

# Career Paths in Educational Leadership: Examining Principals' Narratives

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*This qualitative study analyzes the career path narratives of active principals. Structural narrative analysis was supplemented with sociolinguistic theory and thematic narrative analysis to discern the similarities and differences, as well as the patterns in the language used by participating principals. Thematic analysis found four major themes in the narratives: (1) passion for teaching and education; (2) external motivation to become a principal; (3) importance of the experience as an assistant principal; and (4) recent changes in the principalship. While all of the participants acknowledged difficulties associated with the principalship, the findings revealed differences between male and female leaders' narratives in terms of structure, content, and style as well as certain similarities.*

*Cette étude qualitative analyse les récits de directeurs d'école intérimaires par rapport à leur cheminement professionnel. Nous avons eu recours à une analyse narrative structurale, complétée par la théorie sociolinguistique et une analyse narrative thématique, pour examiner les patrons, les similarités et les différences linguistiques chez les directeurs et les directrices qui ont participé. L'analyse thématique a identifié quatre thèmes majeurs dans les récits : (1) une passion pour l'enseignement et l'éducation; (2) une motivation externe à devenir directeur d'école; (3) l'importance de l'expérience de directeur adjoint; et (4) des changements récents dans le rôle de directeur. Tous les participants ont reconnu des difficultés liées au rôle de directeur d'école, mais la structure, le contenu et le style des récits des hommes étaient différents de ceux des femmes. Notons que tous les récits partageaient quand même certaines similarités.*

With increasing attention to principals as instructional leaders (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009) and principal shortages reported nationwide (Walker & Kwan, 2009), the career paths of acting current principals are worthy of examination. Recent studies on this topic focus on the gender gap in the secondary school principalship (McLay, 2008; Moorosi, 2010), the assistant principalship as the route to the principal position (Vladika, 2010), career progression of black and ethnic minority principals (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010), and how school leadership stability relates to career moves (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010).

This study aims to enrich the literature by examining the career path narratives of school leaders who have served as principals from several months to nine years. The purposes of this study are to (1) examine the career path narratives of sitting school leaders and to (2) compare and contrast leaders' stories of becoming a principal by gender. The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

- What are the major themes in the career paths of current principals?
- When divided by gender, what similarities and differences emerge in principals' career path narratives?

Interview data from principals in different stages of their careers (early, mid-career, and late career) were examined.

## **Literature Review**

There are four major topics framing the literature on principals' careers: principals' career trajectories, assistant principalship as a step to becoming a principal, principalship and gender issues, and connections between leadership, career, and gender. A brief overview of the literature on these topics follows.

### **Principals' Careers**

Howard (2006) notes the need to examine the career trajectories of school leaders and the factors impacting principals' career paths to address supply and demand concerns. Principals typically begin their careers in administration by serving as an assistant principal; making the position of assistant principal of strategic value in developing future principals (Vladika, 2010). Similarly, the principalship, especially at the secondary level, can serve as a springboard into the superintendency (Skrobarcek & Stark, 2002). Previous research indicates that men were more likely to have a linear trajectory career in educational administration than their women counterparts (Pavan & McKee, 1988). This trend is illustrated by a study of southern Georgian principals, which found that the average principal tends to be "a Caucasian male with an average age of 48 possessing an average of 11.67 years of teaching experience combined with 13.23 years of administrative experience" (Grubbs et al., 2002, p. 5).

Literature on principals' career paths is frequently tied to the impact of job satisfaction. In their quantitative study of principal career longevity for example, Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011) concluded that salary, autonomy, individual characteristics, and job satisfaction impact principal career mobility in the United States. Despite these findings, a sample of female principals, reported that job satisfaction had "a negative, even endangering, sense in the principal's career cycle. In contrast, job dissatisfaction was portrayed positively, in that it may lead to innovation, changes in the school and even to a principal's self-reflection upon her work" (Oplatka & Rivka, 2008, p. 142). Therefore, job dissatisfaction may serve as a motivating factor to lead school improvement depending on a principal's gender identity.

One of the central topics in analyzing the longevity of principals' careers is leader development. Although one formal way to develop a leadership pipeline is by having a succession plan, many districts lacking such a plan still use tapping to identify future principals. The majority of current principals are found to be men, who were tapped by the principals they worked for (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011). Although the tapped teachers were generally those with leadership potential, there was a preference for male candidates. Even for those districts that have a strategic succession plan, assistant principals' professional development and career planning are disconnected, warranting further attention to aspiring leaders' career planning (Thompson, 2010). Furthermore, because principal preparation programs do not prepare leaders to deal effectively with job challenges, mentoring must become an integral part of

principal career development (Bakioglu, Hacifazlioglu, & Ozcan 2010; Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengtson, 2012; Searby, 2010).

### **Assistant Principals as a Training Ground for the Principalship**

Myung et al. (2011) noted the thinning of the leadership pipeline and by studying the reasons for choosing the principalship amongst Florida administrators, they quantitatively demonstrated that current principals were tapped as teachers by their own principals for leadership positions. They also asserted that principals identify and encourage future generation of leaders within their schools, while noting that targeted training and leader succession plans are also needed to ensure leadership continuity. Similar conclusions are drawn by Livingston (1998), who reports that most new rural principals (73%) were mentored as teachers by their own administrators. More importantly, the participants in this study expressed an interest in staying in educational administration until the end of their careers. These studies confirm that the assistant principalship provides a training ground for the principalship.

The traditional career path to educational administration positions has included classroom teaching, assistant principalship, principalship, and district level leadership (Vann, 1992). The position of the assistant principal in particular, has been positioned as a springboard to the principalship (Marshall et al., 1992). Therefore, it is important to examine the experiences of assistant principals and their willingness to assume the principalship in the future; especially given that research suggests that there is a correlation between the level of job satisfaction of assistant principals and their willingness to pursue the principalship (Cooley & Shen 2000; Hausman et al., 2002; Sutter, 1996).

Having examined the perceptions of new and experienced assistant principals about their jobs, Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) report concerns about workload, curriculum and instruction, and task management from both participating groups. These findings suggest the need to further examine principals' responsibilities and to redesign assistant principal preparation and professional development to enhance their career development.

### **Gender and the Principalship**

The literature on gender concerns and the principalship asserts that it is more difficult for female leaders to obtain and sustain the principalship than it is for their male counterparts. These differences are especially noticeable at the high school level where male principals are more common. Moorosi (2010) asserts that female leaders experience more challenges along their career paths than male leaders do, mainly due to personal, organizational, and social factors. International research has underscored the challenges that female principals and assistant principals face in Africa (Moorosi, 2010), Israel (Arar & Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2011; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009), and Greece (Kaparou & Bush, 2007).

