

2011

## A Case Study of Selected Female Elementary School Leaders' Perspectives on the

Julie D. Hasson

University of South Florida, [julie.hasson@sdhc.k12.fl.us](mailto:julie.hasson@sdhc.k12.fl.us)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Education Commons](#)

---

### Scholar Commons Citation

Hasson, Julie D., "A Case Study of Selected Female Elementary School Leaders' Perspectives on the" (2011). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.  
<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/3144>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

A Case Study of Selected Female Elementary School Leaders' Perspectives on the  
Transition from Teacher to Administrator

by

Julie Hasson

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
in Educational Leadership  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Valerie J. Janesick, Ph.D.

William Black, Ph.D.

Judith Ponticell, Ph.D.

William Young, Ed.D.

Date of Approval:

October 25, 2011

Keywords: assistant principal, role transition, feminist, phenomenology, leadership  
preparation

Copyright © 2011, Julie Hasson

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, husband, and children who make the impossible possible and to the female school leaders who dedicate themselves to improving educational opportunities for children.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deep appreciation to all of the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Valerie Janesick, Dr. William Black, Dr. Judith Ponticell, and Dr. William Young. Their assistance and valuable contributions enhanced this study. Dr. Valerie Janesick served as my major professor, and her guidance and expertise in qualitative methods was invaluable. I must also convey my respect and admiration for the women who volunteered to participate in this study and who, despite many challenges, are successful models for female, early-career administrators. In addition, the support and guidance of my principal mentors, Scott Myers, Mary Ann Keene, and Missy Lennard enabled me to grow as an administrator and juggle my roles as an assistant principal and doctoral student.

And finally, I give heartfelt thanks to all of my friends and family- especially my husband, Brian- for all of the encouragement throughout the years of this journey. I must thank my children, Connor- my comic relief- and Cailin- my cheerleader. I also extend my deepest gratitude to my mom and dad for their unfailing help and optimism. Thank you to my lifelong friend, Laura, for her skills as a listener and an editor. Your love and support have been indispensable, and I am truly grateful for all of you.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vii
List of Figures .....	viii
Abstract .....	ix
Chapter One Introduction .....	1
Introduction and Rationale.....	1
Background and Personal Perspective .....	2
Theoretical Framework: Feminist Phenomenology .....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Exploratory Questions .....	5
Research Design.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Usefulness of the Study .....	8
Summary of this Chapter .....	8
Chapter Two Literature Review.....	10
Introduction.....	10
History of Women in School Administration .....	14
Barriers and Challenges for Early-career Administrators.....	16
Barriers and Challenges for Women in School Administration .....	19
Benefits of Female School Leadership .....	24
Women’s Gender Identity.....	27
Professional Role Identity.....	32
Defining Role and Role Transition.....	32
Psychological Motives in Role Transition.....	33
Unfreezing-Exiting the Teaching Role .....	36
Moving-Entering the Administrative Role .....	37
Refreezing-Becoming Situated in the Administrative Role.....	38
Feminist Phenomenology.....	39
Gaps in the Literature.....	43
Summary of this Chapter .....	45
Chapter Three Methods Used in this Study .....	47
Introduction.....	47
Research Techniques for this Study.....	47
Interviews.....	49
Participant Selection .....	54

Analytical Techniques for this Study.....	55
Ethical Considerations .....	57
Theoretical Framework for the Methods in this Study .....	59
Role of the Researcher .....	60
Assumptions of this Researcher.....	62
Summary of this Chapter .....	63
Chapter Four Presentation of the Data.....	64
Introduction.....	64
The Five Participants .....	66
Megan Monarch .....	67
Sarah Swallowtail .....	82
Caroline Crescent.....	94
Sydney Skipper .....	108
Bailey Birdwing.....	121
Conclusion .....	134
Chapter Five Analysis, Interpretations and Recommendations.....	136
Introduction.....	136
Cross Case Analysis.....	141
Work/Life Balance.....	143
Unfreezing from the Teaching Role .....	144
Refreezing into the Administrative Role .....	145
Leadership Style.....	147
Adaptive Behaviors.....	148
Mentorship .....	149
Considering Gender .....	151
Essential Meanings .....	152
Unpleasant Surprises.....	154
Self-Reliance.....	157
Surviving and Thriving .....	159
Recommendations and Implications .....	161
Recruiting.....	162
Preparation .....	163
Induction .....	166
Impact of this Study on the Researcher .....	168
Conclusion .....	170
References.....	172
Appendices.....	178
Appendix A: Letter to Participants .....	179
Appendix B: Informed Consent Signature Page.....	180
Appendix C: Interview Protocol .....	181
Appendix D: Member Check Form .....	183

About the Author .....END PAGE

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Kvale and Brinkmann's 12 Aspects .....	39
Table 2: Kvale and Brinkmann's Steps for interview Analysis.....	44
Table 3: Participant Demographics.....	50
Table 4: Participant Similarities across Common Themes.....	143

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Schema for the Literature Review .....	11
Figure 2: Megan’s Challenges and Strengths .....	81
Figure 3: Sarah’s Challenges and Strengths .....	93
Figure 4: Caroline’s Challenges and Strengths.....	107
Figure 5: Sydney’s Challenges and Strengths .....	120
Figure 6: Bailey’s Challenges and Strengths .....	133
Figure 7: Common Themes and Essential Elements of Meaning.....	152
Figure 8: Aspects of Unpleasant Surprises .....	153
Figure 9: Aspects of Self-Reliance .....	156
Figure 10: Aspects of Surviving and Thriving .....	158

## **Abstract**

The transition from the comfort of a familiar role, that of teacher, to the discomfort of a new role, that of school administrator, is a transformative process. Transforming oneself requires leaving what is known and venturing into the unknown. Researchers have illuminated women's struggle to attain school leadership positions, but the transformation of females making this change in professional roles is seldom addressed in leadership literature. Although context cannot be ignored, there are some challenges common to many women undergoing this transformation.

Situated in the elementary education setting, this study investigated the perspectives of female, early-career administrators who recently experienced the transition from teacher to administrator. The purpose of the study was to describe and explain selected female leaders' perspectives on the transition from teacher to school administrator. My exploratory questions that guided the study were:

1. What elements constitute the perspective of the participants?
2. What variables influence women's perspectives as they make the transition from teacher to administrator?
3. What barriers and challenges do women encounter as they move from teacher to administrator?
4. What variables contribute to resiliency and agency for female administrators?

The theoretical framework of this study was feminist phenomenology. Employing qualitative research methodology, this researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with five purposefully selected participants.

The interviews yielded several shared perspectives on the transition from teacher to administrator, including a focus on: work/life balance; unfreezing from the teaching role; refreezing into the administrative role; resiliency; mentorship; considerations of gender's effects on the transition. Essential elements of meaning that emerged from the early career administrator's data were: unpleasant surprises; a sink or swim induction; surviving and thriving in the new role. Implications for leadership preparation and induction were described. Although these five women developed adaptive behaviors and persevered in the role despite challenges, formal mentors and more purposefully designed induction programs would have benefitted them. They also would have benefitted from more integration of theory and practice during their preparation programs. The study contributed to development of a fuller phenomenological understanding of the perspectives of female, early career school leaders as they make the transition from teacher to administrator.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The transition from the comfort of a familiar role, that of teacher, to the discomfort of a new role, that of school administrator, is a transformative process (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Transforming oneself requires leaving what is known and venturing into the unknown. Researchers have illuminated women's struggle to attain school leadership positions, but the transformation of females making this change in professional roles is seldom addressed in leadership literature. Curry (2000) explains, "Considerations of leadership have been lacking in two ways. They have not focused on the phenomenological aspect, including such developmental experiences as the intrapsychic aspects of the individual's ascendancy to a leader position through the construction of a leader persona, and they have not substantively included the experiences of women" (p.18). Although context cannot be ignored, there are some challenges common to many women undergoing this transformation.

