose of the study and my assurance that I would not engage in deception about the nature of the study

(Creswell, 2013, p. 174). I promised to protect the anonymity of the informants by assigning numbers or aliases to individuals. Participants who shared information “off the record” during interviews or observations, did not see this information appearing in the final written report. Personal experiences were not shared with participants in the interview setting so that “bracketing” was not minimized and so I could construct the meaning of participants in a phenomenology (Creswell, 2013, p. 175).

There existed the potential that I could develop a more professional and transparent relationship with one or more of the participants; therefore, it was essential that I maintained and upheld the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession in Ontario* so that ethical issues did not cloud my judgment as researcher. Participation in this study was completely voluntary, and the participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion.

Physical and electronic data is securely stored in a safe located in the office area in the basement of my house. Only I have keys to the safe, and a spare set are kept in a safety deposit bank at my banking institution. The only individuals who have access to this safety deposit box are my wife and I; however, neither of us can access the box without the other’s written authorization. All participants have been assigned pseudonyms so that their identity will never be known by anyone but me.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study contributes to the literature discussion around successful leadership induction practices by identifying the successful elements of a mentoring program that best meet the needs of novice Vice-Principals. It achieves this through an in-depth examination of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the participant’s mentoring experience. As well, this study gives voice to the participants so that school districts can re-

examine their existing programs and make the necessary changes that will strengthen the leadership growth of its participants thereby enabling effective succession planning practices to occur. Kouzes and Posner (2010) share ten leadership truths in *The Truth About Leadership* and posit that the best leaders are the best learners as their first truth. They write:

You have to believe that you (and others) can learn to lead, and that you can become a better leader tomorrow than you are today. Leaders are constant improvement fanatics, and learning is the master skill of leadership. Learning, however, takes time and attention, practice and feedback, along with good coaching. It also takes willingness on your part to ask for support. (p. xxiv)

This study will grow and deepen the learning around best practices for mentoring Vice-Principals who are embarking on their leadership journey. It is a journey that will undoubtedly be fraught with many trials and tribulations; however, if beginning administrators are afforded the best opportunity towards success, then all stakeholders in education stand to reap the rewards towards improving our educational system.

A qualitative phenomenological study was employed to investigate Vice-Principals' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, frustrations, challenges, and other emotions experienced during this transitional phase. Specifically, I was interested in examining the development of self-efficacy in Vice-Principals. This approach is the correct one for this study because it best meets the needs of the problem under investigation:

- (a) What are the supports, as perceived by beginning Vice-Principals, needed to ensure a successful transition from the classroom into administrative leadership? and
- (b) How has the mentoring experience assisted Vice-Principals in their transition from a classroom teacher and preparing them for the role of the principalship?

This study contributes to the data and discussion around effective mentoring program practices for beginning administrators. Lovely (2004) draws attention to the frustrations experienced by many Vice-Principals, both past and present, when stating, “Without depth and complexity in his experience, an assistant principal may be able to manage a school but will struggle to lead it” (p. 49). Lovely continues by positing, “If the assistant principal assignments are to serve as a pathway to the principalship, the expectations and experiences of the position must be expanded” (p. 50). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2007) write, “At no time in recent memory has the need for effective and inspired leadership been more pressing than it is today. With increasing needs in our society and in the workplace for knowledgeable, skilled, and responsible citizens, the pressure on schools intensifies” (p.123). This study hears, and gives voice, to the participant’s experiences and arrives at overarching themes surrounding best practices in mentoring.

Through data analysis procedures of memoing, bracketing, and open coding, this study provides the essence of the lived mentoring experiences of beginning administrators who are transitioning from the classroom into a position of educational leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2010) discovered *enduring* truths about leadership and state that leaders “can gain mastery over the art and science of leadership by understanding them and attending to them in [their] your workplace and everyday life” (p. xxv). This study shares the mentoring experiences of beginning Vice-Principals and how their experiences, whether positive or negative, impacted their leadership beliefs and practice.

In *Qualities of Effective Principals*, Stronge, Richard, and Catano (2008) accurately describes school administrators when writing, “Although they must be skilled practitioners who are committed to giving to others, ultimately, principals must give back to themselves” (p. 133).

Stronge *et al.* continue and write, “School leaders . . . serve in a highly skilled profession, and they require continual renewal in order to become and remain expert. Thus, professional development for the principal is not optional” (p. 133). I propose the same rings true for the Vice-Principal; that is, professional development should never be optional for them because leadership involves serving others. It is about giving ones’ self so that others may benefit and grow. However, in order for Vice-Principals to be most effective, they need to stay current in their practice and in their thinking. They need to know what their core values truly are, and they need to live them each day in the workplace. Most important, Vice-Principals need to know when to swim with the current and when to stand like a rock.

This study gives voice to the professional development experiences of beginning Vice-Principals; as well, it shares with the reader the types of professional development opportunities that the participants’ feel are most needed and beneficial to their position. Lahera, Hamdan, and Normore (2014) highlight the importance of administrators’ professional development by writing:

. . . evidence indicates that effective programs are research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, and are structured to enable collaborative activity between the program and area schools.

(p. 191)

People want to follow a purpose that is meaningful to them. A leader builds competence and confidence in themselves and others when they are present in the work; that is, when they fully understand the challenges facing students and staff . Having “boots on the ground” and being “in the trenches” lets those you are leading see that you care, you hear, and that you empathize with their fears and struggles. Perhaps most important is that it shows those you are leading that you

are human, and because of that, you are relational. This study shares the importance that relationship building plays in the mentoring process, and it has forced me to bracket out my own mentoring experiences so that the mystery of mentoring can be fully brought into the presence of the reader (Van Manen, 1990, p. 50).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover the mentoring needs of beginning Vice-Principals who have participated in the mentoring program offered at the Ottawa Valley District School Board (OVDSB; a pseudonym) in Ontario, Canada. More precisely, this study will describe the views of the Vice-Principals (the mentees) regarding areas of the mentoring program which were useful in helping them transition to their leadership position, and what suggestions they might offer in helping to enhance the OVDSB's mentoring program. At this stage in the research, mentoring is defined as "facilitating partnerships in ever-evolving relationships focused on meeting the mentee's goals and objectives" (Zachary, 2004, p. 177).

The theory guiding this study is Albert Bandura's (1986, 1997) construct of self efficacy associated with *Social Cognitive Theory*. More precisely, this study examines whether or not a school district's mentoring program has helped, or diminished, beginning Vice-Principals' sense of self-efficacy. Bandura (1986, 1997) defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. These beliefs were described as determinants of how people think, feel, and behave in the situations they are encountering in the moment. Bandura posits that there are four sources of self-efficacy: experiences provided by social models, mastery experiences, social persuasion that the individual has the tools to succeed in the present situation, and inferences from somatic and emotional states indicative of personal strengths and vulnerabilities (Fisher, 2011, pp. 93-94).

The data collection methods within this study include semi-structured one-on-one interviews, field observation notes, and a semi-structured one-on-one focus group interview. This chapter serves as a review of the findings of the analysis conducted through coding and the

emergence of identifying themes from transcripts of the interviews and from my observational field notes.

Moustakas (1994) uses a modification of van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of analysis, and these served as the seven steps I followed during the data analysis stage of this study. First, data was organized once all interviews were completed so that I could study "the material through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis (p. 118). Moustakas (1994) refers to this initial stage as listing and preliminary grouping (p. 120). Second, I horizontalized the data "regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value" (p. 118). This second step Moustakas refers to as reduction and elimination. Once this was complete, my third step entailed the clustering and creation of meaning units. These meaning units were clustered as into common themes where I removed "overlapping and repetitive statements" (p. 118). The fifth and sixth step saw the clustering of common themes and meanings applied so that "textural descriptions of the experience" (p. 118) could be developed. Once all of these steps were complete, the seventh and last step saw the construction "for each participant a *Textural-Structural Description* of the meanings and essences of the experience discovered.

Data analysis began during the interview process, and I spent six months coding and decoding data by hand before three themes with subthemes finally emerged. The three themes included (a) relationships, (b) instructional leadership, and (c) mentoring's importance. The following research questions served as a framework for this study:

1. What experiences and issues do Ontario practicing Vice-Principals identify as the most challenging?

2. What affect has the mentoring experience at the Ottawa Valley District School Board had on the ability and proficiency of Ontario practicing Vice-Principals to address challenges, manage change and to the lead instructional program as outlined in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*?
3. What obstacles to growth, and opportunities for growth, currently exist in the elements of the Ottawa Valley District School Board's mentoring program that can be reinforced or restructured to better prepare Vice-Principals?

Participants

I assigned all the participants a pseudonym to protect their identities; as well, the school board in which this study took place was assigned a pseudonym so its identity could be protected as well. The participants in this study have worked in education ranging from 11 to 38 years. All participants have worked at some point in their career as an elementary classroom teacher. Two participants have teaching experience in both the elementary and secondary panels. Six of the 11 participants have worked in a system-level capacity at the OVDSB as an educational consultant. Within these six individuals, one participant has spent time working at the Ontario Ministry of Education. Each participant is passionate in their approach to becoming an effective school administrator. All have a strong belief that every student can succeed when given the opportunity and the environment to do so. Each participant voiced their desire to be regarded as an effective instructional leader in their building; however, all expressed a concern that they were failing to accomplish that goal. Lastly, although not intentional, all of the participants choosing to take part in this study were female Caucasian.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Yrs Exp In Educ.	Yrs At OVDSB	Yrs In A Classroom With The OVDSB	Yrs As Elem VP	Yrs As Secondary VP	Yrs As Elem Principal	Yrs In A Central Role Or As H.S. Dept Head
Cindy	23	20	6	5	5	4	0
Holly	20	20	9	0	4	0	7
Pam	11	7	3	3.0	.5	0	.5
Meredith	24	24	15	2	0	0	7
Janet	18	10	5	5	0	0	0
Karen	15	15	6	5	0	0	4
Fiona	25	25	8	2	5	10	0
Stephanie	17	7	0	1	0	0	6
Donna	38	38	22	6	0	0	10
Isabelle	16	16	11.5	4.5	0	0	0

Cindy

Cindy has worked in education for the past 23 years. Her first three years were spent working in education outside the Ottawa Valley District School Board (OVDSB) while the last 20 years have seen her employed as both teacher and administrator for the OVDSB. Within these past 20 years, her first six years were spent working as a classroom teacher, and the next five years were spent as a Vice-Principal in an elementary setting. This was followed by four years working as an elementary school Principal but at a different school location.

After being approached by her school Superintendent, Cindy accepted a transfer to the secondary panel as a Vice-Principal; a position she has held at the same high school for the last five years. Cindy accepted this transfer and delegation to a Vice-Principal role with the assurance that this would grow her professionally and better prepare her to become a high school principal. However, Cindy shared that she agreed to the transfer with the understanding that she would spend three years as a high school Vice-Principal before assuming the role of Principal in a high

school setting. She has spent two years longer than originally anticipated at the time of this study, and this has left her with mixed feelings.

Holly

Holly has worked in education for the last 20 years, and all have been with the OVDSB. She worked five years in the elementary panel as a classroom teacher at three different schools. She accepted a teaching position in a high school where she worked as a classroom teachers, a special education resource teacher, and special education department head for the next nine years. Next, Holly applied for, and successfully acquired, a central system position as a secondary special education consultant; a position she held for the next four years. She has spent the last four years working as a high school Vice-Principal at a school where she did not teach.

Pam

Pam has worked in education for ten years and has experience in both and elementary and secondary school settings. Her first three years were spent working in the elementary panel for a large urban school board. Upon relocating to a rural area in Ontario and beginning employment at the OVDSB, Pam spent the next four years continuing to work in the elementary panel as a classroom teacher. She then spent half-a-year working as a Student Success Teacher (SST) in a central system role before being promoted to high school Vice-Principal in the second half of that same school year. Pam accepted a transfer to the elementary panel as Vice-Principal; a position she has held at the same school for the last three years.

Meredith

Meredith has spent her entire time, a career spanning 24 years, working for the OVDSB. Her first 15 years were spent as a classroom teacher before she transitioned into a central system

role; a position she held for the next seven years working as a consultant. Most recently, Meredith has spent the last two years working as Vice-Principal in a school where she previously taught.

Janet

Janet has worked in an elementary school setting for 18 years. Her first seven years were spent working at another board of education, while her last 11 years have been spent working at the OVDSB. She has served as an elementary Vice-Principal for the last five years but not at schools where she has taught in the past.

Karen

Karen has spent her entire career working at the OVDSB; a career spanning 15 years and counting. She began her career as an Educational Assistant with the school board and spent a year in that position before becoming a classroom teacher for the next five years. She then transitioned into a central role and served as a special education consultant for the next five years. Most recently, she spent the past four years working as an elementary Vice-Principal.