In the 1990s, in the U.S., school leaders were predominantly white males, but with a growing number of female administrators (Graham, 1997; Hanson, 1996). Female leaders frequently start their principalship career in the elementary school, while male leaders are more likely to begin leading at the secondary or high school levels (Graham, 1997). Noting that American principals were predominantly male, Holloway (2000) called for gender equity in the principalship. However, female school leadership in India was found to positively influence students' career aspiration and academic achievement (Beaman et al., 2012).

In the United Kingdom, Jones (2007) reports that while the number of female teachers is much higher than male teachers, women are still proportionally underrepresented at the principalship level. Jones concludes that male teachers are more likely to pursue the principalship and to “invest in positions which will bring eventual gain” (p. 179). Also focusing on the U.K. context, Smith (2011) examines the career decisions of female secondary school teachers and principals, reporting that female teachers had negative perceptions about the principalship and calls for promoting positive views about administrative careers. Similarly, by examining 25 Israeli female assistant principals that were eligible candidates for but did not aspire to the principalship, Oplatka and Tamir (2009) conclude that the dichotomy of male-female leadership should be reexamined. Based on their study of female principals in South Africa, Lumby and Azaola (2011) found that women in the study used gender as a causal explanation for their success or failure in leading schools, concluding, “gender in the workplace is a socially constructed phenomenon” (p. 73). In summary, although some studies suggest that female educators have negative perceptions about school leadership and have low leadership aspirations, there is a general consensus that female leaders face more barriers on their career paths.

### **Leadership, Career, and Gender**

Over the last several decades, there has been an increase in the number of women in the workforce (Stewart, Bing, Gruys, & Helford, 2007). However, female applicants need to ‘play tougher’ to get an executive job, which indicates a gender bias (Powell, 2010). As a result, studies on gender and leadership have focused predominantly on women as an underrepresented leadership group. Examining the literature on career development of professional women, Parlea-Buzatu (2011) concludes, “there is still a great deal that is unknown [about the female career constraints] and that requires further empirical inquiry” (p. 335). Recent studies from different fields can confirm the assertion as gender-related career constraints were reported in examinations of higher education faculty (Ismail & Rasdi, 2008; Özkanli & White, 2008), higher education administration (Dindoffer, Reid, & Freed 2011; Tessens, White, & Web 2011), nursing (Tracey & Nicholl, 2007), healthcare administration (Maryland, 2008), and executive sport organizations (Pfister & Radtke, 2009).

In their study of the \$100K, predominantly American professionals, Burke and Attridge (2011) found few gender differences among the respondents with regard to the early life experiences, core personality traits, work styles, leadership styles, career work assignments, career path detours, and work-related failures. Nevertheless, twice as many female participants stated they experienced prejudice and discrimination. Burke and Attridge (2011) conclude that although male and female leaders had similar career paths, females experience difficulties caused by sexism and gender-based discrimination more frequently. In addition to these topics, studies on gender differences in career paths have also examined job satisfaction (Mason, 1995), promotion concerns (Wilson, Powney, Hall, & Davidson, 2006), leadership styles (Hutchison, Valentino, & Kirkner 1998; Lipman-Blumen, 1992), faculty advancement (Morrisey & Schmidt 2008), turnover (Weisberg & Kirschenbaum, 1993), and self-efficacy stemming from career decision-making (Paulsen & Betz, 2004).

## **Career Stage Theory**

Although no single theory can completely and comprehensively describe an individual's move through the principalship, the literature typically reports that the first years in the position are an entry period, followed by years of being confident and comfortable in the position, and ending with lowered enthusiasm and effectiveness, and exit from the principalship (Hart, 1993; Weindling, 2000). Hart (1993) synthesizes research on organizational socialization of principals, suggesting three major stages of principals' careers: encounter, adjustment, and stabilization. Day and Bakioglu (1996) add a negatively coloured stage by proposing a four-step principal career progression consisting of initiation, development, autonomy, and disenchantment.

In an analysis of beginning principals' career development, Hall and Parkay (1992) offer a career development model for beginning principals that includes five stages: survival, control, stability, educational leadership, and professional actualization. At the last stage of this model, the principal creates a culture of respect and growth, and "manifests respect for the incipient vision the faculty has for the school" (p. 353). Hall and Parkay emphasize that principals' careers begin at different developmental stages and develop at different rates, which means that a principal may be in more than one stage at the same time. This model of beginning principals' career development covers only one part of the overall principalship career stages analyzed by other researchers.

While analyzing questionnaire data from British head teachers, Day and Bakioglu (1996) used phases to characterize principal development because "phases are recurrent in that individuals can pass through the various phases in and between each of many different domains" (p. 207). Four developmental phases are suggested in describing principals' careers from taking the position to retirement:

1. Initiation (characterized by idealism, uncertainty, and adjustment),
2. Development (described in terms of consolidation and extension),
3. Autonomy (continued self-confidence), and
4. Disenchantment (decline in enthusiasm and effectiveness).

Day and Bakioglu (1996) conclude that these divisions are similar to teacher career stages and assert that support and development may improve principal effectiveness and prevent early decline.

Based on the data from a 10-year longitudinal study of principalship in the U.K. and supported by socialization theory, Weindling (2000) suggests seven stages of transition through principalship (see Table 1). Weindling notes that this model reflects an idealized scenario, and that differences would occur based on the context and location of the system. Further examining this model, Earley and Weindling (2007) assert that career stage considerations should be accounted to ensure principal longevity. The model of principal development suggested by Reeves, Moos, and Forrest (1998) is more detailed and included eight stages (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Principal Career Stages: Comparing Different Developmental Frameworks*

Hart (1993)	Weindling (2000)	Reeves, Moos, and Forrest (1998)
1. Encounter;	Stage 0: Preparation prior to headship;	1. Pre-entry;
2. Adjustment;	Stage 1: Entry and encounter (first months);	2. Entry (0 – 6 months);
3. Stabilization.	Stage 2: Taking hold (3-12 months);	3. Digging the Foundations (6 months – 1 year);
	Stage 3: Reshaping (second year);	4. Taking Action (9 months – 2 years);
	Stage 4: Refinement (third-fourth years);	5. Getting above Floor Level (18 months – 3 years);
	Stage 5: Consolidation (fifth-seventh years); and,	6. The Crunch (2 years – 5 years);
	Stage 6: Plateau (year 8 and afterwards).	7. Reaching the Summit (4 years – 10 years);
		8. Time for a Change (4 years – 10+ years).