The concepts of role identity and role transition have been extensively studied in the medical and business worlds, but this research is less evident in educational settings. Role identity research indicates that changing from one role to another does not happen in a discrete step; rather it is a process which requires bridging the disengagement of one role with the engagement of another. It requires shedding one persona and donning a new one. New school administrators are prepared through coursework and practica prior to being appointed to an administrative position. However, once appointed, these former

teachers do not suddenly view themselves as administrators. They must go through a process of disengaging from the role of teacher while engaging in the role of administrator. The process may be confounding for women who came to school administration with greater reluctance than their male counterparts. Harris, Ballenger, and Jones (2007) find that men often enter the teaching force with their eyes on administration while women are committed to teaching for several years. Thus, women experience a less direct path to school leadership. Darling-Hammond (2007) suggests that factors associated with behaviors of female school leaders, such as providing support to staff, establishing a supportive culture, and establishing a participatory decision-making structure, are strong predictors of organizational learning and also impact teacher motivation and empowerment. In addition, female leaders often bring several years of teaching experience and knowledge of effective instructional practices to their schools. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) propose that the prominence of instruction and learning at the center of women's leadership drives instructional change that improves student learning. Thus, with the need for strong instructional leaders brought about by recent reform efforts, it is essential to recruit and retain female school leaders.

### **Background and Personal Perspective**

I experienced this transition from teacher to school administrator as I left the classroom after ten years of teaching to accept the position of assistant principal. Like the female subject of Fennell's research (2008), I did not aspire to be a school administrator. I simply wanted to be the best teacher I could be for my young students. After several years of successful teaching, my principal encouraged me to seek educational leadership certification and apply for the assistant principal position. The transition was difficult and

was complicated by unexpected challenges. One unanticipated hurdle was the sadness I felt over leaving the teaching role. I missed the close relationships with my own students and the camaraderie with my peers. The greatest challenge was transforming my perception of myself as a professional in the new role. Putting on a suit and changing my work wardrobe was the easy part. My path to transformation on the outside was much more rapid than my internal transformation. Feeling overwhelmed, I sought other female early-career administrators to discuss common struggles. The lack of formal mentoring exacerbated my apprehension. One challenge unique to my first administrative job was making the transition from teacher to administrator at the same school. I spent three years as assistant principal at that site before leaving to open a new school as an assistant principal. My second administrative job was a much different experience than my first because I came to the position with a few years of experience in the role and had not worked with that group of teachers as a peer. I was new to the school but not new to the role. My personal experience, as well as my connection with other female administrators, prompted me to explore the transition from a teaching role to an administrative role. The starting point for phenomenological research is often personal experience. Van Manen (1990) explains, "In drawing upon personal descriptions of lived experiences, the phenomenologist knows that one's own experiences are also the possible experiences of others" (p.54). In addition to my personal experiences, my beliefs and theoretical framework provided a scaffold for my study of this topic.

## **Theoretical Framework: Feminist Phenomenology**

Feminist researchers view gender as a lens through which school leaders make meaning of their work and lives. Young and Skrla (2003) explain, “Researchers of gender and educational leadership have centered women in their work and have explored the characteristics of women leaders and the institutional and professional cultures within which they work” (p.1). Researchers use a feminist lens to correct both the invisibility and the distortion historically present in male researchers’ interpretations of the female experience (Shakeshaft, 1989). My study enabled female leaders to voice their own experience as they made the transition from teacher to administrator.

Fisher and Embree (2000) suggest that feminism and phenomenology are complimentary approaches in qualitative research. They state, “Feminism can look to phenomenology in seeking an articulated framework for experiential accounts as well as a mode of expression for the issues of sexual difference and specificity that lie at the core of feminism” (p.34). In addition, feminism and phenomenology may both be considered philosophies of action. As feminist or phenomenological researchers, we have a responsibility to improve the conditions of those we study. Similarly, current trends in feminist and phenomenological research caution against sweeping generalizations, and instead, acknowledge the unique experiences of individuals.

Phenomenology is always situated in lived experience. Van Manen (1990) describes phenomenology as, “The systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal structures of lived experience” (p.10). Phenomenological questions are meaning questions, not problems to be solved. Rather than setting up artificial or experimental situations, phenomenology requires researchers to meet participants where they are

naturally engaged in the world. While phenomenology is viewed primarily as a philosophical movement, its influence on methodology has become apparent. Data gathering using a phenomenological perspective requires an open ended qualitative approach that enables the researcher to grasp what it is that renders a particular experience unique. Interviewing as a research method is the principal means for data gathering by both feminists and phenomenologists (Reinartz, 1992). The conversational interview is the tool I used to explore and gather narrative material that enabled me to have a deeper understanding of the transition from teacher to administrator. Using a feminist phenomenological lens helped me understand the transition from teacher to leader from the participants' perspectives.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to describe and explain selected female leaders' perspectives on the transition from teacher to school administrator.

### **Exploratory Questions**

My exploratory questions that guided the study were:

1. What elements constitute the perspective of the participants?
2. What variables influence women's perspectives as they make the transition from teacher to administrator?
3. What barriers and challenges do women encounter as they move from teacher to administrator?
4. What variables contribute to resiliency and agency for female administrators?

## Research Design

Feminist researchers, such as Shakeshaft (1989) and Curry (2000), use interviews and case studies to fully understand the experiences of female school leaders because the daily tasks of female school leaders, the how and why they do things, cannot be fully understood through survey research alone. Margaret Andrews and Sharon Shockley Lee (in Lunenburg & Perreault 2002), used ethnography to understand the life of a female school principal. They contrasted the experience of the female principal with that of Ed Bell in *Man in the Principal's Office* (Wolcott, 1973). Lisa Smulyan (2000) used ethnography to study the work lives of three female administrators. Similarly, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) suggest that, when studying women in leadership, research methods must make it possible for women to relay candid accounts of their experiences so that we can better understand how they construct their identities. In order to more fully understand the experiences of women making the transition from teacher to leader, I examined the transition through a feminist phenomenological lens. I discovered a clearer understanding of the leadership style used by female school leaders through the use of the women's own words and experiences.

I conducted two interviews with five female early-career administrators. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The protocol for the first interviews, Protocol A (see Appendix C) was developed through a pilot study with one early career female administrator and refined through my review of the literature. I analyzed transcripts of the interviews for major and minor categories. The second round of interviews was a follow up to key themes that emerged from initial interviews. I kept a researcher reflective journal to provide a data set of my reflection on the research act, to refine my ideas, and

to gain an opportunity for triangulation of data sets at multiple levels (Janesick, 2004, p.143). In addition, I collected relevant documents from participants, such as resumes and copies of e-mails. I honored the ethical practice of research as far as informed consent and confidentiality.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout this study. Definitions of terms were derived from the review of the literature in Chapter Two:

*Early-career Administrator:* In this study, an early career administrator is a school administrator (likely an assistant principal) who has been in her current position for three years or less.

*Professional Role Identity:* In this study, professional role identity refers to the definition of self-in-role and encompasses all of the values, beliefs, and interaction styles one associates with that role.

*Role Transition:* In this study, role transition refers to the process an individual experiences as she moves from one role to another or changes her orientation to a role already held.

*Unfreezing:* In this study, unfreezing refers to the process an individual experiences as she exits the teaching role.

*Refreezing:* In this study, refreezing refers to the process an individual experiences as she becomes situated and more comfortable in the administrative role.