Fiona

Fiona has spent her entire career, 25 years, working at the OVDSB. Fiona taught in an elementary classroom during her first eight years before moving into administration. She then spent the next two years working as an elementary Vice-Principal before being promoted to Principal; a position she held for ten more years. Fiona was approached by her Superintendent to see if she would be interested in gaining high school experience, and she said yes. She has spent the last five years working as a high school Vice-Principal and like Cindy above, she did not think she would be working in that role for as long as she did. She too has mixed feelings about

accepting a position in the secondary panel, and feels that she would have been promoted to high school Principal by now.

Stephanie

Stephanie has spent 17 years working in education. Her first ten years were spent working at another Ontario school board before spending the next six years working for Ontario's Ministry of Education and the OVDSB as an educational consultant. Most recently, she has worked as Vice-Principal in an elementary school.

Donna

Donna has worked an incredible 38 years at the OVDSB; all of which have been spent in the elementary school setting. She has taught a plethora of grades throughout her 22 year teaching career and has spent ten years working in a central role as an educational consultant. Donna has spent the last six years working in a K-12 school as a Vice-Principal given the responsibility of working with elementary staff and students. At the time of this study, she had given notice to the OVDSB that she would be retiring at the end of the school year.

Isabelle

Isabelle has worked 16 years at the OVDSB, and all have been in the elementary panel. Her first 11.5 years were spent teaching a variety of grade levels and subjects before she accepted a Vice-Principal position at the mid-point of a school year. She has spent the last 4.5 years working as an elementary Vice-Principal in two different schools. She did not have any previous teaching experience at either of these schools.

Results

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, I read through the transcripts several times identifying and highlighting words, phrases, suggestions, thoughts, and ideas that appeared throughout the interviews. All identifying information from the interview transcripts was carefully and deliberately removed so that identities could be protected. Using the data obtained from this process and from my field observation notes, I created a set of general codes which I used during each subsequent pass. Codes were modified and changed after multiple passes through the transcripts and field observation notes with some codes merging and other codes being split into different codes. The general codes led to refinement and the emergence of specific codes as the coding process evolved. Using this information, I created a codebook. I then made several more passes through the interview transcripts and field observation notes where themes began to emerge. Three themes were identified with each theme containing supporting subthemes. The themes identified provided answers to the research questions set forth in this study. I attempted to disprove identified themes using the data collected, but I was unable to do so.

Table 2

Codes

Code	Instances	Description
Balance	7	Balance was the word and any reference to the ability to manage the complexities of the daily workings of the Vice-Principal
Change(s)(d)	19	Change was the use of the word and suffixes applied. A descriptor for pace, mentor, teaching and system practice, personal inventory, attitudinal.
Experience(s)(d)	45	Experience was applied in multiple ways including exposure to events and conversations which grew the self-efficacy levels of Vice-Principals,
Feedback	5	Feedback was the use of word and any reference to the importance of the timeliness of it, the need for it and the

		value gained from it, the importance of descriptive feedback, and information obtained through courageous conversations.
Lead(er)(ing)(ship)	83	Lead, and any reference to leader, leading, and leadership were the words used to describe the the difficulties and complexities of systemic educational change, succession planning, and instructional practice.
Learn(ed)(er)(ing)	65	Any reference to the word learn and how it described the pace of a new leadership position, establishing and building trusting relationships with multiple educational partners, facilitating community partnerships, sharing best practices, professional learning community sessions, and the size and scope of the administrator's position.
Reality(ies)	6	Reality was the word used to describe the present day role of the Vice-Principal. It was used to distinguish between knowledge obtained in Principal Qualification Programs and knowledge obtained while performing the role. It was also used to highlight differences between communities and panels.
Relationship(s)	21	Relationship was the use of the word and the importance it played in building trust with colleagues and members of the school community, in learning the role of Vice-Principal, and in setting direction for the school.
Support(ed)(ing)(ive)(s)	25	Support was the use of the word and its importance to Vice-Principals who allowed themselves to receive and in turn, lend support to others. Support was also used to describe various roles the mentor played in developing the skillset of Vice-Principals.
Time(ly)(s)	100	Time was the use of the word and any reference to the importance it plays in the mentoring experience, to complete required tasks, to grow relationships and establish trust, work/life balance, and to learn the leadership role.
Trust(ed)(ing)(s)	8	Trust was the use of the word and any reference to the role it plays in forming relationships with their mentor, other administrators, students, staff, parents, and community partners.

Theme One: Relationships Take Time

The first identified theme provides answers to the study's first research question: What experiences and issues do Ontario practicing Vice-Principals identify as the most challenging?

The theme of relationships was defined by the specific codes: time, timely, times, trust, learn, learned, learner, learning, relationship, relationships. The subthemes discussed are: time, trust, learning the role, and relationship building. These subthemes discussed help define the key characteristics of relationships and what was needed to establish the foundation from which relationships were able to grow and prosper.

In my own recollections of having been a Vice-Principal I wrote, “Relationships are key to your success. Because we are in the business of educating children, it only makes sense that we learn how to communicate honestly, clearly, and regularly. You need to show them that what they are saying to you really matters and that they are being heard and understood” (Researcher recollections, field observation notes, 2017). Many participants echoed these same feelings. Cindy was adamant in her belief that taking the time to establish solid working relationships with everyone you come into contact was key to an administrator’s success. Cindy shared, “Building relationships is the key to everything in this profession, it’s the key. If you don’t have that ability, you shouldn’t be in this” (Interview, May 11, 2017). Janet echoed the importance of relationship building in the genesis of her leadership:

I would say from my mentoring that was done unofficially through my principals, I would think the developing people and relationships piece was the most effective because that's what I'm doing all day long, and um, whether I agree or disagree with the people coming at me, or the issues, or whether I'm aware of them, or comfortable with them, they've taught me how to sort of start conversations and finish conversations and, um, be understanding of the people’s position from across the table. I think that's the biggest thing I have to understand is where the people are coming from and not just have my own view on things (Interview, April 21, 2017).

Participants also noted that building strong relationships was important in their role because it allowed them to set the direction that they wanted to take the school in. The importance in an administrator's ability to set the programming direction for a school is highlighted as important as outlined in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*. In my interview conducted with Holly, she stressed that her ability to develop people and set direction for the staff was made possible by the experiences she was exposed to through the mentoring program. Holly shared, "I can't imagine not having the experiences I've had before this because of the building relationships part, and the developing people part. . . so people feel like I have something to bring to the table when I talk credibility" (Interview, May 26, 2017).

Janet shared that her ability to assist in helping set the direction for her school was equally possible through the trusting relationships she had taken the time to invest in. Janet was firm in her belief that the time she took building these relationships allowed her a deeper understanding of when she could introduce widespread changes and when she should take a pause and wait. Janet said:

You need to have an idea of what you want and believe in when you go into a school and I think you also need to be aware of the school climate and the school environment and find a balance between the direction you want to go, and where it already is. Sometimes there are subtle changes and sometimes there are big changes. And I think you have to build a relationship, and decide which way you want to go. (Interview, April 21, 2017)

Participants also shared that establishing taking the time to build trust was critical to the relationships they had with teachers, parents, staff, union leaders, and community partners. Karen commented that trust was important to the relationships she had with her teachers because of the support they often needed. Karen reported:

. . . when staff members come into the office and they're looking at being supported, I've built that trust with them, and there's not the time in the day to give people attention to deal with things. That, that is a big issue for me because I think if people aren't feeling supported or not heard, you're not in tune with what's happening, you're not going to, to have an effective team. . . I really pay attention to people's needs and maybe it's because you've got those relationships developed. (Interview, April 11, 2017)

It takes time and effort to build a trusting relationship with people, and some individuals, including union leaders, take a little more panache than others. Cindy illustrates this delicate maneuverability when she shared, "If you can't build relationships at all levels you are out of the game, and ah, it's a dance and you learn it." Cindy also stressed that trust was needed when it came to making difficult decisions because the staff "want to be able to trust that you can make that decision" particularly when it came to student discipline and teaching assignments for the following year. Cindy also shared that trust became a cornerstone in the forming of strong parental relationships. Cindy explained that "when I pick up the phone and I call a family or a parent or I call the stakeholder, they know who I am and they trust who I am and they know what I'm about and they'll you know. . . work with me on something" (Interview May 11, 2017).

Two participants, Fiona and Karen, extended the thinking on trust by pointing out the importance it played in the establishment of the relationship with their mentor. Their comments to me during their interviews made me reflect on the notes I had taken after our interview. I wrote, "There is great security in knowing that what you say behind close doors, when you are under the dome, that it isn't going to go any further. It didn't matter if I was right or wrong. It mattered that I could speak truthfully" (Researcher recollections, observation field notes, 2017). When speaking about her own professional growth and the importance that her mentor played in

helping her develop her leadership skills, Fiona shared, “I believe that the best learning is to trust in your vice-principal, still communicate but give them portfolios that they can tend to run with” (Interview, April 12, 2017). Karen shared similar thoughts regarding trust established with her mentor when she stated, “I think one of the most important things is to establish trust with your mentor because that’s the person that you’re confiding in and you’re showing your vulnerability” (Interview, April 11, 2017). Several participants disclosed in both the focus group interview and the one-on-one interviews that their self-efficacy levels were strengthened through feedback they received during private conversations held with their mentors. The participants felt that having that critical friend there to guide them along and to explore their decision making skills was only made possible once trust had been established with their mentor.

Theme Two: Mentoring Matters

The second identified theme provides answers to the study’s second research question: What affect has the mentoring experience at the Ottawa Valley District School Board had on the ability and proficiency of Ontario practicing Vice-Principals to address challenges, manage change and to lead the instructional program as outlined in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*? The theme of mentoring matters was defined by the specific codes: balance, change, changes, changed, experience, experiences, experienced, feedback, support, supported, supporting, supportive, supports. The subthemes discussed are: time, managing, pace, attitudes, descriptive feedback, receiving and lending support. These subthemes discussed helped define the role mentoring played in developing each participant’s ability to manage the complexities of organizing and managing today’s schools while striving to ensure that the latest policies, procedures, and provincial and system initiatives were finding themselves embedded in daily instructional practices.

“The development of school leaders is a critical component in system building if schools are to be the places in which teachers learn teaching and learning can be powerfully planned and delivered through widely distributed leadership” (Bakioglu, Hacifazlioglu, & Ozcan, 2010, p. 245). Mentoring Vice-Principals by a Principal regarded as a capable reflective practitioner is one of the most effective ways a beginning administrator can be inducted into a leadership role. Having a mentor who is able to impart knowledge to their mentee while remaining patient and encouraging throughout the process, helps increase the confidence levels of novice administrators. Wasden (1988) highlights the importance a mentor can be in creating the conditions for a successful transition into administration by stating:

The mentor is a master at providing opportunities for the growth of others, by identifying situations and events which contribute knowledge and experience to the life of the steward. Opportunities are not happenstance; they must be thoughtfully designed and organized into logical sequence. Sometimes hazards are attached to opportunity. The mentor takes great pains to help the steward recognize and negotiate dangerous situations. In doing all this, the mentor has an opportunity for growth through service, which is the highest form of leadership. (p. 17)

As each of participants shared their mentoring experience with me, it became evident that the overall mentoring experience was a positive one. A few participants experienced a couple of bumps experienced along the way, but all in all the mentoring experience was regarded as being instrumental to the establishment of their leadership foundation. As I looked back at my field notes, I saw myself reflected in the voices of the participants. I also remembered how excited I was at first being appointed a Vice-Principal and how the reality of this responsibility was soon made clear through my first crisis. I was blessed to have been mentored by two outstanding

Principals for three years while serving as a Vice-Principal at two different schools. The voices of the participants are very similar to the mentoring I experienced with the exception of two individuals who chose a different mentor after the initial relationship failed to materialize.

Balance, including the management of daily tasks, unforeseen disruptions, and the achievement of a healthy work/life balance was an area participants identified as being greatly helped by their mentors. Achieving balance is something that all participants expressed some level of frustration with simply because of the tasks presented each day. Holly stressed the importance of a work/life balance in her role because of the importance of family to her. Holly shared:

I think the work/life balance part of this job is huge. . . I'm, so grateful and lucky that I have this wonderful home life and a wonderful work life because I can't imagine if either of those weren't great. . . how you could. . . how you could do this, this job. (Interview, May 26, 2017)

Isabelle reported a similar struggle in finding the time to achieve a healthy work/life balance while navigating the leadership waters. She shared:

Probably. . . I guess probably time. . . managing time and just being able to balance both parts. Like all the aspects of the job; doing the administrative part, doing the TPA part, trying to do some kind of educational leadership so that you're at least part of the process of what's going on in the school. You know, and then you've got your family, and I've got, you know, children and I've got extra curricular activities with them, and all those sorts of things. So, it's just a real balancing act I find. (Interview, April 28, 2017)

Janet and Cindy also shared the importance of a healthy work/life balance in their interviews and stated that theirs was attainable because of the strong relationships they had with

their partners. Both participants are members of very healthy and active homes, and it was evident from our conversations that their administrative pursuits were strongly supported by their families. It was also evident from our conversations that this strong home support served to strengthen the self-efficacy levels of both Janet and Cindy. On a personal note, after hearing Holly, Janet, and Cindy share their stories, I wrote in my field notes how fortunate I was to have had a family who was supporting my educational journey by allowing me to take the courses required to become eligible for an administrative promotion (Researchers recollections, observation field notes, 2017).