Although differing in name and the number of stages, these principal development frameworks all define the first years as entry period, followed by the years of being confident and comfortable in the position, and ending with lowered enthusiasm and effectiveness, and exit from the principalship. The knowledge and understanding of principal career stages are important for selecting an appropriate theoretical perspective on educational leadership styles that vary across the career stages (Oplatka, 2004).

Recent studies examine multiple aspects of principal preparation, development, job satisfaction, and burnout related to principal career stages (Baker, Punswick, & Belt, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Vladika, 2010). The present study takes a different approach by combining thematic and structural narrative analyses of principal career paths to compare and contrast male and female principals’ narratives.

### **Methodology**

Broadly framed within a social constructivism paradigm, this study follows narrative research approach to qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). This narrative analysis combines elements of life history and oral history, focusing on principals’ descriptions of their career paths (Riessman, 2008). The data for this narrative analysis came from individual interviews because most “narrative projects in the human sciences today are based on interviews of some kind” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23).

This study is informed by the research on gender linguistics theory and on principals’ careers. Research connecting language and gender has been expanding over the last decades. In the multicultural world, the gender-language connection spans across racial groups and communities of practice (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (1999) explain, “Our understanding of what it means to be male or female – in a particular group, in the community, in society, and in the world – underlies our interpretation of gender

differentiation in language use” (p. 188). Furthermore, Tannen (1995) describes the differences between male and female communication patterns, stating that males use a direct and forceful style, while females are more indirect and intimate in their communication. Additionally, male speech is described as fact-oriented (Savicki, Lingenfelter, & Kelley, 1996), while female speech is more affective and polite (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

With the advent of Internet communications, researchers are finding gender differences in adolescents’ language use in online blog posts (Huffacker & Calvert, 2005); however, Savicki Lingenfelter, and Kelley (1996) report mixed results about the language choice of male and female members of Internet discussion groups. Recent educational studies on gender and language emphasize the importance of paying attention to sociolinguistic issues and urge examining unquestioned assumptions about language and gender ideologies relating to identity in teacher preparation programs (Velez-Rendon, 2010); to research language stereotyping in school textbooks (Yang, 2011); and to study the role of gender in adult literacy education (Hayes & Hopkins, 1996).

## **Method**

The comparative analysis of narratives is based on eleven stories of leaders, six male and five female, that were provided in response to the question, “Tell me about your educational career path that has led you to your current position.” This analysis was guided by Riessman’s (2008) interpretation of structural analysis that explained the roots of Labov’s (1972) method as a “systematic study in social linguistics” (p. 81). The Labovian approach to narrative analysis focuses on the structure of the spoken narrative accounts, within a framework of six elements to analyze narratives: abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation, and coda (see Table 2).

Table 2

### *Defining the Elements of Structural Analysis Framework*

Element	Questions	Labov’s (1972) Definition
Abstract	What is the story about?	Typically located in the beginning, abstract consists of “one or two clauses summarizing the whole story” (p. 363).
Orientation	Who, what, where, when?	Free orientation clauses are used throughout the narrative “to identify in some way the time, place, persons, and their activity or the situation,” thus providing background of the story (p. 364).
Complicating Action	And then what happened?	Major turns of the plot, complicating actions are narrative clauses denoting the main events in the story.
Resolution	What happened at the end?	Resolution is the final turn of the plot, the last event that occurred in the narrative.
Evaluation	So what?	Evaluation is “the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its <i>raison d’être</i> : why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at” (p. 366).
Coda	What is the final point of the story?	The signal from the narrator that the story is completed.

Data analysis is also informed by the Sandberg and Tollefsen's (2010) study that concluded that men and women position themselves differently when talking about fear. Sandberg and Tollefsen (2010, p. 3) use Labov's method, but note that this approach "is limited and needs to be combined with theory" (p. 3) to interpret the story beyond its structure. Therefore, our analysis couples Labov's structural analysis with sociolinguistics theory (Holmes, 1993; 1998). Holmes (1998) suggested six universals of language and gender that were later tested.

1. Women and men develop different patterns of language use (p. 462).
2. Women tend to focus on the affective functions of an interaction more often than men do (p. 463).
3. Women tend to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more often than men do (p. 468).
4. Women tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase solidarity, while (especially in formal contexts) men tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase their power and status (p. 472).
5. Women use more standard forms than men from the same social group in the same social context (p. 473).
6. Women are stylistically more flexible than men (p. 475).

Following the tradition of structural analysis, our analysis follows a three-step process. First, the transcripts were carefully read and career path stories were constructed and analyzed using Labov's method to identify their structural components (see Appendices A-K). These narratives were then examined to see if they manifested the universals of gender and language outlined by Holmes (1993; 1998). Finally, thematic narrative analysis was used to identify major recurring thematic patterns in these stories. Thematic analysis was added to extract key ideas in the career path stories based on its frequent use in analyzing narrative texts constructed from the interview data (Riessman, 2008).

### **Data Sources**

This study used interview data from leaders in four school districts in a southeastern state of the United States who were acting principals at the time of data collection, and were purposefully selected from a larger sample (Patton, 2002). Participant selection (see Table 3) aimed at choosing both male and female principals in their early careers of one to two years of experience, mid-careers of three to five years of experience, and late careers of six or more years of experience. This grouping was developed based on the synthesis of different principal career stage theories (Oplatka, 2004; Reeves, Moos, & Forest, 1998; Weindling, 2000).

### **Findings**

All participants provided complete stories of their educational career paths (see Appendices A-K). In this sample, female stories were typically longer, with more details and evaluative statements. Most participants started their stories by reflecting on the question they were asked (Tell me about your career path), which served as an abstract to their narratives. Similarly, in

Table 3

*Participants' Information*

System	Gender	Principal of the School	Years as a principal	Years in administration	Years in education	Highest degree
1	M	Middle	<1	4	21	Ph.D.
1	F	Elementary	<1	6	13	Ed.S.
1	F	Middle	2	4	21	Ed.S.
2	M	Middle	<1	2	19	Ed.S.
3	M	Middle	5	10	28	Ed.S.
2	F	Elementary	5	10	21	Ed.S.
2	M	High	3	5	21	Ed.S.
4	M	High	3	6	13	Ed.S.
3	M	Elementary	9	20	29	Ed.D.
3	F	Elementary	8	14	27	Ed.S.
4	F	Elementary	7	7	36	Ed.D.

the coda, or the concluding part, of the stories, they stated the position that they held at the time of the interview. All male and female participants were teachers and assistant principals prior to assuming the principalship, with all male principals serving as athletic coaches prior to becoming an administrator. An analysis of the similarities and differences in male and female narratives follows.