## **Usefulness of the Study**

Fortunately, researchers have a greater number of female school administrators to study today than have been found in past decades. Although they are growing in number, women are still underrepresented in school leadership. Similarly, women are also underrepresented in the research on administration. According to Shakeshaft and Grogan (2011), “gender studies” are almost always studies of women or studies comparing women to men. Studies of men are not labeled as gender studies. They found that only five percent of articles published in *Educational Administration Quarterly* over the last twenty years mention gender. Dissertation research is only slightly more likely to target women, with nine percent of dissertations over the past twenty years centering on gender. The growing number of female administrators requires an examination of how women leaders are faring. Additionally, the indication that women’s leadership positively impacts school culture and student achievement necessitates a closer look at the work lives of women in school administration. Describing the transition from teacher to administrator may assist future female leaders as they go through the internal changes necessary to develop their own leadership personas. Highlighting this transformation for women specifically will also contribute to the representation of women in educational leadership research.

## **Summary of this Chapter**

I described the context and purpose of the study: to describe and explain selected women’s perspectives on the transition from teacher to leader. I also explained the theoretical framework, Feminism and Phenomenology. I described how my personal experiences as well as my coursework led to my interest in this topic. In Chapter Two, I

will synthesize, review and critique the literature relevant to women's transition from teacher to leader. The categories for review of related literature in Chapter Two include:

- History of women in school administration
- Challenges experienced by early-career administrators
- Gender identity
- Professional role identity and professional role transitions

I will also identify gaps in the literature. In Chapter Three, I will describe the methods used in this study.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of the study was to describe and explain selected female leaders' perspectives on the transition from teacher to school administrator. The exploratory questions that guided the study were:

1. What elements constitute the perspective of the participants?
2. What variables influence women's perspectives as they make the transition from teacher to administrator?
3. What barriers and challenges do women encounter as they move from teacher to administrator?
4. What variables contribute to resiliency and agency for female administrators?

The transition from teacher to administrator is a transformative process influenced by the history of women in administration, challenges of early-career administrators, gender identity, and professional role identity. The transformation is viewed through a feminist phenomenological lens. A review of the literature is presented in this chapter in order to provide a background for the reader and to reveal the theoretical framework that guides the study. Figure 1 provides a visual map for the schema of the literature review.

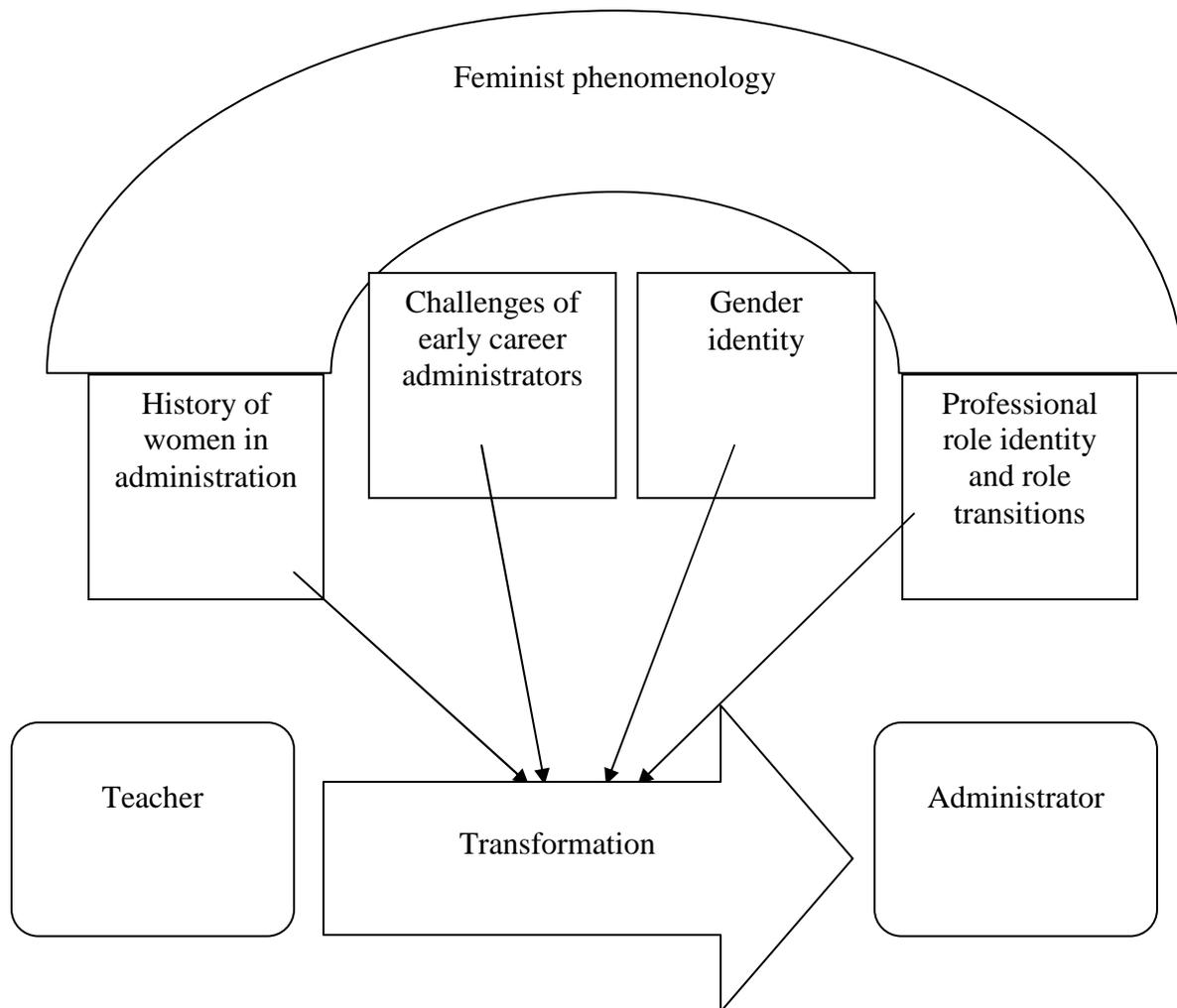


Figure 1. Visual Schema for the Literature Review

Looking at how the percentage of female administrators has changed over the past two decades is a starting point for examining the work lives of these women. However, it is difficult to determine the number of women in leadership positions now and in the past. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) explain, “Documenting women’s representation in formal leadership positions is difficult because of the absence of reliable and comparable data either nationally or within and across states” (p.27). The National Center for Educational Statistics intermittently surveys states and provides some indication of the percentage of administrative positions held by women. In 1985 nationally, 83.5% of the elementary school teaching force were women, but only 16.9% of elementary school principals were women (Shakeshaft, 1989). By 2008, the percentage of female public school principals increased to 64% in elementary schools across the nation. The percentage of female secondary school principals in 2008 was 36% nationally (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). Florida’s public schools saw the ratio of male to female instructional staff remain relatively constant from 1998 to 2008, but the percentage of female administrators increased by 5.6 percent for this same period. Florida’s percentage of female instructional staff members went from 77.6% in 1998 to 79.1% in 2008. Florida’s percentage of female administrative staff went from 55% in 1998 to 60.6% in 2008 (FLDOE, 2009). Although over half of the elementary school leaders are now females, percentages are still not proportional to the number of women in the teaching force. In Florida, the ratio of principals to teachers was 1 to 48.5 for females and 1 to 13.9 for males in 2008 (FLDOE, 2009). Based on the number of women in the teaching force and the number of women obtaining certification in educational leadership, women are underrepresented in school administration (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). The need for

effective leaders demands that traditional stereotypes be disregarded and leaders sought from all segments of society (McFadden et al, 2009). Districts must actively seek leaders from the ranks of successful teachers in order to find effective school leaders to fill the upcoming vacancies.