The wisdom of achieving balance aided through the mentoring process was illustrated by Janet when she spoke to the struggles she encountered while initiating change and the time that it took to bring about change:

You need to have an idea of what you want and believe in when you go into a school and I think you also need to be aware of the school climate and the school environment and find a balance between the direction you want to go, and where it already is. (Interview, April 21, 2017)

However, Cindy's story was quite different from the other participants because she had already been a Principal in the elementary panel before accepting a transfer to the high school setting but as a Vice-Principal. Cindy accepted this transfer because she felt she needed to learn the ins and outs of the high school setting before she felt she'd be comfortable becoming a Principal there. Cindy shared her struggle of being mentored by her high school Principal who had less administrative experience than her and was quickly becoming difficult to work with. Cindy said it was hard "because I had already been a principal, um, and he respected that, he respected that I had been a principal. He was careful on how he managed himself with me and giving me roles

to do” (Interview, May 11, 2017). The difficulty it would turn out was that information did not flow as freely as it should have with Cindy being left completely in the dark on many school and board related matters.

Fiona’s mentoring story as she transitioned to the high school is not as disappointing as Cindy’s but it is similar in that the learning environments, and day-to-day challenges of elementary and secondary schools, are vastly different. Fiona’s mentor helped her while she transitioned and she shared the following:

I have been a principal in large elementary schools, however the high school setting is quite different when you have very specific departments. And learning how to manage the waters of, um, almost the silos that can be created in a large secondary school and how do you uh, develop the communication links between those. (Interview, April 12, 2017)

Mentoring mattered to participants when it came to creating the conditions for change in both their self and in others. Cindy shared, “Sometimes it’s our personality and it’s just hard to adjust them, but I think um, allowing yourself to be vulnerable creates change” (Interview, May 11, 2017). Cindy felt safe in sharing that the busyness of the work day could sometimes take a toll on her level of patience as illustrated by the following statement:

I can get a little bit edgy with people coming at me so fast so I can, I can get a little edged myself, and I admit that, because I’m trying to deal with things and people who’ve come to me for advice or want me to solve a problem don’t know I’ve already dealt with six before them, and so at that point I’m starting to run on low fuel and maybe I’m a little edgy.(Interview, May 11, 2017)

Thankfully, Cindy has created strong interpersonal relationships with several staff members who were confident enough to help Cindy identify when her energy levels were running low.

Karen confirmed the importance of mentoring to her leadership development by stating that “it allows me to, to move in my, in my leadership abilities and have that person as a mentor to rely on and, and give support and advice” (Interview, April 11, 2017). Creating a safety net where the mentee feels supported is reflected throughout mentoring literature as building trust and strengthening the mentor/mentee relationship (Clayton & Thessin, 2017; Daresh & Playko, 1990, 1992; Pollock, 2017).

Holly offered a different perspective on the mentoring process and one that the OVDSB, nor I, have considered. Holly felt her mentoring needs could have been better served had she been mentored by a veteran Vice-Principal rather than a Principal. She felt this way because the role of a Vice-Principal and a Principal are quite different; a difference even more pronounced at the high school level. Holly states:

When I came into this role maybe I should have been mentoring or connecting with a vice-principal instead of a principal, because the two roles, they, they’re definitely a team, here I feel like they’re a strong team, but the two roles are different. (Interview, May 26, 2017)

Holly makes a valid point and one that is worthy of further inquiry. Particularly as she shared difficult conversations she has had with parents who were reliving past schooling experiences. Holly felt that had she been able to tap the expertise of a seasoned Vice-Principal, those initial calls to parents might have been easier. Regarding parents, Holly shared the following:

They’re, they’re going back to their high school experiences, or their school experiences, which sometimes were really challenging and really negative or really hard.

I would have needed a mentor right there with me, helping me through those calls. I would absolutely, I can't imagine, um, I worry. . . I worry for. . . for new admin. . . new VP's if they haven't had those experiences. (Interview, May 26, 2017)

Isabelle felt the mentoring experiences afforded her by the Principal she worked with was well worth the time; however, she would have appreciated being allowed to choose her own mentor instead of having one assigned to her. Isabelle said that it would be beneficial to have someone "you don't feel the same way about. . . maybe it's nice to have another perspective from another school so, I can see why they do it that way but it would just be nice if they changed it and just gave the person the option" (Interview, April 28, 2017).

Having the option to self select a mentor is something that Meredith would have appreciated as well since her mentoring relationship dissolved and she requested to be reassigned to another mentor Principal. The good news is that everything worked out for all parties involved and there have been no residual hard feelings. Meredith was comfortable to share the reasons behind this readjustment and stated:

I had to change was because there just wasn't great communication happening between us. And the thing I appreciated about the mentorship program was that it was made very clear up front that if there were some challenges that there's always an exit and there's a way for you to have a new mentor. (Interview, April 21, 2017)

Participants also made it clear that mentoring mattered to their development as administrators because it helped them realize, that despite their best efforts, the busyness of the day was never really over. Holly shared:

I'd get to this point where I was, you know, um, you know that, that, this day was a smooth-flowing day. And it's not. And now three years in I've realized, because it never

will be. It never will be because it's kind of like playing Whack-a-Mole sometimes.

(Interview, May 26, 2017)

Yet Holly was also quick to point out that the majority of what she learned to be able to complete her job has been learned through her experiences and through the learnings provided shared and discussed with her mentor. One of the hallmarks of her mentoring experience was that her mentor helped her set direction, plan, see the big picture, understand that different communities had different needs, and that “every school is so different. . . It's ever-changing for sure”

(Interview, May 26, 2017).

Participants shared with me that the mentoring experience provided them with the support and feedback required to further develop their leadership skills. In my interview with Karen, she shared that when time allowed the two of them to meet, it gave “the mentor an opportunity to give feedback as well based on their, their skill set, their experiences and how they help to, help grow you as a leader” (Interview, May 2017). More importantly, having a mentor familiar with the *Ontario Leadership Framework* gave Karen the confidence she needed to develop areas of growth in her leadership profile. This confidence was echoed by Isabelle who reported after several meetings with her mentor, “I felt I was very comfortable with the framework itself and knowing what was supposed to happen” (Interview, April 11, 2017).

Apart from Cindy who expressed feeling next to no support in her current position, all of the participants felt that their mentors genuinely cared about their development and wanted them to succeed. Holly shared:

I've had great people I value and respect who I can call on for support. . . 'cause this job is hard and it's busy. . . because you can't be caught up, and you can't feel like you're on top of this job I don't think. (Interview, May 26, 2017)

When I interviewed Pam, she shared that her mentor helped her prepare for the challenges that would inevitably visit her office door one day. Pam shared the following after her mentor had stressed to her the need to develop strong supportive networks:

I also think that in times of crisis when there's stressful situations in schools, those are challenging as with any leader. . . how to support your staff, and how to, um, how to, ah, support them later and afterwards and that is something that unless you've been through it, is hard to, um, it's hard to do it on your own. (Interview, April 28, 2017)

All participants reported having worked through extremely stressful situations already in their early administrative careers, and all expressed an appreciation for the feedback provided them by their mentors. Descriptive feedback received in a timely manner was shared by participants as being highly beneficial to their learning. Fiona found that when she received feedback immediately following a critical incident or stressful situation, that “in those experiences getting feedback from them [her mentor] and their experience also affects my ways of, of leading and learning with my colleagues as well” (Interview, April 12, 2017).

It was during the focus group interview that participants shared that all but one of them were allowed to choose their mentor. Participants went on to share that they were not permitted to be mentored by the Principal in their building, but they could be mentored by a Principal what was in another panel. For example, if you were a Vice-Principal in the elementary panel, you could be mentored by a Principal in the secondary panel. Previous research has shown that mentees value multiple meeting opportunities with their mentors and that having them in close proximity was something that helped mentor/mentee relationships thrive (Schechter, 2014). The participants in this study understood the reasoning behind the requirement that your mentor be in another building; however, they also stated that most of the mentoring they were receiving was

from the Principal they were working directly with. Donna shared that the leadership team she worked with helped her transition more readily than her mentor did because her mentor was a consultant and not readily available. Karen put it more directly and said “that is the one you kind of end up relying on the most just because you are living together all day long” (Interview, March 22, 2017). Meredith shared the same sentiments and stated, “I didn’t feel that I had to access my mentor as often as I could access Nelda” (Interview, March 22, 2017).

Theme Three: Desire to Model Instructional Leadership But How?

The third identified theme provides answers to the study’s third research question: What obstacles to growth, and opportunities for growth, currently exist in the elements of the Ottawa Valley District School Board’s mentoring program that can be reinforced or restructured to better prepare Vice-Principals? The theme of instructional leadership was defined by the specific codes: lead, leader, leading, leadership, reality, realities. The subthemes discussed are: instructional practice, systemic educational change, succession planning, panel differences, preparatory course material. These subthemes discussed helped define the struggles Vice-Principals encountered while striving to be regarded as instructional leaders in their schools.

Each participant in this study expressed a deep desire to model instructional leadership in their buildings, but each participant resoundingly confirmed that the pace and pressures requiring other aspects of their job be completed first did not allow them to lead as well as they would have liked. Holly shared with me that in her past role as a consultant she enjoyed multiple professional development opportunities that helped deepen her self-efficacy levels towards instructional leadership. However, the realities of becoming a Vice-Principal had already impacted her opportunities to model effective instruction as evidenced by her saying, “I know there’s great stuff I could share and there’s great things I could do and it’s how do you get to it

and how do you get the time to do it?” Holly continued to share that because of the daily pressures placed upon her, she had “yet to touch stuff that I learned about” through her course work (Interview, May 26, 2017).

Meredith expanded on Holly’s sentiments and confirmed that the lack of time available to her to effectively lead the instructional program during any given day was severely impacted by her half-time teaching role. Holly shared, “Finding the time to get everything done, is a challenge for sure because you want to spend time with people when you’re in the building and not sitting at your desk looking at emails, and forwarding emails and so forth.” She too continued by saying that “it’s just not feasible for people to give that extra time because they are invested in what’s happening in their own building right now” (Interview, April 21, 2017).

As I sat listening to participants share their passion towards teaching, I recalled the daily time limitations I experienced when I was a Vice-Principal. I too had a half-time teaching component and once that was completed, the disciplinary slips, bus reports, parent calls, special education meetings, and so forth were still there requiring your attention. Karen further illustrated this fact when she shared the following:

I know there are certain circumstances that happen in a building and some days you have to cancel that teaching part because of, there’s an emergency or there’s something you need to attend to, but on most days you, you’re taken away for fifty percent of the school day right from the get-go because you’re teaching. And you have to still deal with the managerial things as far as, you know, looking at behaviours or things that are happening in the school, TPAs that you have to adhere to because of collective agreements and things that, deadlines and timelines, um, so to be able to get into a class, like, to see myself that I’m, I value that instructional component, leadership component, but do I

think that I have time every day to devote as much time as I'd like to? No. But as far as being able to be at the table with, with things, I try my best to be there, but I don't think I, I devote enough time as I, as I need to. (Interview, April 11, 2017)

The size of the school is something that participants felt impacted their ability to get into classes and observe effective teaching practices or to actively participate in professional development sessions with fellow teachers. Isabelle is an example of a Vice-Principal who has worked in two very different school environments. Her first school had a student population of just over 400 students whereas the school she works in now has a student population of over 1000. Citing the size of the school and the complexities that come along with it, Isabelle said:

There's just not time to, like a lot of my plan was focused on the educational leadership aspect of things and that just isn't, there's just no time, it doesn't allow for that when you're here. Like it. . . there's just. . . I don't even know how that would ever happen. I just don't know. I have a teaching component as well, so I mean and even that is very hard. It's a real struggle to try to even, I'm doing SERT [special education resource teacher], it's a huge struggle to get to even see my students I'm supposed to be seeing. I'm doing IEPs and paperwork and that sort of thing. So for me that kind of fell right totally to the back burner. (Interview April 28, 2017).

Isabelle and a number of the participants shared the same sentiment: All schools have challenges but the greater the size of the school, the greater the number of challenges. Holly summed up what all participants were feeling as they described their attempts at demonstrating instructional leadership:

It's on the fly. It's on the fly for sure. And you know we have our PD days, where we talk about this, and the first thing that happens is that feeling of I haven't been doing

enough of that. I'm in classes all the time and I'm, but that really structured supportive instructional leadership, where we're taking a focus and we're, you know, we're moving it from one group to a greater group, you know you feel like, I didn't get to that, you know, it's May, and I didn't get to that. Or, even all through the year, it's great PD and it all makes sense, and then you leave going OK, next week I'm really going to, you know, find the time to go and do this, and again it doesn't happen. . . and by Wednesday, I'm taking all of my paperwork, things you know, OK, put them to the weekend because you can't get, you can't stay caught up on that side of the job. And that's just what I think the job, um, the job is. (Interview, May 26, 2017)

As I reflected on the comments shared during the individual interviews, I compared their comments with those shared during the focus group interview where, oddly enough, instructional leadership was rarely mentioned. Instead, focus group participants chose to highlight that the mentoring program best suited their needs when it came to student discipline, parental concerns, staffing issues, and the managerial side of running a school. Holly shared something interesting that made me wonder if the rest of the participants felt the same way regarding their administrative role. Holly felt that:

If you have a strong VP, and they're doing their job, and what they're supposed to do, the Principal is freed up to do more instructional leadership. I can't imagine being a principal if you didn't have a strong VP. To catch all that initial stuff. Because if you're going to do everything your leadership framework says you should be doing in your school, it's going to take, um, a lot of work by the whole team. (Interview, May 26, 2017).