### Differences

The male leaders' narratives were more likely to contain exact numbers denoting the years, time in a position (e.g., "Back in 1981, I graduated from college;" "I started in education in 1976"). Although female leaders' narratives also included facts and numbers (e.g., "this is actually my 36<sup>th</sup> year in education"), their stories included more descriptive details in addition to the factual numerical information. Female participants were more likely to provide approximate numerical estimates than male participants (e.g., "I taught for about four years;" "I have been with this school system for about 20 years").

Female narratives also included more personal information about families (e.g., "my husband was in the law school;" "then my family moved"), more evaluative statements (e.g., "What a great way to spend my summer;" "I have loved it [education] ever since"), and started earlier, in college or high school, while male leaders' stories typically started when they began teaching. Female participants tied their career moves and choices to their family decisions and used more emotional language (e.g., desperate, great, love, fabulous, never ever). Male leaders' narratives were more self-centered (e.g., "I was a good coach"), while female leaders talked about their colleagues as an inseparable part of their experiences (e.g., "it was just a fabulous and effective leadership team"). Although that was not a part of the questions, male participants elaborated more on their job responsibilities (e.g., "My primary responsibilities [...] were facility management, discipline, buses, teacher evaluation, and overall management").

There were notable differences between male and female leaders' narratives in terms of structure, content, and style of the stories they told. There were several similarities among all participant narratives. Although to different degrees, the five universals of gender and language

(Holmes, 1993; 1998) manifested in the leaders' narratives (see Table 4). However, career path narratives from male and female participants shared similar characteristics both in content (i.e., serving as an assistant principal prior to assuming the principalship; being encouraged to pursue the principalship) and in structure (i.e., starting with describing the educational background and ending with restating their current position of a principal).

Table 4

*The Universals of Gender and Language in Career Path Narratives*

Universals	Universals' Manifestation in Career Paths Narratives
1 Women and men develop different patterns of language use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Male principals used numbers more frequently than female;</li> <li>- Male principals were providing complete sentences more often than female;</li> <li>- Female principals were more likely to include a story-within-a-story.</li> </ul>
2 Women tend to focus on the affective functions of an interaction more often than men do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women were more emotional in the language they used and in what they selected to share than men in this sample;</li> <li>- Female principals were using evaluative statements more often;</li> <li>- Female principals were more likely to use affective words like 'love,' 'fabulous,' 'great,' 'wonderful.' However, some male principals used such language as well.</li> </ul>
3 Women tend to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more often than men do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Female participants talked about bonds they have developed with other leaders;</li> <li>- Since it was not an interaction between leaders but individual interviews, it was hard to pinpoint specific linguistic devices used.</li> </ul>
4 Women tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase solidarity, while men tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase their power and status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Female principals talked about being a part of the team with other principals;</li> <li>- Four female leaders (out of five) positioned their move to administration as externally-initiated;</li> <li>- Male leaders provided lists of their job responsibilities as a way to emphasize their status and power;</li> <li>- Career path of male leaders was more self-directed than that of female leaders;</li> <li>- However, one male leader (out of six) also referred to other-initiated career moves, shifting the power from himself to "other".</li> </ul>
5 Women use more standard forms than men from the same social group in the same social context	<p>This aspect was not really applicable as the participants were not studied in their social context; the interviews were set in the offices, out of their day-to-day social context of a school or a central office.</p>
6 Women are stylistically more flexible than men	<p>This was confirmed in the sample as men tended to speak in complete sentences, while women had many unfinished thoughts that they came back to later in the interview. Also, women's stories were less formal.</p>

## **Similarities**

There were no discernable differences in the length of the narratives; male and female participants both had short and long career path stories. The same was true for the amount of personal information revealed that differed among participants regardless of the gender. No participant admitted wanting to be an administrator (e.g., “I always said I would never be a principal;” “I hadn’t really thought about it [the principalship]”), although two male principals acknowledged that they planned to seek this opportunity later in their careers. Similarly, male and female leaders recognized the changes in the position and difficulties associated with the principalship (e.g., “it’s a lot of work;” “the overwhelming responsibility came with the job”).

## **Major themes**

Thematic analysis of these narratives revealed four major themes relevant to becoming a principal:

1. Passion for teaching and education.
2. External motivation to become a principal.
3. Importance of the experience of an assistant principal.
4. Recent changes that have made the principalship more challenging.

A brief description of these themes follows.

Although participants had different paths leading them to the principalship, they all shared a passion for education and love for teaching. Several participants expressed these qualities by sharing their desire to become a teacher (e.g., “I wanted to be a teacher for children with special needs; I had struggled as a student myself, so I could really relate to them;” “when I was young all I wanted to be was a teacher”). Other participants did not anticipate teaching, but had an opportunity to try it, liked the profession, and remained in education (e.g., “I did not have a clue what I was doing but ended up loving it and stayed there teaching for three years;” “I wanted to be an architect, but that just doesn’t happen in a small town. So I went into education and have loved it ever since”). All principals expressed their love of teaching as a contributing factor to their lengthy careers in education, which directly or indirectly impacted their pursuit of administrative positions.

None of the participating principals talked about assuming this position as their lifelong dream. Although several principals shared that they wanted to teach (e.g., “I came out of high school and that’s what I pretty much wanted to do—to teach and coach”), they did not aspire to the principalship, or as one first-year middle school principal stated, “it’s not been a lifelong dream to be a school principal”. As teachers, the participants believed that principals had an entirely different job from teachers (e.g., “I never saw myself as one of them [administrators]”; “I really didn’t desire to leave the classroom because I love the classroom”).

This career choice was typically positioned as externally motivated, not personally pursued (e.g., “I got a call [about the position] asking me if I would be interested;” “the principal told me that I should consider doing this;” “the principal encouraged me to work on the leadership certificate”). In other words, although the principals themselves made the final decision, they

had someone (i.e., a principal, mentor, or friend) who encouraged them to pursue leadership careers. Most participants stated that they did not think about this career turn themselves (e.g., “I hadn’t really thought about it;” “I never thought about it. I always said I’d never be a principal”). Exceptions to this theme included financial considerations (e.g., “I wanted to make a little bit more money, and I decided to get an advanced degree [in administration]”) and actually seeking administrative opportunities (e.g., “From the onset I knew that I would like to spend the later years of my career in administration”).