The increasing number of women gaining entry into school leadership warrants an examination of the work lives of these women. Female school leaders often face different challenges than their male counterparts. A lack of networking, scarcity of role models and inadequate mentoring are challenges for many female leaders, but not necessarily for male leaders. Sacrifices of personal relationships and even health are obstacles female school leaders face (Gupton & Slick, 1996). However, districts would be wise to consider females as instructional leaders during this age of accountability. Darling-Hammond (2007) suggests that factors associated with behaviors of female school leaders, such as providing support to staff, establishing a supportive culture, and establishing a participatory decision-making structure are strong predictors of organizational learning and also impact teacher motivation and empowerment. In addition, female leaders often bring several years of teaching experience and knowledge of effective instructional practices. Their emphasis on instruction as central to their leadership encourages improvements in both school culture and student learning (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). These positive attributes make it essential for districts to recruit and support female school leaders. Comprehending the current professional climate for female administrators requires an understanding of how we got to this point.

## **History of Women in School Administration**

In the early days of public schooling in the United States, the days of the one room schoolhouse, the teacher performed all tasks necessary for running the school. As schooling became more complex and bureaucratization was imposed upon schools, the functions of administrator and teacher became more distinct (Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1989). By 1918, teaching and administration had become two separate professions, special requirements to become an administrator were instituted in several states, and departments of educational administration were launched in universities (Shakeshaft, 1989). The professional lives of women in schools were greatly impacted by the separation of teaching and administration. Shakeshaft (1989) states, “Scientific management, and specifically bureaucratization, helped keep women out of administrative roles because the belief in male dominance made it easier for both males and females to view women as natural followers and men as their leaders” (p.31). Feminist groups and teacher associations both worked to organize the ranks of female teachers and open doors to administrative positions for women. They made great gains from 1900 to 1930, but those gains were not sustained after 1930. Shakeshaft (1989) explains,

Several factors worked against women and resulted in their decline in administrative positions after 1928. Many of the barriers to women in the mid-twentieth century were indistinguishable from those of prior years. Century-old patterns of male dominance had solidified a number of beliefs about women that both men and women accepted and that limited women’s access to school administration. Negative attitudes toward women continued to be a major barrier.

Women were thought to be constitutionally incapable of discipline and order, primarily because of their size and supposed lack of strength (p.39).

A spike in the number of female administrators happened during World War II, when men were enlisting in the armed forces and were unavailable. After the war, it became even more difficult for women to obtain administrative positions as many men received college educations through the G.I. Bill, which prepared them to be teachers and administrators. Then, the 1950's saw a move to consolidate several small school districts into larger ones. This practice almost always resulted in women administrators from small school districts losing their positions to men in the new structure (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Shakeshaft, 1989). Women administrators struggled to increase in number during the latter half of the twentieth century.

Although the feminist movement strengthened during the 1960's and 1970's, female school administrators did not fare well. In 1973, Patricia Cayo Sexton wrote *Schools are Emasculating Our Boys* alleging that the number of women in school systems was having a negative effect on generations of male students. The cold war era ushered in further scrutiny of public schools, and thus, school administrators. Shakeshaft (1989) explains, "The cold war raised the stakes of the educational process- survival, not success, was at issue. When American social status and political scrutiny were at stake, society could no longer tolerate a majority of female educators" (p.51). Women in school leadership have worked slowly and steadily to prove their competence. When women came to teach in and lead schools, it was not for the children of the elite. They were much more likely to work in schools that served working-class, immigrant, and female students (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011). Therefore, women tended to view school leadership as a

path to social justice, or a vehicle for improving children's lives. Recent reform movements suggest that female school leaders may be a better match for today's schools (Riehl & Byrd, 1997). Fortunately, females are more likely to land leadership positions in the new millennium, and the number of female administrators has increased by almost forty percent in elementary schools over the past two decades (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). Despite this increase, the following literature verifies that women continue to find barriers to administrative positions and barriers to success once those positions are obtained.

### **Barriers and Challenges for Early-career administrators**

Although many barriers and challenges are unique to novice female administrators, some challenges are pertinent to all early-career administrators regardless of gender. One barrier to an administrative position is the commitment of money and time required to obtain educational leadership certification. However, a number of certified candidates choose not to seek administrative positions. Reasons include insufficient compensation for the time required to do the job, perceived high stress level, and reluctance to give up teaching (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Another reason certified candidates do not seek principal positions is their own assessment of the difficulty of the job plus their self-doubt in their own ability to succeed as school leaders. Winter, Rinehart, & Munoz (2002) suggest that candidate's self-perceptions of their ability to perform well in the job are the strongest predictors of their willingness to apply for a leadership position. The transition into school administration is described as a drift by Riehl and Byrd (1997) because most potential administrators, particularly females, do not express strong feelings about leaving teaching in the near

future even though they have completed administrator preparation programs. It is likely that teachers, particularly female teachers, are passive about upward career mobility or do not view administration as upward mobility.

The term early career administrator is used by Mullen (2004) to describe assistant principals within two years of their hiring. These administrators find common challenges in their new positions. One challenge is role ambiguity. Marshall and Hooley (2006) state, “The assistant principal seldom has a consistent, well defined job description, delineation of duties, or way of measuring outcomes from accomplishment of tasks” (p.7). Therefore, it is difficult to get a sense of how well one is achieving. Daresh (2004) describes new assistant principals as neither fish nor fowl since they are neither the fish in charge nor part of the flock of fowl. Despite the existence of role ambiguity, there are some tasks common to most early-career administrators. Weller and Weller (2002) identify the primary responsibilities for assistant principals:

- Supervising students
- Completing reports
- Evaluating staff performance
- Coordinating and conducting staff development
- Preparing budgets
- Acting as a community liaison (p.12)

At times, the boundaries of responsibility are difficult to define, and new responsibilities may be assigned at any time. One area of responsibility requires the use of interpersonal skills to communicate with and solve conflicts involving parents, teachers, and students (Mullen, 2004). This role can become exhausting.

Role conflict and overload are additional challenges for early-career administrators. Marshall and Hooley (2002) explain, “With so many tasks to perform, assistant principals find that their roles are often at cross-purposes with each other (p.7). Role conflict and overload happen when it seems impossible to adequately perform all of one’s assigned roles and duties. Marshall and Hooley add, “This situation is exacerbated when roles and duties are ambiguous, never measured, and never-ending” (p.8). Accountability legislation is a source of role conflict for early-career administrators. They must encourage teachers to teach to the curriculum and not to the test, despite messages from the district office to increase test scores. In addition, the desire to have an impact as an instructional leader may conflict with the time needed to complete managerial tasks. Daresh (2004) explains, “New practices, staff development programs, goal setting, and many other things may be the dream, but as a beginning assistant principal, you also have to make sure you take care of business right from the start. While maintaining your personal goals of leadership, you also need to focus on the technical aspects of running a school” (p.35). Role conflict and overload may result in little emotional or physical energy left for a personal life or professional rejuvenation.

Some challenges faced by new assistant principals result from lack of preparation. Weller and Weller (2002) identify areas in which assistant principals feel they are not adequately prepared in educational leadership courses:

- Motivating teachers
- Resolving conflict
- Developing real world curriculum
- Working effectively with teams

- Improving Instruction
- Dealing with the politics of the job (p.13)

These challenges require skills beyond the observable behaviors taught in leadership preparation programs. Feeling unprepared to take on these challenges may lead to increased anxiety about performance in the new role of administrator.