In other words, Holly felt that her role as Vice-Principal was to free the Principal up from things that detracted them from leading the instructional program. In her eyes, the Principal was

the instructional leader in the building and try as she might, she was not. Pam and Karen had a slightly different take on things and felt that the pillars contained within the *Ontario Leadership Framework* was something that you embedded into your leadership practice each day and modelled it accordingly for your staff; however, both acknowledged that the increasing amount of demands placed upon administrators each year was significantly impacting their abilities become the instructional leaders both desired to be.

Table 3

Themes

Theme	Subtheme
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking the time to develop them is critical to your acceptance. • It takes time to build the relationship with all stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Students (b) Staff (c) Parents (d) Unions (e) Community partners
Instructional Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All desire to be lead learner • Time constraints • A teaching component limits their ability to do so.
Mentoring Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The job is too difficult without it. • Fills a void left by Principal Qualification Programs. • Debate between what is the best format because one size does not fit all (e.g. Same school/different school; same panel; Principal or a veteran Vice-Principal)

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the results of the research I conducted with Vice-Principals participating in a mentoring program at the Ottawa Valley District School Board during the

2016/2017 school year, as well as from field observation notes I collected. Upon completion of data analysis, three themes emerged with subthemes that describe the mentoring experience of participating Vice-Principals from the OVDSB, as they lived it and in answer to the research questions that framed this study.

Theme One: The critical importance of relationships emerged from all data sets as evidenced by participant responses during individual and focus group interviews and field observation notes. The information rich data obtained through these process provided answers to the study's research questions, and this is concurrent with the importance of relationships woven throughout the fabric of the *Ontario Leadership Framework*.

Theme Two: Mentoring matters was the third theme that emerged after data analysis. All participants in the study confirmed the need for, as well as the benefits of, an effective mentoring program. The enormity of responsibilities placed on the shoulders of administrators was a shock to all and something all participants felt they were not adequately prepared for. All participants confirmed that a mentor assisted them greatly in transitioning from the classroom into their Vice-Principal position. Of all of themes and subthemes identified in this study, the data clearly indicates the importance that relationships play in the role of leadership; in particular, in their position as Vice-Principal.

Theme Three: Instructional leadership was the second theme emerging upon completion of data analysis. All participants voiced their desire to actively model instructional leadership practices in their schools; however, the busyness brought forward each day significantly monopolized their daily schedules which in turn diminished their ability to be recognized as an instructional leader in their building. Regardless, all the participants strived to maintain an energy and focus in remaining actively engaged in professional learning and capacity building

cycles occurring in their buildings and throughout the system. Moreover, all participants were confident they had the skillset required to lead the instructional program lead and help build the professional capacity in the staff they were working with.

Results suggest that while the OVDSB does provide a formalized mentoring program for newly appointed administrators, it is clearly not enough. Participants in this study voiced their concerns that the role of the Vice-Principal is more difficult than they thought and while budget constraints are an everyday reality for any school board, all participants voiced their desire to have more time provided to them so they could meet one-on-one with their mentor to ask questions, to observe them in action and to ask them questions regarding their decision-making processes, or to simply vent in a safe environment free from the daily distractions of their own building.

Karen sums up many of the results of this study when she describes her PQP courses as well as the real-life experiences she had prior to being appointed as Vice-Principal. She states:

You don't know what you don't know. It's very overwhelming even with a mentor program, guidance and support, and even knowing that you can call on your colleagues. You're not prepared until you get. . . Nothing really prepares you until you actually start (Interview, March 22, 2017).

Clayton and Thessin (2017) support Karen's disposition that a person is never completely prepared despite all the preliminary preparation. They call on school board officials to find "collaborative and creative approaches to ensure that aspiring leaders receive the leadership experiences they need to further own learning and growth and to prepare site-based leaders to mentor aspiring administrators" (p. 16). John Maxwell said that true leaders are always in the minority because they are thinking ahead of the present majority. Now is the perfect opportunity

for the OVDSB to embrace this challenge by creating a highly structured mentoring program with the intention of it becoming known as the “Oracle of Ontario”. Time is a precious commodity when it comes to school leadership and student achievement; hence, school boards cannot afford to wait-and-see stance to see if the *Ontario College of Teachers* and/or Ontario’s *Ministry of Education* will adopt this recommendation and create a mandatory induction program for beginning administrators. Currently within the OVDSB there exists highly skilled and competent administrators who know what it takes to successfully guide beginning Vice-Principals while they gain experience and build strengthen self-efficacy levels. If exemplary, confident, highly successful, and competent school leadership is of paramount importance to the OVDSB, then the senior leadership team, along with the public’s elected Trustees, will find creative ways of designating budget monies which reflect an expansion and yearly review of the current induction offering to administrators.

The key ingredient to any organization is its people; in particular, how firmly established its succession planning practices are. All learning organizations require a foundation that is firmly established so that the building can withstand seasonal tempests and tectonic shifts in power. Much like building a home, construction does not begin with the upper floors and its roof. Those are the things that are easily seen and esthetically pleasing. However, it remains standing because of the cornerstone and footings located beneath it, and often out of sight. A foundation meticulously planned out and carefully constructed, is a foundation providing strength and support to the learning organization as it moves forward. In contrast, a foundation hastily constructed and populated with shortcuts and weaker building materials, may look pretty at first inspection, but it will inevitably begin to deteriorate and have its tenants looking elsewhere. This recommendation is supported in existing research. For the well-being of its

students, teachers, parents, and community partners, this researcher hopes the OVDSB makes this dream genesis into reality.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Hansford and Ehrich (2006) have extensively researched the need for school boards to support mentoring programs. In particular, they highlight the importance of mentor and protégé matching after reviewing 40 research-based programs on mentoring for principals and discovered that “mentoring programs are an important type of professional development activity for enhancing the learning and growth potential of novices and more experienced principals” (p. 49). Researching 300 articles around mentoring programs, Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent (2004) concluded that beginning administrators, regardless of their gender or race, benefit from a structured mentoring program when roles are clearly established at the outset. They go on to state that the benefits of a mentoring program far outweigh the drawbacks and call for an increased awareness and support for any such program, research-based mentor training, a carefully selected process of pairing mentors with mentees, and a systematic evaluation of the program each year. They conclude that “mentoring has enormous potential to bring about learning, personal growth, and development for professionals” (p. 536).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover to discover the mentoring needs of beginning Vice-Principals who participated in the mentoring program offered at the Ottawa Valley District School Board (OVDSB; a pseudonym) in Ontario, Canada. More precisely, this study described the views of the Vice-Principals regarding areas of the mentoring program which were useful in helping them transition to their leadership position and the suggestions they offered as a means to assist and enhance the OVDSB’s mentoring program. This chapter summarizes the findings of the study and it answers the research questions. The results listed provide a link to existing literature and the theoretical construct related to the study.

The themes discussed in chapter four provide the foundation for the discussion of conclusions of this study. Specific program recommendations for stakeholders and suggested areas of further research are also shared in this chapter. I addressed the framework of the research questions through one-on-one interviews, field observation notes, and focus groups interviews. Data were collected, transcribed, read and studied and coded by hand. I followed steps outlined in Moustakas (1994) where each transcript was divided into textual units that expressed the meaning of the experience as expressed through the participants. Invariant constituents of the experience were clustered into a thematic label which represented the words of the participants. Textural descriptions were developed from thematically organized meaning units which were synthesized into a textural-structural description of the essence of the experience (p. 121).

Summary of Findings

“Phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon, for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it is – and without which it could not be what it is” writes Van Manen (1990, p. 10). It is the tool I used to describe the “what” the participants experienced and “how” they experienced it. It was through this process that the essence of the phenomena under investigation was arrived at (Cresswell, 2013, p. 78). I have worked as a Vice-Principal and Principal with the OVDSB so it was incumbent on me to bracket out my own experience of entering administration so that I could “take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Cresswell, 2013, p. 80). Hence, an argument can be made that this study combined two approaches to phenomenology: hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology.

After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the site visits completed, I began the coding process. After multiple passes through the transcripts and the revising of my field notes,

three themes emerged which were each supported by applicable subthemes. This process allowed me to develop a theoretical construct that described the essence of the participant's mentoring experience with the OVDSB. In an attempt to remove any bias from my research findings, I have bracketed out my own experiences so that the phenomena under investigation could be looked at "as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). Researcher bias "can be an investigator's intentional or unintentional favoritism that may distort data" (Charles & Mertler, 2002, p. 379) and I have attempted to make sure that this has not clouded the study's results.

The Research Questions providing the frame work for this study were:

1. What experiences and issues do Ontario practicing Vice-Principals identify as the most challenging?
2. What affect has the mentoring experience at the Ottawa Valley District School Board had on the ability and proficiency of Ontario practicing Vice-Principals to address challenges, manage change and to lead the instructional program as outlined in the *Ontario Leadership Framework*?
3. What obstacles to growth, and opportunities for growth, currently exist in the elements of the Ottawa Valley District School Board's mentoring program that can be reinforced or restructured to better prepare Vice-Principals?

Discussion

Theoretical Framework

Self-efficacy beliefs are an element of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997) and are about a person's beliefs in their own ability to perform a task or achieve a goal. More precisely, Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391). Participants in this study felt their self-efficacy beliefs were impacted by "how well they motivate[d] themselves and persevere[d] in the face of difficulties. . . their vulnerability to stress and depression; and the life choices they make, which set the course of their life paths (Bandura, 2009, p. 185). This framework has been shown in previous studies to be an important trait in beginning administrators as they transition into school leadership (Hargreaves, 2009; Fullan, 2014). Bandura's self-efficacy is connected to this research because "Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives. . . efficacy expectations are a major determinant of peoples' choice of activities, how much effort they will expend, and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations" (Bandura, 1997a, p. 77). Ann shared that the mentoring experience was important to her transition because it made her "feel that they really want to see me succeed and be successful. So it's nice to know that they care about that, and that the system cares about you. There's a group of people there that are there to support you" (Interview, April 21, 2017). Holly echoed Ann's experience and why the mentoring process allowed her to develop the skills she needed to cope each day. When speaking about the enormity of the daily tasks Holly stated "you can't be caught up, and you can't feel like you're on top of this job I don't think" (Interview, May 26, 2017).

Several participants credit the mentoring program for having helped them further gain new knowledge and the skills required to promote their success. This is something that was lacking in the Principal Qualification Program completed by all the participants and is reflected in current research (Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013; Versland & Erickson, 2016). Cindy shared with me the importance of having a strong mentor because it was through them that she was able to articulate the frustrations she faced on most days. Her frustration was evident when she shared with me, “We don’t have time to think. We don’t have time to percolate the thinking process to allow us to make always the best decision. We have to remove ourselves from it” (Interview, May 11, 2017). Karen experienced a positive mentoring experience and one of the things she found most useful that was absent from her qualification course, was the value of descriptive feedback. She shared that it was feedback that was best “able to support me in, in my role” (Interview, April 11, 2017). The notion of descriptive feedback and how it helped participant self-efficacy levels was echoed by Fiona. She commented that when “getting feedback from them [their mentor] and their experience also affect[ed]s my ways of leading and learning with my colleagues as well” (Interview, April 12, 2017). These comments extend the value of descriptive feedback as highlighted in the research of Goff, Guthrie, Goldring, and Bickman (2014) who posit, “Providing meaningful feedback through principal assessment, and helping principals to adequately interpret feedback through coaching, are viable tools to improve leadership practice” (p. 698).

A high degree of trust was identified as having significant impact upon the professional mentoring relationship. Trust was seen as creating the conditions for safe talk to occur between the mentee and the mentor which in turn aided the professional development of the mentee. Trust is reflected in current literature as aiding a mentee’s professional growth (Bakioglu,

Hacifazlioglu, & Ozcan, 2010; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe et. al., 2007). This finding is significant because for courageous conversations and meaningful collaboration to take place, trust is the cornerstone upon which this relationship is built and maintained. Karen was firm in her convictions about the importance of trust as evidenced by her words:

I think one of the most important things is to establish trust with your mentor because that's the person that you're confiding in and you're showing your vulnerability, you're, you're talking about areas that you think that you need to perhaps work on or improve on, um, but it also gives the mentor an opportunity to give feedback as well based on their, their skill set, their experiences and how they help to, help grow you as a leader.

(Interview, April 11, 2017).