Despite assertions that they did not actively look for the principalship opportunities, participants acknowledged that they had the necessary credentials and had served in various leadership positions prior to assuming the principalship. A first-year, male, middle school principal shared, “I was pretty good at managing people, managing coaches, and running a program.” Similarly, a fifth-year female elementary school principal believed that she was prepared for the position by serving for three years as an assistant principal: “I had a good learning base and a lot of opportunities to learn what the true expectations for the principalship are”. Participants specifically noted the value of being an assistant principal to prepare for the principalship (e.g., “In order to be a principal you need to go through that experience and you need to have a lot of skill sets that assistant principals refine and it prepares you for the principalship;” “I’ve been well prepared by the experiences I’ve had as the department chair and as an assistant principal”).

While reflecting on their career path descriptions, principals noted the changes that have occurred to the principalship, making it more challenging to maintain. Principals were quick to notice the changes to responsibilities of the position (e.g., “Over the course of time the principalship has truly changed from the basic expectations and has evolved into instructional leadership”); the decreased desirability of the principalship to potential applicants (e.g., “It’s probably not a job that many people should dream and fantasize about because it’s a hell of a lot of work and it’s crazy at times”), and the lack of formal preparation to ensure principal effectiveness (e.g., “There is no training. You learn as you go. There is no degree that prepares you to be a principal”). In summary, the “overwhelming responsibility” of the position concerned the principals, as they did not have enough time to devote to instructional leadership (e.g., “The most difficult part of it is that I don’t have the time to be instructional leader of the school which is really what I want to be”).

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study support previous research suggesting that the assistant principalship is the best preparation ground of future principals (Cooley & Shen, 2000; Hausman et al. 2002; Sutter, 1996). In particular, this study emphasizes the strategic value of assistant principalship in developing future principals (Vladika, 2010). All the participants in our study served as assistant principals prior to being appointed as principals and asserted that this experience was important in preparing them to face the realities of their leadership position. Therefore, we agree with Thompson (2010) that more research is needed to examine assistant principals’ professional development and career planning.

Tied to the assistant principalship experience is the motivation behind the current principals’ choice to pursue an administrative career. Previous studies suggest that many acting principals were tapped by their principals and encouraged to enter educational administration (Livingston, 1998; Myung et al., 2011). In this study, principals did not talk about tapping, but

acknowledged that their career moves were highly influenced by their principals and mentors, who provided them with leadership opportunities, and encouraged them to obtain the necessary leadership certificates and to apply for assistant principal and principal positions. We therefore agree with other researchers that it is important to make mentoring an integral part of principal career development (Bakioglu et al., 2010; Parylo et al., 2012; Searby, 2010).

Interestingly, this study suggests a phenomenon that has not been directly discussed previously in the literature. The anticipation of becoming a principal seemed to be present only when the participants were established in a teaching career, and once someone mentioned, suggested, or encouraged them to become a school leader. The findings suggest that the role of principal is only seen as something that might happen once an individual has several years of teaching experience and then the thought of becoming a principal is largely generated by external influences. As mentioned above, this implies the importance of mentoring, but does not suggest that there is a real embedded anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 1987; Kramer, 2010) that occurs solely within the individual. While this may be a result of the credentialing process, a principal requires teaching experience or at least an initial degree provided by teacher education institutions, it does raise the question about the nature of anticipatory socialization in becoming a principal.

Furthermore, while talking about their career paths, principals reflected on the recent changes that have made the principalship more challenging. The participants noted that the principalship has changed to instructional leadership and has become more complicated and difficult to maintain. These findings align with the multiple studies reporting increased attention to the principal as an instructional leader (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2009; Fink, 2010), significant changes that have occurred in the principalship (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Niesche, 2010), and the impact of the accountability on principal responsibilities (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Normore, 2004; Sorenson, 2005).

Over the last decades, there have been many debates about gender differences in language (Aries, 2009; Mulac, 2009). Being small in scale, this analysis did not attempt to prove or disprove these theories. Rather, these 11 constructed narratives were examined to see if they manifested the universals of gender and language (Holmes, 1998), with the finding that they manifested most of the universals of gender and language as suggested by Holmes (1998). The career path narratives of male and female leaders were also similar in content and structure, which differs from studies that reported gender issues related to the principals' career paths (McLay, 2008). Unlike recent studies reporting female leaders' struggles along their career paths (Moorosi, 2010; Powell, 2010), the findings of the present study did not reveal any gender-related concerns in the pursuit of the principalship. Although earlier research has addressed the differences between how men and women communicate, there is a need to examine how these communication patterns impact overall leadership in schools. The examination of communication patterns could shed light on overall school success, especially in schools that are under the stress of accountability, sanctions, and rewards.

## **Limitations**

The findings of this study are limited to the sample of participating leaders. Convenience participant sampling further limited generalizability of these results. Reported similarities and differences between female and male leaders' stories are restricted to participating leaders. Being a qualitative inquiry, this study aimed to better understand sitting leaders' paths that led

them to leadership positions through the in-depth analysis of the small number of participants. While the results of this study may not be generalized beyond the scope of this analysis, they may, however, be used to inform studies in other educational contexts and large-scale studies.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study suggest the need to offer career planning and professional development opportunities for assistant principals. Because the principals in this study acknowledge the impact of mentors and administrators on their career, school districts may consider providing their aspiring leaders (both teachers and assistant principals) with formal mentors who could assist with career planning. In light of the acknowledged challenges of the position, district leaders should provide their principals with timely and contextually relevant professional learning that would help them handle job requirements, and be more effective as instructional leaders in their schools.

Finally, this study suggests that more research is needed to examine alternative paths to the principalship as well as factors both inside and outside of the workplace that affect the choice of a career in leadership. All principals had a traditional career path to educational administration, which included teaching, assistant principalship, and in some cases, coaching (Vann, 1992). Future research may examine non-traditional routes to the principalship and the factors impacting career decisions of these principals. In addition, further research needs to examine successful female principals in middle and high school to inform policy and research about better ways to prepare and support female administrators at these levels. This, in turn, could contribute to a much-needed increase in gender equity in the principalship (Holloway, 2000).

## **Conclusion**

With increasing attention from researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers, it is important to better understand career paths of acting principals. Future inquiries may inform policy and practice on how to better prepare, develop, and sustain school leaders. The findings of this study contribute to the literature on the career paths of current principals and on the differences between male and female leaders' careers in education. On a methodological level, this study examines principals' career narratives using an approach new to educational leadership research—a combination of structural narrative analysis and gender linguistics—thus bringing a different perspective to this topic.