### **Barriers and Challenges for Women in School Administration**

Some internal and external barriers to administrative appointments and retention in administrative positions are unique to women. Internal barriers refer to the internal conflicts women experience because of socially created values (Hudak, 2001). Internal barriers include low self-image and lack of confidence. However, self-image and lack of confidence are often context dependent (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Shakeshaft (1989) states, “what has often been seen as a personal failing of women- lack of self-confidence- might be more accurately seen as a consequence of a sex-structured society that generates a belief in females that they lack ability- a belief reinforced by an organizational system that prevents women from developing confidence in public sphere activities through both lack of opportunity and lack of positive feedback” (p.85). In other words, women have confidence in areas where society has encouraged them to participate. The process of socialization into a new career typically rewards conformity to existing norms, and the norm for school administrators has historically been a male model (Riehl & Byrd, 1997). The term androcentrism is often used to describe the practice of viewing the world and shaping it from a male perspective (Shakeshaft, 1989). Androcentric beliefs have become underlying assumptions and values in our culture, largely unquestioned (Dunlap and Schmuck, 1995). Androcentric assumptions lead to conflict for female leaders.

Shakeshaft (1989) states, “Because of an androcentric worldview, traditional female qualities are not highly valued. By dividing the world into two kinds of behavior- those who are male and those who are female- and labeling behaviors of competence male, women must choose between being called competent and being identified as female” (p.113). Smulyan’s research (2000) on three female principals also supports the existence of androcentric assumptions. She states, “As women learn to be administrators, they may unconsciously silence a part of themselves” (p.3). Believing that typically female behaviors are incongruent with success as a school leader is a barrier for women.

As a new administrator, I was often advised to hold staff members at arms’ length, to avoid being too friendly with staff. The strengths that made me successful as a teacher, close relationships with staff members, students, and families, were seen as weaknesses in my new position. I felt a disconnect between my authentic feminine self and the androcentric norms associated with successful administrators. It was necessary for me to discover what leadership behaviors worked with my personal strengths as well as with the characteristics of the school population I served. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) state, “Developing and sustaining leadership styles that don’t fit into preexisting boxes is difficult” (p.83). They suggest that successful women school administrators use strategies often associated with being female, despite the risk of not being taken seriously. Just as leadership behaviors associated with male norms cannot be generalized to females, we also cannot make sweeping generalizations about female leaders. Context as well as individual characteristics play a role in a leader’s style and interactions. Smulyan (2000) describes a conflict that some female leaders encounter when they do not fit the expectations held by school stakeholders. She suggests that the expectations of

female leaders to be nurturing, collaborative, and focused on curriculum inform the interactions others have with these leaders. When female leaders do not fit these expectations, they are found to be lacking, but when they do fulfill these expectations, they are found to be less effective than their male counterparts. Societal norms and expectations present a double edged sword for many female leaders.

In addition, it often takes females longer to gain entry to administrative positions due to personal or family commitments. The average number of years of teaching experience prior to becoming an administrator is several years more for females than for males (Marshall, 2002; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). The female subject of Fennell's life study (2008) reported that she had been teaching for twelve years before receiving any messages from supervisors about taking on leadership roles. Men tend to have plans with clear career goals and paths to advancement. Browne-Ferrigno (2003) states, "Men tend to pursue a more aggressive approach to career planning and advancement and take advantage of in-service courses more often than women" (p.496). Harris, Ballenger, and Jones (2007) suggest that men often enter the teaching force with their eyes on administration while women are committed to teaching for several years. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) state that women often report having no intention of moving into administration but step into the role because of their frustration with the state of education in their own districts, viewing their move as a sacrifice for service to children. They state, "Whether entering administration reluctantly or purposefully, these women equate the move into administration as necessary for making a difference" (p.89). This delay results in more teaching experience and instructional expertise, which is ultimately useful to female leaders.

Similarly, parenthood often impedes career advancement for women, but not usually for men. Mothers of young children realize that the demands of an administrative job create hardships for their families (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Harris, Ballenger, and Jones (2007) propose that a majority of women view their careers as secondary to their spouse's and also would not consider relocating because of their spouse. Women leaders may also spend more hours at work than their male counterparts. Grady, Curly, and Lacost (2008) indicate that women have difficulty delegating. While male leaders tend to depend on administrative assistants, female leaders tend to resist asking others to complete tasks that they are able to complete themselves. The work-life balance presents a significant challenge for women in administration. However, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) suggest that the need to manage households and care for family members has brought a dimension to women's leadership that may enhance performance. They can empathize with parents and with other teachers, who are often also working mothers. The work-life balance is possible but requires a significant support network for female leaders with family commitments. There must be continual renegotiation of tasks with a spouse and also acceptance of help from extended family and friends.

A major problem for women gaining entry into and succeeding in educational administration is the lack of adequate networks, positive role models, and support systems in general (Gupton and Slick, 1996; Marshall, 2002). Darling-Hammond (2007) suggests that few districts offer systematic mentoring to help new school leaders learn how to make sense of the complex job, juggling the many priorities, and learning to manage and lead adults. Unfortunately, women can become barriers for other women.

Funk (2002) uses the term “tall poppy syndrome” to describe the way that talented, assertive women are cut down by other women who do not want to see them succeed. This is also called horizontal violence, which includes sabotage by female peers (Slaton, 2008). Horizontal violence prevents the necessary networking and support needed by female school leaders. Conflicting attitudes about what it means to be female and what it means to be an administrator necessitate supportive relationships with veteran female administrators (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995). Same gender role models are crucial for women but not as critical for men. Shakeshaft states, “Women often cannot envision patterning themselves after men, either because they identify men’s behavior as ‘male’ and therefore incongruent with their ‘female’ self-images, or because male behavior seems inappropriate for them” (p.115). In addition to the scarcity of role models, the influence of gender on theory and research in educational administration cannot be ignored. Many theories exclude the female experience and the female voice, and many theories upon which the field of educational administration relies heavily are based on all male samples (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Shakeshaft, 1989; Young and Skrla, 2003). Lunenburg and Perreault (2002) propose that female school leaders rely less on scientific management and strategies for efficiency and more on communicating, walking through the school, and checking on things. It is difficult for female administrators to guide their work with theories generalized from a male perspective.

There are also differences in how male and female leaders allocate their time. Shakeshaft (1989) explains, “Although the activities that men and women undertake to fulfill their job responsibilities are primarily the same, there are some differences in the way they spend their time, in their day-to-day interactions, in the priorities that guide

their actions, in the perceptions of them by others, and in the satisfaction they derive from work” (p.170). She adds, “Women conduct more unscheduled meetings, monitor less, take fewer trips away from the building, and observe teachers more often” (p.170). In addition to the way they spend their day, the communication style of women is also different than that of men. Women administrators interact more frequently than men with teachers, parents, and students. They also exhibit a different style of interaction (Shakeshaft, 1989). A feminist culture includes a more collaborative environment with open communication and shared decision making (Curry, 2000). Shakeshaft (1989) states, “These differences in working conditions, in administrative style, and motivation mean that for women the work environment is qualitatively different than it is for men. This ‘altered’ environment combines with differences in leadership, communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution styles- all of which mold a feminine culture” (p.177). A feminine culture is in contrast to the traditional autocratic style of school leadership. Women need alternative models, beyond the traditional models of leadership.