Cindy shared the importance of trust as it pertained to relationship building. She confided that “building relationships is the key to everything in this profession, it's the key. If you don't, if you don't have that ability you shouldn't be in this. . .” (Interview, May 11, 2017). However, Cindy also shared with a negative side to her mentoring experience; an experience that has left her wondering if it might prevent her from receiving any promotions in the future. Her pain is reflected in her following words:

I think the mentoring this year I received was no mentoring from my Principal. I can honestly say I've had next to no support, no value of what I bring to the table or anything that I've brought. So very little mentoring, actually none. I can say absolutely no mentoring this year at all. No collaboration, no group meetings, no checking in to see what I've been doing, no communication at all. So I think, you know, as a leader lots of growing here at the secondary. A ton of growing, not just about the secondary system,

and how it functions differently than elementary, but a lot of learning of myself as a leader. (Interview, May 11, 2017).

Citing Lindley (2003), Parylo, Zepeda, and Bengston (2012) suggest “that an effective mentor of the first year principal determines expectations; builds the relationship with the mentee; and helps the mentee to survive the job, improve on the job, and to grow professionally” (p. 124). For Cindy, this was not the case and for reasons she does not understand nor is her mentor willing to share. Consequently, she has requested that she be provided another mentor so that she might further her professional growth. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) assert that “when mentoring effectively engages veteran, novice, and aspiring principals in reciprocal professional development, the community of practice continuously improves, expands, and deepens leadership capacity in schools and districts” (p. 189). Each participant in the study shared the value received from participating in a mentoring program. All indicated a desire to have more time with their mentors as so that the relationship would further grow and in turn, help them along their leadership journey. This is supported in the literature by Clayton, Sanzo, and Myran (2013) as well as by Hansford and Ehrich (2006).

Parylo, Zepeda, and Bengston (2012) assert, “To reach its potential, principal mentoring should be intentional and built on trust” (p. 124). Participants reported that as the relationship developed with their mentor they were better able to maneuver through the daily demands of school leadership. Oftentimes, this relationship was enhanced by their ability to observe their mentor in the context of the role. These job embedded opportunities to observe their mentors were seen as authentic by participants, and something which they desired more of.

Unfortunately, no participant mentioned any evaluation component of the existing mentoring program, and this is something that should be addressed so that the program’s leaders can ensure

an offering that is impactful, productive, and highly applicable to the work of the mentor and mentee alike (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). Future studies of mentoring programs should determine what instruments are available to measure professional growth; as well, are these instruments accurately measuring the professional growth of the beginning administrator.

Empirical Literature

The literature regarding mentoring for beginning administrators is extensive and growing exponentially as education stakeholders remain focused on raising current levels of student achievement. Embracing research supporting mentoring and best induction practices for Vice-Principals is a means to facilitate the professional capacity of new administrators (Daresh, 2004; Daresh & Playko, 1992; Duncan & Stock, 2010). All participants in this study voiced their support and highly recommended a job-embedded mentoring program that was financially supported by the school board. As well, all participants voiced their support that they be given an increase in the amount time provided with their mentor so that they strengthen and expand their professional capital in areas such as relationship building, problem solving, instructional leadership, and communication.

Participants reported gaining a better understanding of the Vice-Principal role and how to become a better school leader. This finding echoes the findings of Daresh (2004), Fink and Resnick (2001), and Grissom and Harrington (2010) who similarly found that school leaders taking part in mentoring and induction practices were better able transition into the leadership role when compared to those who did not. Having the ability to observe their mentors perform while in the role is something provides the source of job embedded learning that Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) and Hezlett (2005) highlight as influencing the growth of a new leader. Moreover, participants expressed a disconnect between the training they received through

their principal qualifications course and the realities they were facing on a daily basis. Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) highlights the disconnect occurring between theory and practice and something deserving deeper inquiry.

Similar to findings in other research, participants in this study reported that a lack of time was a significant obstacle that needed to be overcome throughout the program (Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013; Hansford & Ehrich, 2006). Participants reported feeling pressures from staff, senior leaders, and parents to handle school matters in a timely matter. Unfortunately, this had a major impact on the participants' ability to connect with their mentor to problem solve, reflect, or to see observe them modelling instructional leadership. Participants voiced a strong desire to build their instructional leadership capacities through job-embedded learning and something that is supported in existing literature as something strengthening a beginning administrator's leadership skills (Davis et al., 2005; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Hale & Moorman, 2003; Honig, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Peterson, 2002).

Trust between the mentor and the mentee was significant and acknowledged by participants as influencing their professional growth; a finding supported in existing literature (Bakioglu, Hacifazlioglu, & Ozcan, 2010; Drago-Severson & Aravena, 2011; McAdamis, 2007; Reina & Reina, 1999). Participants shared that establishing trust with their mentor and their colleagues allowed them to form professional networks where they could discuss more freely job related struggles, curiosities, and conflicts. Once trust had been established, participants felt they were more freely able to collaborate and share information in an environment that was considered safe and secure (Duncan & Stock, 2010; Pollock, 2017; Pourchot & Smith, 2004).

Empirical research posits that the most important component of the mentoring program is the development of the relationship between the mentor and their mentee (Alsburly & Hackman,

2006; Daresh, 1995, 2004; Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995). Consistent with the literature, novice administrators in this study welcomed the support they received from their mentors because they felt supported while navigating the daily demands of leadership (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 2004; Lashway, 2002;). Participants also confirmed the importance of being able to problem solve and strategize with their mentors. Having the ability to explore alternative approaches to issues or to receive feedback from their mentors around school organization and management served as a vehicle for learning (Hansford & Ehrich, 2005; Hezlett, 2005). It also allowed them to discuss the value in building effective relationships with staff, students, and parents, and to reflect upon these experiences. Relationships were identified in this study as being critically important to school leaders because they allow for better communication lines to be established. This finding supports earlier studies which found communication, reflection, and relationship building as key components to mentoring programs and vitally important to school leadership; however, absent from their principal preparatory programs (Barnett & O'Mahoney, 2002; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002; Petersen, 2002; Pollock, 2017; Sergiovanni, 2009; Strong, Barrett, & Bloom, 2003; Weinberg & Lankau, 2011;).

Implications

The empirical and theoretical implications of this study have already been discussed earlier and do not warrant repeating again. In this section I will outline several practical applications and recommendations for stakeholders involved in the preparation, planning, and placement of Vice-Principals. The findings of this research gives voice to recently appointed Vice-Principals who successfully lived the experience of having gone from a classroom teacher to a school leader all while under the guidance of a mentor. The following recommendations

arise from the participants and are confirmed in current research literature. The recommendations are specific to both the geographical area studied and to the Province of Ontario.

Implications for Ontario College of Teachers

Ontario's *Ministry of Education* is responsible for government policy, funding, curriculum planning, and direction in all levels of public education. The *Ontario College of Teachers* licenses, governs, and regulates the Ontario teaching profession and is responsible for approving the content contained in the Principal Qualification Program offered by approved course providers. Though they are both separate bodies, the recommendations in this section ultimately link the two of them together.

Ontario's Ministry of Education passed a requirement in 2006 that all new teachers participate in and complete the *New Teacher Induction Program* (NTIP). Ontario's newly appointed Supervisory Officers are also required to participate in a mentoring program intended to assist them in their transition to system-level leadership. This said, no such program currently exists for newly appointed Vice-Principals or Principals in Ontario. There is a vast degree of separation between what is offered for beginning administrators throughout the province with some school boards running a highly structured induction program to where little or no offerings are made available to beginners in other school boards. This is a gap that needs to be addressed through funds specifically designated as such by the *Ministry of Education*. It is recommended that they adopt a name similar to the *New Teacher Induction Program* (NTIP) and give consideration to the name, the *New Principal Induction Program* (NPIP).

Course providers approved by the *Ontario College of Teachers* are charged with the responsibility of preparing future Principals with the knowledge and experience they will need to lead our schools. Working closely with the *Ministry of Education* in the creation of an organized

induction program for administrators is the second recommendation put forth by this researcher. It is also recommended that course providers involve practicing Vice-Principals and Principals from all publicly funded education panels in the creation and future monitoring of such an induction program.

A third recommendation is a revamping of current PQP course content and is therefore directed at the *College of Teachers*. Versland & Erickson (2016) offer three concrete suggestions for improving principal preparation programs and are deserving of careful consideration by PQP course providers:

First, create instructional activities, which function as mastery experiences and vicarious learning enabling candidates to acquire course content while building relationships across the school setting. Second design internships of sufficient length to provide candidates time to build collegial relationships and experience social persuasion and support.

Finally, advance program rigor to ensure that candidates can effectively build positive psychological responses necessary to cope with the challenges inherent in the work of principals. (p. 318)

The creation of a *New Principal Induction Program* embedded with the aforementioned suggestions would help assist newly appointed administrators who are not only charged with the responsibility of leading and managing schools, but they are also responsible for raising current levels of student achievement.

During the focus group interview, Donna spoke to the need of an induction program and how it benefitted her as she transitioned into the Vice-Principal role. She shared, “I think it really is important to have some kind of mentorship program. . . it’s different from any other job. I don’t know what it should look like. . . but I really think it has to be something” (Interview,

March 22, 2017). Isabelle supported this same opinion and stated that “it’s very overwhelming even with a mentor program and with guidance and support. . . you’re not prepared” (Interview, March 22, 2017). Fisher (2014) writes:

In today’s climate of heightened expectations, principals are expected, more than ever, to deal with pedagogy, i.e., they are expected to improve teaching and learning. They need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curricula leaders, assessment experts and disciplinarians. They are also expected to carry out general managerial tasks and be proficient administrators. This includes being budget analysts, facility managers, public relations experts, expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. However, being a school principal also requires special skills such as community building, as principals are expected to broker the often conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office officials, unions and state and federal agencies. They also need to be sensitive to the widening range of student needs. (pp. 59-60)

The role of the Principal is become more and more difficult given the pressures placed on them by the public, unions, senior administration, and the increase in student and staff mental health concerns. The voices from the participants in this study acknowledge the unforeseen challenges of becoming a Vice-Principal and have suggested the recommendations contained here.

Implications for Principal Qualification Program Course Providers

In Ontario, the Principals Qualification Program is comprised of Part 1, Part 2, and a Leadership Practicum. Parts 1 and 2 are each 125 hours in length while the Leadership Practicum consists of a 60 hour leadership experience. Throughout the interview process, participants noted that in spite of the preparatory course work afforded them in the PQP, the realities of a Vice-

Principal's job were vastly different. Fiona captured this best when she said the role of Vice-Principal:

. . . can remove you somewhat from those leadership opportunities because you primarily are dealing with disciplining of students. . . components of the time-tabling. . . you're doing a lot of attendance tracking with students and also attendance tracking of staff. Those kinds of jobs tend to feel more managerial/secretarial in a way that I'm not sure maximizes the leadership potential of Vice-Principals. (Interview, April 12, 2017)

The reality of today's Vice-Principal is that they continue to be responsible for daily managerial tasks as well as disciplinary problems. This is more evident when comparing the differences between elementary and secondary Vice-Principals. Karen helped better illustrate this point when she shared, "Our PQP told us how to be a Principal. It didn't tell us how to be a Vice-Principal" (Interview, April 11, 2017). Consequently, participants in this study recommended that the course content of Part 1 of the PQP be specifically about the role of the Vice-Principal and that content contained in Part 2 be specifically about the role of the Principal.

Transitioning into the Vice-Principal role is hard work, and it impacts leaders in various ways: some more than others. As a result, an individual's self-efficacy level will undoubtedly be impacted. This is easily addressed and supported in current literature by Versland & Erickson (2016) who state, "For preparation program faculty, advancing program rigor and designing challenging experiences could provide program candidates with a safe environment to learn strategies that create perseverance and eventually success" (p. 317). The authors continue by call for course providers to address the self-efficacious needs of its participants. They write:

While researchers support the need for leaders to be self-efficacious, there is little evidence in the literature that preparation programs have incorporated efficacy-building

experiences into pre-service training. Creating preparation programs that weave efficacy building into coursework and field experiences would indeed be advantageous to aspiring administrators. (p. 301)

A second recommendation for PQP course providers, and one briefly mentioned above, is that all course providers be required to have Principal representation on the course content provided in PQP Part 1 and 2. It is recommended that local representation from public and Catholic, French and English school boards, form the composition of these planning committees. It is also recommended that there be a three year rotation of its members so that program content remains current and that other educational leaders are afforded the opportunity to train the next generation of upcoming administrators. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2004) write, “It is not enough to hire and retain the most capable principals – they must also believe that they can successfully meet the challenges of the task at hand” (p. 582). I can’t think of a better way to help beginning administrators succeed than by providing them with first-hand knowledge of the role by administrators who are experienced and currently active in the position.