The findings of this research are important to scholars as well as practitioners. By listening to the narratives of acting principals, decision-makers can learn much about how leaders are prepared and socialized into the principalship. Through their narratives, policy-makers can better understand the markers of a career path and how the events surrounding these markers have influenced key areas, such as capacity to frame and to make decisions, the types of beneficial experiences, and the lessons that shaped leadership styles.

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## Appendix A

### Narrative Representation (female, first-year principal of elementary school)

<b>Abstract</b>	Do you want me to tell you about my career in education from the beginning?
<b>Orientation</b>	I actually was a communication major in college and decided to go back to medical school. So I went through two-year intensive science program which was specifically made for people who had not been pre-med students. At the end of that I was getting ready to go to the yearlong medical school application process. I was living in Los Angeles and they were desperate for science teachers.
<b>Complicating Action</b>	So, I got a job in LA teaching 8 <sup>th</sup> grade science in intercity middle school.
<b>Evaluation</b>	What a great way to spend my year! I did not have a clue what I was doing,
<b>Complicating Action</b>	but ended up loving it and stayed there teaching for three years. Then my family moved to Atlanta.
<b>Resolution</b>	I thought “I really like what I am doing. So I am just gonna stick with teaching.” So I taught high school chemistry and physics in the high school in this school district.
<b>Evaluation</b>	I had a great experience moving into this district just because it was such a polar opposite experience to working in another big district across Los Angeles where you didn’t get what you needed to do your job. It was a rough place to teach.
<b>Reorientation</b>	This is my tenth year in Illustrious County. I taught in High School for about 4 years...
<b>Complicating Action</b>	...before being approached by one of my administrators about possibly going into leadership which was what put me down on that path.
<b>Evaluation</b>	I hadn’t really thought about it that much, honestly, until she came to me.
<b>Resolution</b>	So I got a leadership degree. And then my principal who I loved to work for in high school retired the year that I was eligible to become an administrator, and so I left the school and served as an assistant principal in the middle school for five years.
<b>Coda</b>	And this is my first year as a principal of the elementary school.

## Appendix B

### Narrative Representation (female, first-year principal of middle school)

<b>Abstract</b>	What took me to education was...
<b>Orientation</b>	Well, in high school I was encouraged to participate in a DCT work program. I was placed as a teacher's aid in the exceptional child's center in my town. And that was back when children with disabilities were not integrated into public schools.
<b>Evaluation</b>	And my first week there I knew that that was exactly what I wanted to do with my life – be a teacher for children with special needs. I had struggled as a student myself, so I could really relate to the children and that's started me on what I wanted to do in college.
<b>Complicating Action</b>	So I became a teacher. I started my career teaching special ed children with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities
<b>Evaluation</b>	which I think is probably the best training for the principalship - working with children with special disorders and their parents.
<b>Complicating Action</b>	Then I relocated to Georgia and was self-contained EBD teacher at middle school here in this school district and was invited by the leadership staff to come out of the classroom to be the lead special ed teacher. They asked me to get my leadership credentials to look at going into administration.
<b>Evaluation</b>	That was a very difficult decision for me because I never saw myself as one of them. The administration loved what I was doing. I was considered the lead special ed teacher at that time - I just loved what I did.
<b>Resolution</b>	Anyway, I made the decision, and went to university to get my leadership add-on.
<b>Evaluation</b>	I loved that experience - I saw that maybe there was a way I could make a difference in a way other than just being a classroom teacher.
<b>Complicating Action</b>	So I caught that vision. As soon as I had my credentials, I was moved to an administrative position. And then I just couldn't imagine not ever being an assistant principal. I did that for 7 years.
<b>Evaluation</b>	I loved it!
<b>Reorientation</b>	One of my principals that I worked with was a woman that was such a fabulous mentor that I always said that "I just want to be the woman behind the woman."
<b>Evaluation</b>	It was just a fabulous and effective leadership team.

... continued

**Appendix B** *(continued)*

- Complicating Action**      However, she moved down to another school; someone new came in who kept saying to me “Why don’t they make you the principal of this school?”
- Evaluation**              But I never ever thought I wanted to do that...
- Resolution**             Anyway, after a year with this new principal and her harping on me: “You really have to put your head in the ring” – I did. And the next year I was given this middle school – I am beginning my second year here now.
- Evaluation**              So it wasn’t really on my radar for very long.
- Coda**                      Overall, when I get embedded in what I do, I just love what I do. Now I feel that way about being a principal. I look at the things that I can do to help change as really significant. I’ve seen that at every level I’ve been.

## Appendix C

Narrative representation (male, first-year principal of middle school)

<b>Abstract</b>	It's not been a lifelong dream to be a school Principal.
<b>Orientation</b>	When I was younger all I really wanted to be was a teacher. I made up my mind that I wanted to teach and to coach and went through the process of doing that. I went to the university which was pretty well known for its educational training and spent six years there. I majored in secondary education science.
<b>Evaluation</b>	It was the best four year education I could probably get.
<b>Complicating Action</b>	Then I became a science teacher and basketball and golf coach and did that for many years. I was teaching for 17 years in various schools, various settings: large, suburban school, high school, small private school, large metropolitan school...
<b>Evaluation</b>	I loved every minute of my teaching.
<b>Complicating Action</b>	About 12 years in, I got the notion that I would like to make a little more money at what I was doing and so I decided to get an advanced degree.
<b>Evaluation</b>	I knew it was going to take more time.
<b>Resolution</b>	So I walked away from coaching basketball and got my Master's in secondary education science.
<b>Orientation</b>	When I finished the Master's, an opportunity presented itself to get a specialist degree in administration.
<b>Evaluation</b>	It was a good program.
<b>Complicating Action</b>	I enrolled in it and completed it in supervision. I did not do that with the idea that I'm going to be a principal one day
<b>Evaluation</b>	That was not the notion, but I knew that it would open a door should I choose to do that. Being a head coach gave me a lot of confidence and a lot of interest in leadership in general. I really enjoyed it. I was pretty good at managing people, managing assistant coaches, and running a program. But I was starting to get the little notion of being burned out.
<b>Complicating Action</b>	And then it happened. I got a call from a friend of mine; he told me that they were going to be passing a new position in the state of Georgia called the graduation coach and if I would be interested. I was ready to come back.
<b>Resolution</b>	And so I said absolutely, I'll be there in a minute.