### **Benefits of Female School Leadership**

Despite the challenges and barriers for women, trends toward collaborative school cultures and instructional leadership may work in favor of female school leaders. Gupton and Slick (1996) state, “Literature about reform efforts frequently references the need for leadership skills usually associated with women; systematic reform emphasizes team building, interconnectedness, group problem solving, and shared decision making- concepts and skills often associated with female leadership” (p.139). de Casal (2004) notes that research has associated women with leadership behaviors like nurturing and caring, focusing on relationships, using interpersonal skills, consensus, and negotiation

(p.26). de Casal states, “The communal leadership style (also called the democratic or transformational style) is usually associated with women. Communal attributes include qualities that demonstrate a concern for the welfare of other people, such as affection, helpfulness, kindness, sympathy, interpersonal sensitivity, nurturing , and gentle characteristics” (p.26). This leadership style is conducive to staff feeling a sense of ownership and loyalty.

Relational leadership is the term used by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) to describe leadership that is horizontal rather than hierarchical. Female leaders often prefer power *with* rather than power *over*, viewing power as something that increases as it is shared. This view of power stems from the high value women place on relationships. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) state, “Powers used to help others strengthens relationships, while power used to control damages relationships” (p.7). Women like to see themselves as working with those they lead. Blackburn (1999) uses the metaphor of female leaders acting as the center of the spokes of a wheel, rather than pulling the wagon. Developing a shared vision as they lead encourages collective movement toward goals. Women also value a more diverse collective. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) explain, “A diverse collective is generated in an organizational environment that encourages input, dissent, feedback, and ideas from both internal and external constituents” (p.65). When relationships flourish between the leader and staff and among staff members, robust conversations and innovative problem solving can occur.

Similarly, using integration as an approach to conflict promotes a positive culture and preserves the interests of all stakeholders. Integration is built on relationships and the valuing of diverse perspectives often associated with female leaders (Grogan &

Shakeshaft, 2011). Blackburn, Martin, and Hutchinson (2006) indicate that male principals whose conflict management style is dominating receive lower school culture scores in teacher collaboration, while female principals whose conflict management style was viewed as integrating receive higher school culture scores in professional development and collaboration.

In addition, accountability legislation requires a focus on instructional leadership, rather than a focus on administrative and managerial tasks. deCasal (2004) states, “The emphasis on instructional behavior may turn the tide in favor of women in leadership positions, since women, as a group, tend to have more years of teaching experience” (p.26). In addition to more years in teaching, women are also likely to work as curriculum coaches before entering administration. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) suggest that the changes women bring to their organizations most often relate to improvements in student learning. They state, “Women administrators are likely to introduce and support strong programs in staff development, to encourage innovation, and to experiment with instructional approaches” (p.18). This commitment to instruction is indicative of women’s desire to improve the educational experience for students.

Women often bring both a social-justice and a spiritual component to their leadership. The opportunity to help others is a major motivator as women move into school leadership and strive for improvement once an administrative position is attained. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) propose that women strive to create more equitable learning conditions for students, particularly those who have been least well served by the traditional system. They report improvements in student learning as necessary for job satisfaction. As they work for social justice, many female leaders also report a connection

to a higher power that enables them to do this work. They draw on their spirituality as a source of hope and connectedness to others (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). In addition, the ability to communicate this hope and passion to others propels their schools forward.

At this point in women's journey in school leadership, it may be more useful to examine how women lead, rather than emphasizing the differences between men and women. Identifying these paradigms and making them accessible and acceptable for all leaders will serve schools and children. Furthermore, Grady, Curley, and Lacost (2008) propose that the presence of female leaders is changing the behavior of male leaders, giving men license to behave in a much more caring way. Darling-Hammond (2007) suggests that factors associated with behaviors of female school leaders, such as providing support to staff, establishing a supportive culture, and establishing a participatory decision-making structure are strong predictors of organizational learning and also impact teacher motivation and empowerment. In addition, female leaders often bring several years of teaching experience and knowledge of effective instructional practices. Generalizing leadership theories based on research conducted with only male models deprives all leaders of alternate and highly effective representations of leadership. Including females in leadership research creates stronger and more accurate models. In my own research, I endeavored to deepen these models.

### **Women's Gender Identity**

In addition to the inappropriateness of generalizing leadership theories, the generalizability of classic psychological studies is an assumption that feminist researchers have attacked. Until recently, women have played only a minor role as theorists in the social sciences. Women have been missing even as research subjects at the formative

stages of our psychological theories (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1997). The researcher bias present in a field dominated almost exclusively by males cannot be ignored. Drawing on their own experiences and perspectives, men have constructed the prevailing theories, written history, and set values that have become the guiding principles for men and women alike. However, women have become empowered to question these findings. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) propose, “The omission of women from scientific studies is almost universally ignored when scientists draw conclusions from their findings and generalize what they have learned from the study of men to the lives of women” (p.6). Researchers, such as Gilligan (1993), advocate for studies that investigate women’s development and experience. Gilligan states, “As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. Yet in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection” (p.173). Women’s experiences are often either missing or distorted when interpreted by male researchers, and women’s experiences cannot be measured against male values.

The generalization of theories of development has raised questions from feminist researchers, such as Gilligan (1993). She explains, “The disparity between women’s experience and the representation of human development, noted throughout the psychological literature, has generally been seen to signify a problem in women’s development. Instead, the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of the human

condition, an omission of certain truths about life” (p.2). Major theorists, such as Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg, are addressed in Gilligan’s work. She finds, “The criticism that Freud makes of women’s sense of justice, seeing it as compromised in its refusal of blind impartiality, reappears in the work of Piaget and Kohlberg” (p.18). She also describes the omissions of Piaget’s work, “Piaget’s account of the moral judgment of the child scarcely mentions girls in an index that omits the word ‘boys’ altogether because ‘the child’ is assumed to be male” (p.18). Gilligan asserts that the omission of females is also present in Kohlberg’s work. His six stages that describe the development of moral judgment from childhood to adulthood are based empirically on a study of eighty-four boys (p.18). She also describes the tendency for women to appear developmentally inferior in Kohlberg’s work. Gilligan states, “Prominent among those who appear to be deficient in moral development when measured by Kohlberg’s scale are women, whose judgments seem to exemplify the third stage of his six stage sequence. At this stage morality is conceived in interpersonal terms and goodness is equated with helping and pleasing others” (p.18). Gilligan asserts that a concern with others, typical of females, is not a sign of inferior moral development.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) also support Gilligan’s argument that females are misrepresented by developmental theorists. They state, “Developmental theory has established men’s experience and competence as a baseline against which both men’s and women’s development is then judged, often to the detriment or misreading of women” (p.7). Gilligan suggests that the recognition of differences in children should also lead to a recognition of gender differences. She states, “As Freud and Piaget call our attention to the differences in children’s feelings and

thought, enabling us to respond to children with greater care and respect, so a recognition of the differences in women's experience and understanding expands our vision of maturity and points to the contextual nature of developmental truths" (p.174). Gilligan advocates for building a theory of development based explicitly on a deep understanding of women's experiences. If researchers begin with the study of women and derive developmental constructs from their lives, the outline of a moral conception different than that described by Freud, Piaget, or Kohlberg begins to emerge and informs a different theory of development (p.19). The experiences of women are validated by theories based on women's stories, told through their own voices.

In addition to theories of development, theories of motivation may not be generalizable to women. Shakeshaft (1989) argues that Maslow's hierarchy has a male bias. She describes, "Maslow definitely implies a value scale to the differing needs- that is, the self-esteem need is on a higher plane than the affiliation need, and the self-actualizing need is on a still higher level than the self-esteem level. This prepotency configuration matches traditional male values" (p.156). Women may have a different ultimate goal than self-actualization. Women's motivation may be based more on developing others than developing the self. Female school leaders focus on developing the school as a people-centered community formed through democratic decision making which ensures that the needs of all stakeholders are met (Smulyan, 2000). Women tend to operate under an ethic of care rather than a concern for their own power and prestige.