Implications for the OVDSB

The importance of time, specifically the need for more of it, was highlighted by all the Vice-Principals in this study. Participants stated they needed more time with their mentors; they needed more time to complete the tasks of the day; they needed more time to develop and gain trust from students, staff, parents, and the community; and they needed more time to showcase their instructional leadership skills and to actively participate in professional learning sessions without fear of interruption. Karen’s frustration at finding enough time was clearly evident when she shared:

I know there are certain circumstances that happen in a building and some days you have to cancel that teaching part because of, there's an emergency or there's something you need to attend to, but on most days you, you're taken away for fifty percent of the school day right from the get-go because you're teaching. And you have to still deal with the managerial things as far as, you know, looking at behaviours or things that are happening in the school, TPAs that you have to adhere to because of collective agreements and things that, deadlines and timelines, um, so to be able to get into a class, like, to see myself that I'm, I value that instructional component, leadership component, but do I think that I have time every day to devote as much time as I'd like to? No. But as far as being able to be at the table with, with things, I try my best to be there, but I don't think I, I devote enough time as I, as I need to. (Interview, April 11, 2017)

Knowing the growing complexity and immensity of the school leader, it is recommended that the OVDSB strategically increase the allocation of funds allowing for the offering of a more comprehensive mentoring program. The goals of this program should be targeted at increasing the self-efficacy levels of newly appointed Vice-Principals so that they can effectively lead and manage schools in an era of increased scrutiny and accountability. Daresh (2004) writes, "Mentoring is an absolutely essential part of socialization and professional formation, whether at the pre-service, induction, or in-service phases of the professional development of school administrators" (p. 502). The limited mentoring experience was something highly valued by participants in this study as evidenced by Isabelle who shared the following:

I think for me I think the mentoring program is important. I think it's important to have some sort of mentoring program. For me I felt like, it just was very sporadic. We only

had two or three meetings. One of them I ended up driving halfway there, having to come back. . . I couldn't get away. (Interview, April 28, 2017)

Although Daresh (2004) cautions that the mentoring experience alone does not ensure lifelong learning, it does provide hope that “a climate of collegial support will begin to develop in a school district. And this climate will result in a culture of lifelong learning existing in a system (p. 506).

A highly structured mentoring program for beginning administrators sends a two-fold message. First, that Vice-Principals don't need to feel that they are alone. Second, it tells experienced administrators that they are valued by the Board they work for and that their collective experience is valuable; in fact, it's crucial to helping Vice-Principals work through difficult learning experiences that are authentic. This position is supported in the literature by Versland & Erickson (2016) who write, “Authentic learning experiences not only enable skill and content mastery, but also provide opportunities for relationship building, improving communication, and developing social support necessary to implement the processes of school improvement” (p. 316) and by Weingartner (2009) who posits that a structured mentoring program creates “an environment in which a principal could pursue questions, issues, concerns, and frustrations with an experienced peer whose sole purpose is to provide support, advice, and direction” (p. 69).

The participants in this study gave voice to the need for three specific things: tech, time, and treasury. They wish for more time to be spent with their mentors; they wish for technological tools that will enable them to stay current with provincial and system directions; and they ask that the OVDSB make a commitment to making these things happen by opening up their treasury. The current mentoring program at the OVDSB is loosely assembled and in desperate

need of a program overhaul. Succession planning is an ever-present reality for any school board, let alone the OVDSB, and one that is more successful when formalized mentoring processes are in place. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) write, “Sustainable leadership goes beyond temporary gains in achievement scores to create lasting, meaningful improvements in learning. Sustainable leadership means planning and preparing for succession – not as an afterthought, but from the first day of a leader’s appointment (p. 9).

The OVDSB has an opportunity to address this concern given the current make-up of the senior administration team. Current data shows that close to 80% of OVDSB’s school administrators are eligible to retire in seven years or less, and this is compounded by the increase in students’ needs entering the school setting. This was confirmed at a recent senior administration meeting with school administrators by a superintendent who stated, “You’re dealing with very complex needs of students” (September 27, 2017). Hall, Berg, and Barnett (2003) sum up the realities of today’s principalship by stating :

. . . the job has become increasingly complex, more difficult, and with intense and unreasonable pressures to solve a broad menu of education, social, and personal problems. At this time, the demands for accountability, maintaining a safe environment, and serving all the needs of children (and many needs of their parents) means that in reality no one person can do it all. . . We also are very concerned about how long they can survive in the pressure cooker that the principalship has become. (pp.2-3)

Knowing the number of impending retirements, and knowing that the role of a school administrator is increasingly becoming more difficult, I can’t think of a better way for the OVDSB to attract promising new leaders than by showing them strong, professionally trained,

and highly experienced administrators who are eagerly waiting to assist them in their leadership journey.

Delimitations and Limitations

Creswell (2005) identifies limitations as “potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher. By stating the limitations, other researchers can judge to what extent the findings can or cannot be generalized to other people and situations” (p. 198). Like most, if not all research, this study is not without its limitations. Patton (2002) lists three kinds of sampling limitations typically arising from qualitative research designs: limits in the situation, limits from the time periods during which observations took place, and limitations based on selectivity in the people who were sampled (p. 563) The sample size of 10 Vice-Principals was from a rural school board in Ontario and findings may not transfer to other geographical settings (rural or urban); therefore, limit the generalizability of this research. Race and gender were studied, but it should be noted that the Ottawa Valley District School Board is overwhelmingly Caucasian and all participants in this study were female. Demographic data was gathered, but this was not considered during data analysis. The reliability of data gathered from interviews may be influenced by experiences the participant was going through at that time; therefore, the opinions expressed may not be indicative of their overall mentoring relationship and experience.

Leedy and Ormond (2005) refer to delimitations as what the researcher is not going to do. In this case, the decision was made to focus on the mentoring experiences of Vice-Principals in a rural board located in Ontario, Canada due to the researcher’s proximity to the participants. The researcher did not investigate whether or not mentors were strategically selected to work with a particular Vice-Principal, nor was there any investigation into professional training, if any, received by the mentors.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study only focused on the experiences of participants in a rural school board in the Province of Ontario. For a substantial increase in the understanding of the learning taking place in formally organized mentoring programs, more research is needed from other areas in Ontario including rural and urban, public and catholic, French and English school boards. Is the learning that occurs similar across all areas in Ontario? Moreover, is the learning in the elementary school environment similar or vastly different? And if it is different, what components to a mentoring program are needed to better equip novice administrators?

A recently released report entitled, *The Changing Nature of Vice-Principal's Work* by Dr. Katrina Pollock (2017) found that “the actual daily work of vice-principals can vary greatly from school to school, because the duties and responsibilities of the role are not well-defined and often negotiated with the principal” (p. 2). Participants in this study indicated that there was a growing need for them to develop skills necessary to support student and teacher well-being. However, one participant noted that they spend each day entering the building knowing they have to attend to the needs of everyone around them. The participant stated, “No one ever checks with us to see how we are doing.” This said, it is recommended that further research be conducted examining administrator well-being and that programs, policies, and a clearly communicated job description for administrators is defined.

Participants in this study shared concern regarding the pace at which change was occurring and the accompanying pressures associated with the position. This concern was also noted by Pollock (2017) who reported the following:

Contemporary school administrators are employed within a context of *work intensification*. Extended work hours, increased complexity and volume of work tasks,

and an expansion of responsibilities are all associated with work intensification. A decrease in the time allotted for completing one's work, increased levels of student diversity, working within bureaucratic organizations, and a high reliance on email and other forms of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to work remotely, also fuel the work intensification that contemporary principals and vice-principals face.

(p. 2)

It is recommended that further research be conducted exploring the impact on a teaching Vice-Principal's leadership development over time and whether it is enhanced or hindered by their daily teaching component.

The idea of the Vice Principal acting as an instructional leader in a school is a novel one but one that lacks reality according to this study's participants. All indicated they would like to become more engaged in duties, tasks, and activities rooted in instructional leadership but that the daily demands student discipline; addressing student, staff, and parental concerns; and the constant demands placed upon them; significantly limited their ability to do so. Pollock (2017) noted that "Vice-principals find it difficult to engage in their own professional learning. As a result, it can be challenging for them to develop the skills, abilities, and dispositions they need to eventually become a successful instructional leader and move forward in their careers" (p. 16). This said, it is recommended that further research into mentoring programs examine practices where the possibility exists whereby a teaching Vice-Principal can be easily recognized as the instructional leader in a school. Furthermore, that assessment instruments be identified and analyzed to determine if they accurately measure the instructional leadership growth of Vice-Principals.

An intense and unmanageable workload; little opportunity to engage in instructional leadership; spending less time with students than classroom teachers; conflict mediation; and having a dual teaching role were the five themes emerging from Pollock's (2017) study. With respect to having a dual teaching role, one vice-principal in Pollock's study shared:

It is custom in our board for vice-principals to also be teaching as part of their work day. Regardless of the percentage of time assigned to teaching responsibilities, it increases workload and stress load so significantly for vice-principals, that it effectively feels like having two full-time equivalent jobs. The management and teaching roles both demand so much of the individual on a daily basis, that one seems to undermine the other, in any attempts one makes to be effective in both. (p. 23)

This sentiment was reflected in this study as well when one participant shared their frustration in coping with the amount of emotionally draining situations they faced each week in their school. She continued to voice her frustration towards the unpredictability encountered each day and something which further confirms Pollock's (2017) study that, "Ontario vice-principals are suffering from the effects of work intensification" (p. 35).

Summary

This study began with a definition of leadership as outlined in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* (2013). Here, leadership is defined as the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals (p. 5). Topics such as succession planning, leadership development, effective instructional methods, and successful mentoring practices are viewed and accepted as vital to Ontario's continuation and growth in the public's confidence levels towards publicly funded education. Existing research (Bartell, 2005; Bass, 1984; Buck, 2004; Candis

Best, 2011; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Darwin, 2000; Funk, 2013; Hezlett & Gibson, 2005; Merriam, 1983; O'Neil & Marsick, 2009; Versland, 2016) shows those willing to grasp the reins of leadership have benefitted from formalized organized mentoring programs; yet, school boards are experiencing shortages of motivated and qualified principal candidates (Pollock, 2017). Those that once considered moving into administration are now reconsidering such a move because of associated pressures put on today's leadership, the time commitment it takes to successfully complete the enormity of tasks faced each day in the role, the pace at which change continues to genesis in our schools, and the difficulty to maintain a work/life that is healthy and balanced. Research conducted by Alexander (2010), Fullan (2008), and Leithwood, Anderson, & Seashore-Louis (2012) have all discovered that the school leadership is vital for raising student achievement in today's schools. Yet for those who are considering making the jump into school leadership and are wondering what the job description might be, there is one word that best describes the roles and responsibilities of today's school administrator -- Everything! As soon as you accept that fact and embrace the realities that the position brings, the easier it will be for individuals wrestling with uncertainty to make their final decision.

The increased workplace demands and the hectic pace at which today's school administrator must navigate through inevitably affect the individual and those close to them. To better help illustrate this point, *The Georgia Tech Whistle* (1991) reported the university commencement address of Brian Dyson, former CEO of Coca-Cola, who gave this advice to the graduating class:

Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them work, family, health, friends, and spirit, and you're keeping all of these in the air.

You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls: family, health, friends, and spirit, are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same. A glass ball is not only more fragile than a rubber ball; it's also more valuable. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life.

(p. 3)

Yet maintaining a healthy work/life balance for school administrators is slowly becoming more of a myth than a reality. If this is the case, what solution is there to be found which ensures that the best qualified, competent, motivated, focused, resilient, emotionally intelligent, and self-efficacious leaders are discovered so that the continued trek to the Everest of student achievement and well-being can be continued as set out before them by their predecessors? Schools need teachers who are exemplary in their practice; demonstrate a commitment to student achievement as well as their own learning; already demonstrate a natural ability to lead and motivate others; and, who are able to suffer the slings and arrows that inevitably will be thrown their way. Some will be deserved; most will not.

David Brinkley is credited with saying, "A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him" and this is true with leadership moments encountered by today's administrators. Those considering a leap into administration must realize that they have been entrusted with the skills they have so that they can positively impact others around them. Don't let past successes go to your head, and don't let past failures go to your heart. Experience is a great teacher, and much like a teacher sitting silently while we take a test, the pressures and demands facing administrators today are providing an education like none other. For a school leader wanting to know their community better, look no further than the

fabric which holds them together. In other words, look for the common unity in the community. Be authentic in your leadership. You cannot wear a mask and appear in front of certain people one way, and in front of other people another way; above all, you must never compromise your beliefs and your truths for the illusion that it will bring you a promotion.

Joshua Rothman in the February 29, 2016 online edition of the *New Yorker* wrote, “For leadership to exist, a leader must cross paths with a crisis. Without an answering crisis, a could-be leader remains just a promising custodian of potential.” A beginning administrator will never lack for an audience when they speak of failure because we all have failed at some time in our lives. You just have to remember to keep on getting up, dusting yourself off, and getting yourself back in the game. Your leadership skills may have been passed over once, twice, perhaps even more, and that it feels like you’ve been living in the wilderness for a number of years now. Don’t give up on your dream, don’t give in to the voices reminding of you of past failures; instead, hold true to your principles. You’re going to go through life with many opportunities to hold your tongue; embrace them all because hurt people, hurt people! Read closely the words of Roher and Wormwell (2000) for they are as valid today as they were at the beginning of this millennium:

The job of principal has become increasingly complex. Principals are having to balance competing sets of demands. School boundaries have become more and more transparent. The new curriculum, parent and community demands, government policy, changing technology, and staff morale issues have all contributed to a complex school environment. The role of principals in implementing innovations more often than not consists of being on the receiving end of externally initiated changes. The constant bombardment of new tasks and continual interruptions have kept principals off balance.