... continued

### Appendix C (continued)

- Evaluation** I had no idea what a graduation coach did; I just knew that it was an opportunity to come back home.
- Resolution** And so I came down, interviewed for the job, found out more about the job, and loved the opportunity. So I accepted that job and had it for one month.
- Complicating Action** Someone at the county office here retired, the assistant principal at the high school moved into that role and they promoted me into that position. So I became an assistant principal.
- Resolution** I was an assistant principal for the remaining part of that year, and then one more year at the high school level and then I became the middle school principal.
- Evaluation** Having done it for two years, I would say that it's probably not a job that many people should dream about and fantasize about, to be honest with you, because it's a hell of a lot of work and it's crazy at times. Most of the time it borders on insanity. So, how somebody, at least from my point of view, how somebody could want to be a school Principal, I really don't know, but I'll tell you this—I love it.
- Coda** So that's how I came to be here.

## Appendix D

Narrative Representation (male, a first-year principal of middle school)

- Orientation** I started teaching in 1988. I was a great math teacher. I had normal first two years and was influenced significantly by my mentor.
- Evaluation** I'm certain that's why I'm still in education today—because of her influence, because it was different than what I'd expected. And yet, very rewarding but also very challenging; teaching is a hard job.
- Complicating Action** I got married. My wife worked in another district, so that's why I came over here. I had a very difficult time finding a job. Finally, I got a job in this district teaching math.
- Complicating Action** I taught for another 6 years. During that time, I worked very closely with the department chair and had a chance to experience some leadership opportunities. I was a bad coach, but a good teacher. So I went back to graduate school. I started a doctoral program in 1994. At that point I thought that I'd like to be a department chair, a math department chair.
- Resolution** So I applied and was hired at high school in 1996 to be the math department chair. That was my first official teacher leadership position that I held and I did that until 2004.
- Reorientation** I moved to another high school in 2003. The principal of that school has probably had the greatest influence on me. He led his school through teacher leadership. He engaged a large number of leaders to run his building. And I was one of the people that did lots of things. So, as a department chair, I did a lot of assistant principal duties.
- Evaluation** And I enjoyed that.
- Reorientation** I got my doctorate in 1998.
- Complicating Action** The principal mentioned to me that he thought I would be a good assistant principal and I should consider doing that.
- Evaluation** Well, that wasn't the right timing. He planted the seed though and I started to think about it. I thought it would be neat to be a principal. I never ever thought it would be much fun to be an assistant principal. I got to be an assistant principal for 4 years and it was a good experience. It prepared me to be a principal. Um but I can't say I enjoyed it. I've met a lot of assistant principals that did enjoy being that and still do and frankly would love to retire being an assistant principal. I would rather be in the classroom than be an assistant principal.

... continued

**Appendix D** *(continued)*

**Evaluation** But in order to be a principal you need to go through that experience and you need to have a lot of skill sets that assistant principals refine and it prepares you for the principalship. I taught for 16 years. And that gave me a platform from which to speak to engage teachers. I wouldn't give that up for anything either.

**Coda** I've only been a principal for two months now. I'm still learning a ton on the job but I've been well prepared by the experiences I've had as the department chair and an assistant principal.

## **Appendix E**

Narrative representation (female, fifth-year principal of elementary school).

- Orientation** I was in a coaching career, teaching physical education and health. The sports I coached were softball, basketball, track... I was coaching for about 12 years and had coached at the college level, high school, and middle school level
- Complicating Action** Then I went back to school and received my masters degree
- Resolution** and moved into administration.
- Orientation** I have been with this school system for about 20 years; 5 years in my current position of an elementary school principal. Before that I served 2 years as a principal at the middle school and 2 years as an assistant principal.
- Coda** In total, I have been in education for about 21 years.

## Appendix F

Narrative Representation (male, fifth-year principal of middle school).

- Orientation** Back in 1981 I graduated from college with a health and physical education and social studies background. I started out in high school; I coached a little bit as well.
- Evaluation** I had a very strong athletic background as a player and as a coach. And I believe that teaching is coaching; coaching is teaching.
- Complicating Action** I started working in a school and from the onset I had some good role models in front of me who were former coaches/principals. From the onset I knew that somewhere after 20 years I would spend the later years of my career in administration.
- Evaluation** Over the course of time the principalship has truly changed from the basic expectations and has evolved into a lot of the instructional leadership.
- Reorientation** So I stayed in the classroom and coached for about 18 years, decided to get out of coaching and go ahead and pursue administration, and took a couple of years to do my masters.
- Complicating Action** I started at the high school as an assistant principal for three years,
- Evaluation** and had a good learning base, and a lot of opportunities to learn what the true expectations for the principalship are, to understand a lot of the instructional expectations, and to learn setting goals for staff.
- Reorientation** My primary responsibilities as an AP were facility management, discipline, buses, teacher evaluation, and overall management. I also assisted the principal on his leadership team, and so I had an opportunity to become involved in that aspect of it, and try to develop ways to meet the needs of teachers as well as students.
- Evaluation** The most significant thing that allowed me to fully understand what the expectations for the principalship are, I had a principal who was not afraid to delegate certain responsibilities.
- Complicating Action** My principal allowed me the latitude to feel comfortable in meeting some of the challenges, and he allowed me to make some mistakes.
- Evaluation** That's just that one thing that allowed me to really understand that this is something that I think I can do.
- Reorientation** So at the end of my third year another opportunity came up that I ended up applying and getting the principalship in the alternative school.

... continued

**Appendix F** *(continued)*

**Evaluation** I looked at that opportunity as a big piece of the puzzle. It was a great experience for me

**Complicating Action** from the principal level, to try to become a change agent for instruction well as facilities.

**Evaluation** And we were able to make some changes there.

**Resolution** We've made AYP 3 out of the 4 years; we did not make it the first year.

**Evaluation** We were able to understand some of those challenges.

**Coda** So, that's where I have ended up.

## Appendix G

Narrative representation (male, third-year principal of high school).

- Orientation** I taught and coached for eighteen years. Health and physical education is what I'm certified in. I've taught high school,
- Evaluation** lots of subjects. I taught a lot of physical science. I taught a lot of math.
- Complicating Action** Somehow through my last couple years as a teacher, I ended up being an administrative assistant. I went from the classroom to in-school suspension where I was in charge of custodians.
- Reorientation** I did the entering of the discipline. I did a lot of things just because the administration couldn't get it all accomplished. I got my leadership degree somewhere along the way in there
- Evaluation** and just decided that I just needed a career change
- Resolution** So I took an assistant principal's position in a high school for a year.
- Complicating Action** And when a high school principal retired, I applied for the job, and I got that job and have been there. This is my third year doing that.
- Evaluation** Being a principal is like being a parent. There is no manual. There is no training. It is like the Pope blesses you and you go. And you learn as you go. I have people I could call and talk to but there's no manual, there's no training, there's no degree that prepares you to be a principal.
- Reorientation** I got out of coaching to spend more time with my family
- Complicating Action** and I didn't even see my family because of what I thought a principal should be, and the dedication of time, and the need to be seen, and this and that.
- Resolution** I did that the first year—watch and learn and listen.
- Evaluation** Now I feel that the honeymoon is over.
- Resolution** The second year we stirred the waters,
- Evaluation** and now I feel like the direction has been set, the expectations have been set. I know my expectations are probably even higher because I'm not a rookie.
- Coda** They know me and I know them.