Just as there are differences in motivation, a difference in views regarding power exists between male and female leaders. Shakeshaft (1989) states, "Power means different things to men and women. A number of studies provide evidence that women

use power to empower others. This sharing of power is based on the notion that power is not finite, but rather it expands as it is shared” (p.206). Gilligan (1993) finds that women see an ugly side to power as it relates to winners and losers. She explains, “Conflicts expressed by women indicate a heightened perception of the other side of competitive success, that is the great emotional costs at which success achieved through competition is often gained- an understanding which, though confused, indicates some underlying sense that something is rotten in the state in which success is defined as being better than everyone else” (p.15). Shakeshaft (1989) sees these views on power as part of a larger concept of motivation. She proposes that females enter school leadership to be of service to people, to use professional skills for creative management, and to work with highly qualified and motivated people, whereas men choose such work to meet important people and to have high prestige (p.173). Gilligan (1993) also discusses power as part of a larger concept, the concept of morality. She explains, “Women’s deference is rooted not only in their social subordination, but also in the substance of their moral concern. Sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view” (p.16). Gilligan goes on to say, “Thus women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care” (p.17). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) look at power and morality through the eyes of female constructivists. They illustrate, “Women’s question posing when faced with moral conflict indicates a sensitivity to situation and context. Question posing is central to the constructivist way of knowing” (p.149). They continue, “Constructivist women aspire to work that contributes to the empowerment and

improvement in the quality of life of others” (p.152). Differing views of power and moral concerns cannot be ignored in leadership research.

Researchers’ examination of leadership and power require us to challenge the prevailing assumptions and create models based on the experiences of female leaders. However, context has a major impact on how women carry out their leadership roles (Smulyan, 2000). Community context dictates to some extent the style of leadership employed by a principal. There is a negotiation between a female leader’s personal preferences and the context in which she works. Christman and McClellan (2008) indicate that gender identity and leadership cannot neatly fit into one gender construction model or another. The successful women leaders they studied chose different gender norms depending on the situation. Therefore, these researchers propose a multi-dimensional-gendered leadership model. Smulyan (2000) suggests that sometimes the interactions of female administrators are adaptive and at other times they challenge the status quo. Perhaps in addition to models based on female experiences, there also needs to be more examination into why the behaviors of leaders of different genders are sometimes dichotomous and sometimes overlap. A challenge for both male and female leaders is a transition in professional roles.

### **Professional Role Identity and Role Transitions**

**Defining Role and Role Transition.** The term *role* has been defined by structuralists as a set of behavioral expectations associated with a position in the social structure, largely determined by function. Symbolic interactionists define role as an emergent and negotiated understanding between individuals, based on perceptions and preferences (Ashforth, 2001). Both definitions are correct and are compatible. Roles are

generally defined by institutions, but their meaning and the way a person enacts the role is negotiated socially and within the constraints of the structure.

A role transition occurs when a person moves from one role to another. The transition to a new role happens in a predictable course. Ashforth (2001) identifies three phases in role transitions: rites of separation (unfreezing), which facilitate role exit; rites of transition (movement), which facilitate the journey between roles; rites of incorporation (refreezing), which facilitate entry into the new role (p.11). Therefore, females making the transition from teacher to administrator must first exit from the role of teacher before transitioning into the role of administrator.

**Psychological Motives and Role Transitions.** Four psychological motives are involved in unfreezing from a familiar role and refreezing into a less familiar role: identity, meaning, control, and belonging (Ashforth, 2001). Upon transitioning to a new role, newcomers develop identity by learning more about the role and their articulation of it. A transition from a teaching role into an administrative role requires a shift in one's professional role identity. Chreim, Williams, and Hinings (2007) describe professional role identity as the goals, values, beliefs, norms, and interaction styles that one associates with a role. It is the definition of self-in role (p.1515). Chreim, Williams, and Hinings (2007) state, "The way that professionals view their role identity is central in how they interpret and act in work situations" (p.1515). Curry(2000) also highlights the development of a professional role identity. Curry suggests that the development of a professional role identity is a necessary component of becoming situated in an administrative role. Although identity is made up of many different aspects, Curry describes the need for a professional persona, an aspect of identity designed to function

within individually set parameters. She states, “Constructions of professional identity are less ways of being to aspire to than they are qualitative aspects of individuals’ identities that ultimately influence the ways in which leader roles are managed” (p.16). Although role changes may initiate personal development as individuals try to alter identity-related attributes, research indicates that role and identity evolve interactively (Chreim, Williams, and Hinings, 2007). Therefore, as a new administrator comes to know her role better, she also comes to know herself better.

A shift into a leadership role requires self-awareness. New leaders must find a way to integrate what they already know about themselves with what they are coming to know about themselves as leaders. Curry states, “Belief in the importance of knowing oneself as one ascends to a leadership position is nearly universal. Few people would argue that individuals who are mired in anxieties regarding basic self-knowledge have the ego strength to sustain themselves in a leadership position” (p.17). Self-esteem is necessary for entry into a leadership role, and high self-esteem also enables leaders to express their individual identities within a new role (Ashforth, 2001). Shakeshaft (1989) argues that women may lack self-esteem in public roles because society has not encouraged them to participate in these roles. Therefore, developing a leadership persona may be a challenge for women. Developing a leadership persona requires self-knowledge and also knowledge of exemplary role occupants, those who have been successful in the role. Self-enhancement is part of identity development. It involves experiencing a sense of growth or progress, more closely mirroring the exemplary role occupants. Therefore, mentoring is an essential component for the successful transition from teacher to administrator.

Meaningfulness refers to a sense of purpose and significance associated with a role (Ashforth, 2001). Curry (2000) describes meaning-making within the development of leadership personas:

Leadership personas emerge from our individual psychology and are unique.

They are part of our developmental experiences. In the study of leadership, we observe the extension of meaning-making to making sense of continually changing circumstances (social contexts) and to behavior. Consequently, prescriptions for leading are limited. Effective leadership is not as simple as following several rules for getting people to work well together. Rather, it is likely to be as intricate as the meaning systems we spend considerable parts of our conscious and subconscious lives fashioning. Indeed, effective leadership is part of the identity that makes up the individual, and it evolves within the developmental process (p.21).

Individual meaning-making is a process and is impacted by unforeseen challenges in the new role. Included in the motive for meaning is a need to make sense of the role.

Ambiguity and surprise are challenges to sense-making. Consequently, ambiguity and surprise are considerable challenges for new assistant principals.

The motive for control refers to attempts to influence the environment, encompassing autonomy, participation, and power. According to Ashforth (2001), “The need or motive for control underlies many perspectives on organizational behavior, from motivation to newcomer adjustment, and from power and politics to stress and burnout” (p.68). Control may not be desired by new female administrators, or they may lack the ability or resources to skillfully wield it. Control over their own schedules and time is a

challenge for many new administrators. They must learn to adeptly exert control in order to successfully transition from teacher to administrator.

The desire to belong, or experience authentic interpersonal interactions, is a basic psychological need. According to Ashforth (2001), “Personalized Belonging refers to the sense of attachment that an individual derives from knowing that one or more others are familiar with and like her as an individual” (p.70). Many new assistant principals experience difficulty leaving a close group of teacher peers to become the only one in an assistant principal role at a school site. In addition, Ashforth (2001) argues that one’s sense of self within a new role is largely grounded in the perceptions of others. This is particularly true for women, who often define themselves in terms of their relationships. Hierarchical ranks, physical proximity, and task interdependence all affect personalized belonging. Depersonalized belonging refers to the social identity a group of people share. Networking opportunities among assistant principals support this type of belonging. These psychological motives are integral to the transition from teacher to administrator.