(p. 1)

Glenn Clark is credited with saying, “If you wish to travel far and fast, travel light. Take off all your envies, jealousies, unforgiveness, selfishness, and tears.” You can’t create a great future for yourself if you remain angry about the past. If a career in administration sounds interesting to you, and others have pointed out the giftings you possess and want you to share those skills: What are you waiting for? What you see if what you’ll be, so get up off the bench and get yourself out into the game.

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APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

Lessons Learned and Wisdom Earned: a Phenomenological Study of the Lived Mentoring Experiences of Ontario's Vice-Principals.

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Position of interviewee: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study of the lived mentoring experiences of beginning administrators who have transitioned from a classroom teaching position to that of a school Vice-Principal. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a practicing Vice-Principal and a participant in the school board's mentoring program for beginning administrators. The purpose of this study is to code and identify recurring themes regarding the mentoring needs of beginning Vice-Principals and to describe through observations, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews, the perspectives of the most critical areas in the mentoring program at the Ottawa Valley District School Board (a pseudonym) that need to be examined.

Questions:

1. Can you please describe for me your perceptions of the Board's mentoring program and how it has impacted your practice as Vice-Principal?
2. Please describe to me the specific elements of the mentoring program, as well as any specific experiences, that have impacted your self-efficacy as a leader.

3. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* is built around five key outcomes: setting directions; building relationships and developing people; developing the organization to support desired practices; improving the instructional program, and; securing accountability. Please describe for me how your mentoring experience has impacted your confidence in using the *Framework* and your ability to manage change and lead the instructional program.
4. Based on your experience as a Vice-Principal so far, please identify for me experiences and issues you deem as being the most challenging to manage both professionally and personally.
5. Please describe for me the obstacles you have experienced in the mentoring program and what additional resources would you have desired during your mentoring experience.
6. Is there anything else you would like to mention that you have not already shared with me?

I want to thank you for participating in this interview. I also want to reassure you that you will remain anonymous, and I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. My research records are stored securely, and I am the only individual having access to these records. Thank you.

Appendix C: Focus Group Interview

Focus Group Interview Questions

Researcher: Q1

Karen: The whole thing, the mentoring process is very valuable. What I was thinking is that at the beginning when you're new, um, for us to start out we had to select our own mentor. And so that was a little bit of a different process coming into it, is who do you select?

Isabelle: It's because you're new and you don't know anybody.

Karen: That's right. Um, but being a close knit board you know a lot of people already so you go to those people who you feel can offer you the most support. And the things that you want to learn more about. So you were mine in year one of it and having someone that had that knowledge of the ap's, the legal components, he was the obvious choice for me. and so it valuable just looking back in the process now of knowing what you don't know, maybe there could have been a little more pre-planning things in getting that established for us?

Donna: I had to choose my own too so because I was coming into curriculum I didn't know a lot of people and I had worked with lots of people, and mine was Emily, um, and I really liked the way she asked question, she never really ever answers any, but so I wanted to develop that skill more of questioning. But I mean she has lots of other skills to but I found that the days we went to those mentoring sessions they had a specific Focus usually, so not, and they were really good, but sometimes I was left with questions at the end too right? Yeah. I'm not sure you could do it better.

Stephanie: Um, I chose my own mentor as well. I'm. . . and coming out of a Consulting role as well out of curriculum, um, I had been out to the school for six years or more so I really needed somebody who had the management side of the leadership role down, and someone who I could identify as having a similar style so that I could really dig into the how and the why with someone who I know would, have the same kind of thinking. So having that choice was a huge benefit for

me. I could pick, um, personality and also the area I really wanted to focus on. Um. . . so the. . . yeah I can go into other stuff later so go ahead.

Isabelle: Um, I guess I'm sort of going to say something very similar to the rest of the people. I chose my own mentor based on, well again it was because I didn't, I know there wasn't a whole lot of people I was really comfortable with, or I felt I knew really well, um, so I picked Marian because she, um, emulated kind of how I would what how, I thought if I was going to be a principal I like the way her style was, I like the way she bring stuff together, and the relationship she builds with parents and that sort of thing, so that was kind of my , that's why I was interested and working with her so period, but then we didn't really have a whole lot of time to spend, but it was nice, it was nice to still have that person. Like even still now if I have a question I will call her, or I will email her or that kind of thing. But in the moment, or in the job experience-wise, when you're a new person It would have been nice for me to spend maybe more time. Um. . . but there just wasn't time. It just seemed to be that she was busy or we were busy, or, and even like some of the mentoring days, we had two I think, a year, mentoring days, and I mean like one I had missed because I got half way there and had to get called back to school because the supply teacher shortage and, so I missed that one and I think part of the first one maybe. Like it was just very sporadic but I think that was no fault of anybody running the program. I mean I think it's a great program I think, I just didn't have the opportunity to take full advantage of it to its full extent just because of the busyness of the situation that we had.

Meridith: So, um, I agree I think that being able to choose your own mentor is really valuable because this is somebody that you're going to have, ah. . . a trusting relationship with. And you wanted to be able to be honest and upfront and not be afraid to, um, talk about any worries that you might have. So, um, when I think about fundamental experiences, I think the mentoring days were valuable. Um, I wish we had time to just, um, maybe to meet with our mentors just to pick their

brains about things or, um, just have them talk and have us listen. I think, um, the job shadowing with another, um, important part. And, um, but when I think about the mentoring opportunities that I had as a Lead Teacher, and as an aspiring leader it was different when I became a vice principal because when I became a vice principal, my principal became my mentor. And so I didn't feel there was as much of a need too, um, access my mentor because I had one right there in the building. So that was to me the most important mentoring. . . my relationship with my principal.

Researcher: Does anyone have any follow-up to add to question number one?

Karen: I agree with Meredith, like you know, it's great to pick somebody that you know. That's in your area of expertise, and that's something that I needed to learn more about, but when you are a vice principal working closely with a principle in your own building, and you're not allowed to ask that person to be your mentor, your asked to choose somebody else, so you're living in this house kind of thing with the person you can't have as a mentor but that is the one you kind of end up relying on the most just because you are living together all day long. Whereas the time we spent together with valuable on the set days that we got to have, but they're probably would have been 10 other days I would have loved to have you by my side living and breathing everything I was going through because that's when the questions come up or what do I do when, you know, am I handling this situation right?

Researcher: That was the way the program was set up for you folk? You weren't allowed, in your case, the principal you were working within the building, they could not be your mentor?

Karen: No

Meridith: I do think there is a benefit to it as well right because you want to be able to have somebody who is objective and impartial and not situated in the context whatever you are working in. I think it's valuable to have somebody that's in it. I think for me I didn't feel that I had to access my mentor as often as I could access Nelda.

Stephanie: I think it's important to have that outside the building Mentor as well because sometimes decisions are made within the building that may, or may not align with what you're thinking at the time then too. And then to have somebody that you can in confidence have a conversation with about, you know decisions that were made and whether, you know that There were any other options or possibilities or, um, if that was maybe how somebody else would handle that situation.

Karen: I guess it would depend on the relationship you have with your existing principal?

Stephanie: Right.

Isabelle. Yes. For me I didn't, like Nelda was new because I was there before her so, I didn't know her, or anything about how she works, like I said I really didn't have a whole lot of experience how anybody, how anybody principaled except for. Except now in hindsight having worked with Nelda, like now I know I would love to have her as a mentor. Looking back if I had started differently, Marian was great but as you say, she was right in the building which was really valuable, but at the time you really don't know if you don't know the person so the relationship piece is huge.

Researcher: Okay. Anything else on question 1?

Q2

Meridith: I remember AP jeopardy (laughter heard amongst the group) with Dennis.

Isabelle: I must have missed that day.

Meredith: Do you remember that?

Isabelle: No

Meredith: I was teamed up with Penelope McLaren and she was awesome.

Karen: I don't think I was there for that.

Meredith: We were the A-Team and she had it all so. I remember Willow. I remember Willow with above the line. Do you remember her? Do you remember that one with Willow Sweeney?

Karen: I didn't get to it.

Donna: I didn't get to it. I was done.

Meredith: And the second cup man. Do you remember in Calabogie?

Karen: Yes. Yes, he was a standout too.

Meredith: those are the ones, um, when I think back that stand out.

Researcher: Ok, so AP's, Willow Sweeney, and the Second Cup guy?

Stephanie: I think for me, um, rather than a one-off event it was more than just having, um, experiences with Lorna that were day in, day out, so when something was happening that was complex or out of the ordinary or just kind of, you know, not straightforward, she would call and we would talk it through and, um, she kind of run it. You know, well we'd have a discussion about it. That to me was great because, um, it was on-the-fly real-time problem solving and, um, That's what the job is everyday and so I took that away as the most valuable, or what would stand out to me as the most important part of the whole program. Yeah, were those opportunities. . . .

Karen: Add for me to, the mentor that you asked to be your Mentor, you know you could always count on them for like when you're in the daily, um, events that were happening in your own building, I was relying on Marian because we were they're together. But I knew, that I could phone and call you, or email you. You're there, but you're having to make decisions right away or like figure things out right away. So if it was something that could wait I know that you would be there to back me up, or even afterwards this is what we did, did we handle this properly kind of thing. it's having the people that you know you've relied on are being there to support you 100%.

Donna: We had a day at Calabogie but I can't even remember the presenter but it was on difficult and awkward conversations. And we got a book, and uh, I thought that day was valuable. I pull the

book still like if I know I have to go and have that conversation with somebody. Okay right, start with something positive. Yeah, so I thought that day was valuable. But I think that is valuable for anybody, whether you're in a mentor program, or. . . it's just good to review it as well.

Meredith: Were you guys in a mentorship program? How long were you in it before you were placed in admin roles?

Isabelle: Yes, we were.

Group: Yeah

Isabelle: We started the mentorship program when we first got our VP job.

Meridith: It wasn't when you were like Leadership Assessment Program (LAP)? Because for me it was as soon as I became LAP qualified.

Stephanie: Yeah, me too.

Isabelle: We got LAP qualified and then we had jobs right away

Karen: We had like LAP right in the spring and then we were placed right afterwards.

Donna: I got my job February 1st, right at the start of second semester at Holy Cross.

Isabelle: Yeah

Meredith: And what happened?

Donna: I joined a mentor program that had already been established right? So that's, really, I really wanted Emily as my mentor but there were others I couldn't have had because they were already with other people. But she kind of agreed to take me on even though she was leading the mentorship program. So I think there were lots of days that she would be doing lots of things and I would be waiting around. Yeah

Isabelle: And it was a two-year process.

Donna: It was a two-year process.

Researcher: Okay. Anybody else on question 2? Okay.

Q3

Donna: Even though there weren't very many of them I really liked everybody being brought together at a central location. All of the people that were new to those position because it was a good chance to hear, that everyone was in similar situations, or were worried about the same things. Like even though I didn't, (stuttering) it just would have been nice to have more of those, so I did value those days.

Meridith: I think, um, for people who are not yet in a VP role, I think it's helpful for them to have time with newly appointed VP's just to help with that transition because I can remember more along the lines of having conversations or listening to somebody talk about their new role or their new role, and the changes that were happening, and um, so that was valuable I think.

Researcher: Ok

Karen: I can't remember, but with the process. . . but when were brought together, were there opportunities for us? The managerial side, was there tutorials almost of how to do things? Like here's budget, or here's org chart. Like here's all these things that we need to know, but you don't have time in a day to sit down.

Meridith: Yeah. Budget would have been, would have been a good one.

Karen: Like to have the non-negotiable things that we just need to know to do.

Meridith: Ap's! Like finding the AP's. I still remember the AP Jeopardy but it was helpful because it got you into them.

Stephanie: I think Debra Koenig came in and talked to us.

Isabelle: What one was that? Was that at the mentoring thing or was that at an administrative thing? Senior admin or something?

Meridith: Yeah, I remember Debra coming in too.

Isabelle: Maybe it was a mentoring thing. It seems like it's been so long ago I'm really having a hard time.

Karen: It was really brief.

Meridith: And it was sort of general. It wasn't school budget.

Stephanie: Well again that's what I like, that's what I really like about Lorna when it was time to do the org chart. She'd say come and we will do the org chart. When it was time at the end of the month, she'd say come to look at the budget, and allocate some funds, and come and we will do some things together. You know, um, that's not going to happen at a one-off.

Donna: No, you're right.

Isabelle: But it also doesn't happen at. . . sorry to interrupt, it also doesn't happen at every school so in that sense it might be nice to move around. If your Mentor person, is the person saying come and help me with this, or come and I will show you.

Karen: Hmmmm. . . .

Meredith: So maybe it is creating some guidelines or tips for mentors to help the mentees. Like that suggestion. . .

Karen: Like the things you need to know how to do.