## Appendix H

Narrative representation (male, third-year principal of high school)

- Orientation** I was a baseball player in the university, majoring in education. I came out of high school and that's what I pretty much wanted to do—to teach and coach.
- Evaluation** I taught one year in Alabama at a college. Moved to Georgia in 1985, and have worked as a teacher and a coach, eventually as an assistant principal.
- Complicating Action** Then I moved and got out of education for a year. I went into my family business.
- Resolution** After getting back into education I worked in several high schools.
- Evaluation** I started in this business as a teacher and coach and I always saw myself doing that. It never really got any closer for me. I continued to coach and enjoyed what I was doing.
- Reorientation** Three years before I became an administrator there, they had some money set aside to start training some people through administrative assistant's role.
- Complicating Action** They came to me and asked would I be interested in doing that.
- Resolution** Eventually, I decided to do it and felt like I could handle it. I served as an administrative assistant and then moved into administration for the last two years.
- Evaluation** I enjoyed it. I saw it as a chance to help students. It was very similar to what you're doing in coaching. I mean, you want to win a game but it's also about developing young men and women with future employment and those skills needed to be set for life. And I saw moving into administration, especially as an assistant principal at doing very similar things, helping many more kids.
- Complicating Action** With the help of my coach I started down that path
- Resolution** and then I saw I liked it and I ended up going back to school and getting my masters and then my six year administration degree
- Coda** and here I am today.

## Appendix I

Narrative Representation (male, ninth-year principal of elementary school)

- Orientation** I started in education in 1976. I have a Bachelor's in business administration, a Master's in health and physical education and, a Doctorate in educational leadership.
- Complicating Action** After being in a classroom as a teacher for about five years, I was a college professor for about five years.
- Evaluation** The college was actually an opportunity to go and coach.
- Complicating Action** We started a football program there in 1980 and I went in as one of the assistant coaches and full time coaches. And while I was there, I went on and got my masters as I worked as a professor.
- Evaluation** I could not work and teach certain things until I completed the Master's.
- Resolution** So I did the Master's as quickly as I could and I basically taught in the health and physical education department.
- Reorientation** Well, the first couple of years, all I taught were physical education and health classes.
- Complicating Action** Then, once I finished my Master's, I was able to teach in the school of education. So I taught materials and methods and introduction to education and physical education for teachers.
- Evaluation** Of course, all that curriculum now has changed. You don't even hear those kinds of terms anymore. I still have friends that are teaching on the staff there and we correspond and talk quite frequently.
- Evaluation** So I've heard how the college coursework has developed over time. And it's changed quite considerably.
- Reorientation** And then I went to a small school as the head football coach and athletic director.
- Evaluation** As the athletic director, that was my first experience with the administration of the athletic department for that school.
- Complicating Action** As I was growing in that position, the principal that was at that time was encouraging me to start to work on a leadership certificate and degree, which I did.
- Reorientation** And during that process, I had the opportunity to move into an assistant principal's position.

... continued

**Appendix I** *(continued)*

**Resolution**

I did that for two years and then had an opportunity to be a principal. I completed a doctorate in leadership and took the principal's position.

**Coda**

And here I am today. I've been with this school system since 1994 and served in my current position for nine years.

## Appendix J

Narrative Representation (female, eighth-year principal of elementary school)

- Orientation** When I was growing up I always said I would never get into education because my mother was a teacher and she worked awfully hard. I couldn't decide on a profession, I wanted to be an architect, and that just didn't happen in a small town.
- Resolution** So I went into education
- Evaluation** and have loved it ever since.
- Orientation** I started in private school where I worked for five years.
- Complicating Action** Our son was in private school. All of his little friends were in the local private school and so we decided to enroll him there. Then I decided to go back and get my teaching certificate.
- Resolution** I finished up and started teaching at the little private school here
- Evaluation** and realized very quickly that I did not want to be in private school I wanted to be in public education and wanted my children to have public education.
- Reorientation** I worked in a neighboring for three years when my husband was in law school.
- Complicating Action** Then I taught from 1981 until 1993 and my principal came to me and he asked me if I would go into administration, if I'd be willing to be an assistant principal.
- Evaluation** And I never thought about it. I always said I'd never be a principal. It just hit me on the right day.
- Complicating Action** I said I would love to do it.
- Resolution** My principal retired after several years and I was hired as a principal.
- Coda** So, I have been in administration since 1994 and have been a principal since 2000.

## Appendix K

Narrative Representation (female, seventh-year principal of elementary school).

- Abstract** Well this is actually my 36<sup>th</sup> year in education.
- Orientation** I graduated with my undergraduate degree in 1973 and went right back to school in my first years of teaching and earned my Master's degree. And then straight from there I earned my 6-year degree. Well, then I became the instructional facilitator or instructional coach, as a lot of people call that position now,
- Evaluation** I really didn't desire to leave the classroom, because I love the classroom. Loved my job all these years and still do.
- Complicating Action** But my principal encouraged me to do this and said that in that position I could help more people to become better teachers than just helping one classroom of children and could have an effect on lots of children that way.
- Resolution** So I agreed to move into the instructional coach position with the understanding that if I did not like it, she would let me go back to the classroom the following year.
- Evaluation** But I did like it. I enjoyed it very much and enjoyed working with the teachers. I knew from that time that I needed to go ahead and pursue leadership.
- Complicating Action** Then in 2000 I entered the doctoral program to work on my Leadership Degree. But I had been out of the college classroom for 20 years when I went back,
- Evaluation** so that was quite a big step for me. It does take you a while to get adjusted to being a student again.
- Reorientation** And I became a principal. I've been in this leadership position for 7 years now.
- Evaluation** The overwhelming responsibility came with the job and realizing that everything in that building, the buck stopped with me. From the facility being cleaned to what the children were learning to the staff development that was going on. It is just trial by fire. You're just thrown in there and you learn by doing.
- Coda** The most difficult part of it now is that I don't feel like I have the time to be the instructional leader of the school which is really what I want to be.