Stephanie: Ya.

Meredith: That's a great suggestion.

Stephanie: And I think if we organize that like, I feel that if there was a plan, like we had to do a learning plan and we identified the things that we really wanted to learn more about. So Lorna kind of went off with that. Do any time one of those things came up, I got the phone call and we met after school or something. So

Isabelle: Did you have a plan?

Donna: I do remember doing a learning plan now that you. . . ya, ya.

Meredith: I don't know how well mine was really followed I don't feel it was pulled out a lot and referred to.

Karen: I think that were just so new that we don't really know what we need to put on the plan.

Laughter

Donna: Ya, that's right. That's right.

Isabelle: And you don't know what you don't know. It's very overwhelming even with mentor program and with guidance and support and you know that you can call on all your colleagues.

You're not prepared until you get. . . T here that's what I will say. Nothing really prepares you until you actually start.

All: Laughter

Donna: And I think, I know I did rely on the principal and because I'm in a school where there's three administrators, there's three of us, the other two administrators, I was going to them a lot because they had already been there. So, um, in the day-to-day happenings of the school where I, what do I do now? What's an org chart?

Isabelle: It's really interesting being in, going from Williamsburg to Colonel By right just because Williamsburg was busy enough school, like don't get me wrong. Even when Nelda and I had time, there's times when Nelda and I would have time to consult on things and say what should I do about this? Or how would you handle yes? And we would have those conversations pretty easily and readily and then I got to Colonel By and there was just not time for that. I find that Andy is nowhere and Paulette is nowhere, they are out in the building. . . .

Karen: Doing something. . .

Isabelle: Doing things. I found I just had to put myself in the mindset that here's no time to call your Mentor, there's no time to find your people, so just deal with it. . . just deal with it. Deal with the fallout later if you did something wrong but it has to be dealt with.

Karen: You have to make a decision.

Isabelle: Uh huh. So that was a big change for sure.

Researcher: Okay, anything else then on number 3? Okay final question then,

Q4

Pause from participants.

Donna: I guess the only thing there is. . . I think it really is important to have some kind of mentorship program. Like, because it is, um, it's different from any other job. I don't know what it should look like. . . but I really think that has to be something. And I think because we are in a small board we are very lucky that even though you have a mentor there is always other people you can call that have done lots.

Karen: And it's nice that you got, I think Stephanie you mentioned that you're picking somebody that you have a relationship so that you can trust because there are lots of times that you are overwhelmed and you wonder, oh my gosh, what have I done. Like, am I handling things right or, it becomes, it's just because the job, um, is so big It can get overwhelming at times and then you can get down on yourself. So to able to talk to that person, I know that there were times that I hadn't had a direct question or issue but just needed to touch base with them and they were always so good to reassure and to make sure that I was doing okay. I didn't necessarily have to come to you with an issue, but they just new to check in and make sure because they know what that role is like and there are going to be peaks and valleys. So it is really important because sometimes you don't want to come and be vulnerable in front of everybody. Yes, I'm good everything is great, but you've got that person you can go to.

Isabelle: Sometimes you just need to vent, and you know it's not going anywhere. You just need somebody that you can trust. . . Oh my God, listen to this.

All: Laughter

Isabelle: Get it out there. Even just to get somebody else's perspective on something. Yes I agree it's important, at least I have a connection with somebody. Especially when you don't have a consulting background or you don't maybe know as many people.

Meredith: Um, I think, when I think about leadership and, moving from VP to P, I think being a VP is it really important step, So I hope people will have the opportunity to have a VP role first before they go into a P. Only because, I mean if it works out, if there's people there that can, because I think, I can't imagine going straight into the principal role.

Karen: There's so much to it.

Meredith: Like I, you know, I just couldn't imagine. When I think, you know this is my second year in this role, and there is still stuff I find that Nelda, that I did know she did. And I'm like, you have to do that?

All: Laughter

Meredith: I don't know how she does it all. Like I don't, I really don't, so, I think it's a really important stepping stone so, and, I don't know, I think there would be a lot of burnout. I don't know how it would impact somebody just to be thrown into that kind of stress.

Karen: Like Isabelle said, you work with different personalities in a P/VP role. I was so lucky because Marian has been fabulous. Like she has. . . we are like co-principals in the building so it's not, you know this is your role and here are your jobs and this is what I'm going to do. It's shared, it's whoever is available to do it. So you know, org chart, or report card setup, it's something we will do together and she'll mentor me and show me. But there are some things that she's like, if you're interested in this, you take it and run with it. And even as far as the PD, you have a huge staff. That's 40. . . 40 teaching staff, and organized PD to get, and then to organize it all. There is so many different components to it, to the role that it is nice to put your head together with somebody, plan it out and. . . .

Donna: See I've always felt that too. That I feel very fortunate to be part of a team so, and because we're a little bit different from Colonel By, my main responsibility is elementary and I do most things elementary but I know there is always somebody that has my back right? So. . . , or someone to run to if I have a question and then I can run with it. Or if something happens and a parent is unhappy, there is always somebody else there as support.

Stephanie: Um, yeah, I'm thinking of two things as you guys were talking. The first was, um, how I think the mentor, or the mentoring is for first-year principals, because of our board size. Principals are often, Elementary principals are often in schools alone. Like we have very few schools where there are, well, where the VP is right? So where there's a VP/P relationship so I fear If I get placed in an elementary principal role that all of a sudden I'm going to be alone on this little Island with nobody to talk to. Because whenever anything comes up I've got two other people in the building that were sharing and discussing and hashing out right? So I think that's when I'm going to need that relationship and that person I can call and talk to and say, what just happened and problem-solve. So I hope that built into this because that's when I think I'm going to need it.

Isabelle: That's a very good point.

Stephanie: What was the other thing I was thinking of? It'll come back to me, keep talking.

Isabelle: Um, I don't have anything else other than what people have said.

Long pause between group members where nothing is shared.

Researcher: Already, that wraps up everything so I'll stop the recording. I appreciate that very much.

End of transcript

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 12, 2017

Terry Burwell

IRB Approval 2743.011217: Lessons Learned and Wisdom Earned: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Mentoring Experiences of Ontario's Vice-Principals

Dear Terry Burwell,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the Institutional Review Board member.

Appendix E: IRB Consent Document

CONSENT FORM

LESSONS LEARNED AND WISDOM EARNED: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED MENTORING EXPERIENCES OF ONTARIO'S VICE-PRINCIPALS

Terry Burwell
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the lived mentoring experiences of beginning administrators who have transitioned from a classroom teaching position to that of a school vice-principal. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a practicing vice-principal and a participant in the school board's mentoring program for beginning administrators. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Terry Burwell, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to code and identify recurring themes regarding the mentoring needs of beginning Vice-Principals and to describe, through observations, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interviews, their perspectives of the most critical areas in the mentoring program at the Ottawa Valley District School Board that need to be examined.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. After you have been briefed on the purpose, merits, and design of the study at the January 2017 Director's Meeting, those agreeing to participate will be given an informed consent form in order to volunteer for the study.
2. You will be given the option of volunteering for the focus group portion of the study only, the observation and one-on-one interview portion only, both portions of the study, or neither. These options are listed at the bottom of this letter.
3. From among the Vice-Principals who volunteer to participate in the focus group portion of the study, seven participants will be randomly selected so that each of the families of schools are represented.
4. The focus group interview, and one-on-one interviews, will be audio and video-taped and will be transcribed verbatim. All interviews are intended to last 20-30 minutes. Member checks will be conducted to verify the comments made by each participant. If errors are identified, corrections will be made until complete agreement with the transcript is reached.
5. Focus group and one-on-one interview sessions will be semi-structured (vice-principals' participation and response to discussion prompts) with relevant follow-up questions and discussion between investigator and participants.

6. One-on-one interviews will take place at the participant's work site and will be held in a conference room free from distraction and interruption. The interview is intended to last 20-30 minutes. Field note observations are planned as lasting 2.5 hours.
7. The focus group session will take place on the third floor at the school board's education center in a conference room free from distraction and interruption. The interview is intended to last 20-30 minutes. You will know the other members in the focus group, so confidentiality must be maintained so that identities are not disclosed.
8. Recordings of focus group discussion and one-on-one interviews will be transcribed without inclusion of identifying information. You may stop the interview at any time or ask that the recording be turned off if you would like to ask a question "off the record." The recording may be started again if you agree.
9. Qualitative data analysis of field note observations and open-coding of transcribed focus group and one-on-one recordings will be conducted to identify recurring themes and to make a rich thick description of the phenomena under investigation. No identifying information will be included in any transcripts.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life. The individual benefits to participating in this study are not guaranteed. Participants are not expected to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. Participants may experience the satisfaction of having contributed their voice and perspectives to current research in the mentoring field regarding beginning Vice-Principals. Your voice will be of interest and benefit to current practitioners and administrators at all levels of education who are examining their current induction practices, their succession planning practices, as well as looking at ways to enhance their mentoring programs.

Compensation:

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym before the study begins. Participants within the study will be known to each other. Pseudonyms will be applied to the transcribed face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. In the focus group interview, participants will see and

hear one another's statements. In order to maintain the strictest of confidentiality and privacy, it is essential that members of the focus group not disclose to anyone what has been shared.

All signed informed consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet separate from collected study data for a period of three years.

All data collected will be kept on my personal computer that is double password protected, located in a secure and locked location known and accessible only by me. Once pseudonyms are applied to the transcriptions, original recordings will be erased. The master list matching pseudonyms to participant names will be kept as a separate file on my personal computer that is double password protected, located in a secure and locked location known and accessible only by me. All research-related data will be stored for a minimum of three years after the end date of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

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

How to Withdraw from the Study:

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

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Terry Burwell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] (contact information redacted).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

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

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

- The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me only as part of my participation in the individual interview portion of this study.
- The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me only as part of my participation in the focus group interview portion of this study.
- The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record/photograph me for both the individual and focus group portion as part of my participation in this study.
- The researcher does not have my permission to include me in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix F: Participant Recruitment Email

Good afternoon everyone, as part of my Ed.D dissertation requirements, I am conducting a qualitative phenomenological study to identify common themes from practicing Vice-Principals participating in the Ottawa Valley District School Board's mentoring program for beginning Vice-Principals.

As part of my study, I will be taking observational field notes during two school visits, which will occur at the beginning of the study and at the conclusion of the study. I will not record my feelings or judgments towards the participant being observed. I will describe observed experiences at each participant's site and will reflect on these aspects. I will also record and document personal reflections, initial interpretations, insights, confusions, hunches, and breakthroughs.

I will also audio and video record two one-on-one interview sessions, which will also occur on the days that I am observing you in your work. In addition to the observation and one-on-one sessions, I will be audio and video recording a focus group session occurring at the study's conclusion. All interviews will be transcribed verbatim. I will confirm the accuracy of each one-on-one interview, as well as the focus group interview, through member checks. Any inaccuracies will be corrected until we reach agreement.

If you would like to participate, please complete the informed consent that is attached to this email and return the signed document to me on, or before, **January 25, 2017**. I would also like to speak to the group briefly after Senior Admin on January 25th to reiterate this request and to answer any questions you may have.

You may choose to select to participate in the focus group interview only, the school site observation and one-on-one interview only, both, or neither. Your choice to participate or not participate will have absolutely no bearing on your performance appraisal or career aspirations with the school board. No one's real name will be used in any publication or product extending from this research. Each participant will receive a copy of the final report.

If you choose to participate, the signed informed consent forms will kept in a locked filing cabinet separate from collected study data for a period of three years. The pseudonym, or study code, assigned to you will be kept as a separate file and stored separately from data documents. All data will be kept on my personal computer, which is double password protected, located in a secure and locked location known and accessible only by me, and whose records will be permanently destroyed after three years.

Feel free to email me if you have any questions. Have a great weekend everyone.

Appendix G: Individual Interview and Focus Group Questions

Individual Interview Questions

7. Can you please describe for me your perceptions of the Board's mentoring program and how it has impacted your practice as Vice-Principal?
8. Please describe to me the specific elements of the mentoring program, as well as any specific experiences, that have impacted your self-efficacy as a leader.
9. The *Ontario Leadership Framework* is built around five key outcomes: setting directions; building relationships and developing people; developing the organization to support desired practices; improving the instructional program, and; securing accountability. Please describe for me how your mentoring experience has impacted your confidence in using the *Framework* and your ability to manage change and lead the instructional program.
10. Based on your experience as a Vice-Principal so far, please identify for me experiences and issues you deem as being the most challenging to manage both professionally and personally.
11. Please describe for me the obstacles you have experienced in the mentoring program and what additional resources would you have desired during your mentoring experience.
12. Is there anything else you would like to mention that you have not already shared with me?

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Having participated in a mentoring program with your mentor, what experiences do you feel have been most fundamental in affecting your belief in your ability to perform the role of Vice-Principal?

2. Reflecting on these experiences, what circumstances, events, and people stand out?
3. If you had to go through the mentoring program again, what experiences or interactions would you want to replicate and change?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your mentoring experience that you feel you have not already shared and important to this study?