**Unfreezing- Exiting the Teaching Role.** The path of voluntary role exit may start with some doubts regarding one’s ability or desire to take on a new role. These doubts are either socially validated or invalidated. Then, the pro’s and con’s of leaving are weighed, and finally, a decision is made to exit a role in pursuit of a new one. Career mobility is socially constructed, although individual differences and organizational context heavily influence the process. Riehl and Byrd (1997) describe three broad sources of influence on the process of role transition and career development. The first consists of a person’s individual characteristics, including values, ambitions, abilities, and concurrent responsibilities. The second includes the organizational context, incorporating

recruitment policies, screening procedures, hiring practices, and role models. The third source encompasses the larger social context, including labor market patterns, gender stereotypes, and political and legal initiatives (p.46). Gender impacts all three sources: individual characteristics, organizational norms, and societal expectations.

The stronger one's identification with the previous role and the stronger one's cohesion with the role set, the more likely one will experience a deep loss upon the exit (Ashforth, 2001). Females often teach for several years before moving to administrative roles, possibly resulting in a difficult exit from teaching. The physical act of leaving does not complete the process of exiting. A new administrator must reconcile what the teaching role meant to her, what portions of the teacher identity she should retain, and how much she should emphasize her teaching past to others. Self-esteem, optimism, and social support are all advantageous during the unfreezing (Ashforth, 2001). Individual traits greatly impact both the exit from a teaching role and the development of leadership personas. In addition to self-esteem, the need for achievement, reaction to stress, and affectivity influence successful transition and development of the leadership persona (Ashforth, 2001). Illustrating this point, emerging women leaders who participated in deCasal's study (2004) identified determination, fairness, intelligence, and confidence as the characteristics necessary for new leaders. Therefore, a successful transition into a leadership role is dependent on the traits and experiences an individual brings into the new role.

**Moving- Entering the Administrative Role.** It takes time to learn the expected behaviors, attitudes, and even emotions that characterize a role. Developing a role identity often entails adopting a transitional identity, a partially formed understanding of

the role and of self-in-role. Rites of passage assist with role exit and may also facilitate this transitional identity. The purpose of these rites is to signal a change to both self and others. Changes in clothing or setting are rites of passage. Putting on a suit and moving to the front office are noticeable aspects of the transition from teacher to school administrator. Professional development programs specific to newcomers are also rites of passage. According to Ashforth (2001), “A key concept affecting role transitions is the contrast between the exited role and the entered role” (p.28). In addition, voluntarily moving into a desirable role causes one to enter with high, occasionally unrealistic, expectations. The discrepancy between ones expectations and reality may promote a sense of “entry shock” (Ashforth, 2001). Teachers who have been out of the classroom in resource positions or who have had many informal leadership responsibilities may find less contrast between their old and new roles, and thus, experience a less perplexing transition.

**Refreezing- Becoming Situated in the Administrative Role.** Role transitions bring about a move toward normalization. Normalization is rendering the new and intimidating more or less ordinary (Ashforth, 2001). Role complexity, ambiguity, and overload are challenges to normalization, while the support of peers and mentors facilitates normalization. The assistant principal role is fraught with complexity, ambiguity, and overload, and formal mentoring programs are uncommon in most districts. Two adjustment processes are necessary in the path toward normalization: role innovation and personal change (Ashforth, 2001). Role innovation consists of moulding the new role to suit the person, also known as accommodation. Personal change consists of altering daily routines, habits, relationships, and even self-image. Personal change is

also known as assimilation. These adjustment processes may be seen as a compromise between the demands of the person and the requirements of the organization.

Often, behaviors precede affect and cognition in a new role. Simulating the behavior of an exemplar model in the role expedites normalization. According to Ashforth (2001), “The act of *doing* the role necessarily engages one psychologically such that one is simultaneously *thinking* about and *feeling* the role” (p.213). Social validation also accelerates normalization. However, only observable behaviors can be validated. Values, attitudes, and beliefs can only be inferred. New administrators may act, think, and feel their way into the new role, personalizing the role within the parameters of the institution. Thus, the professional role identity is a melding of personal traits, individual preferences, organizational demands, and context. Context cannot be ignored, but the essence of females making this role transition from teacher to administrator is a phenomenon ripe for research.

### **Feminist Phenomenology**

Although there are many overlapping beliefs that influence the study of female leaders, phenomenology provides one perspective. Phenomenology is concerned with the collective reality of all persons who experience a phenomenon. It aims at gaining a better understanding of the experience. Specifically, phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal meaning structures of lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is concerned with both the concreteness and the essential nature of an experience (Van Manen, 1990). It is largely based on the work of Edmund Husserl. Husserl argued that scientific theories gradually arise out of practical life and that there is no stagnant world, only relative normality or anormality (Zahavi, 2003). Van Manen

(1990) describes the phenomenological connection of theory and practice. He states, “Theory enlightens practice. Practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as the result of reflection” (p.15). One outcome of a phenomenological study is a good phenomenological description which is validated by lived experience and validates lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). The complex phenomenon of moving from a teaching role to an administrative role can be understood more fully through a phenomenological approach.

It is important to note the impossibility of uncovering the immediate and natural essence of the phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) explains, “All recollections of experiences, recollections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about those experiences are already transformations of those experiences” (p.54). A person cannot reflect on an experience while living it. Therefore, phenomenological reflection is retrospective. Likewise, subjectivity is not a concern of phenomenologists. Transcendental phenomenologist C. Mouktasas focused on the concept of epoche (or bracketing) in which researchers set aside their own perspective in order to get a fresh view of participants’ experiences (Fisher & Embree, 2000). However, the orientation of the researcher is an important part of phenomenological research. My deep interest and experience with the transition from teacher to administrator allowed me to be construct meaning with participants. According to Van Manen (1990), “To be aware of the structure of one’s own experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all other stages of phenomenological research” (p.57). It also allows me to persist through the difficult work of phenomenological research, in which

the researcher is the research instrument (Janesick, 2004). The researcher reflective journal facilitates the growth and development of the researcher. Janesick advises using the researcher reflective journal to further develop the researcher's skills. She states, "For the qualitative researcher, the meditative focus of journal writing can only help refine the researcher as research instrument" (p. 95). Journal writing keeps the researcher in tune with the lived experience central to qualitative research. The sensitivity to participants and reflection required of phenomenological research requires great interest in the phenomenon being studied.

The study of female leaders is also influenced by the feminist perspective. Feminist researchers view gender as a lens through which school leaders make meaning of their work and lives. Young and Skrla (2003) explain, "Researchers of gender and educational leadership have centered women in their work and have explored the characteristics of women leaders and the institutional and professional cultures within which they work" (p.1). Researchers use a feminist lens to correct both the invisibility and the distortion historically present in male researchers' interpretations of the female experience (Reinhartz, 1992). Feminist theory's foundation is the notion that gender is a legitimate category for analysis (Young & Skrla, 2003). Feminism adds to research in educational leadership by considering the dimension of gender.

Gendered identity develops as females interact with others in their surroundings. Many attributes of the female gender are socially constructed rather than biological. The repeated acts of girls are either in resistance to or in compliance with social expectations, and the results are acceptance or rejection by others (Young & Skrla, 2003). By the age of five, children have learned gender-role stereotypes that dictate appropriate behavior

and traits, and parents can either encourage or discourage a child to consider or dispell these stereotypes. Dominance, submissiveness, and helplessness fall within gender stereotypes, as does occupational choice (Wojtalik et al, 2007). Feminist theory suggests that a woman's perceived field of educational and occupational options is limited by gender stereotypes (Shakeshaft, 1989). This study will add to the understanding of female leaders' path to school leadership and gendered identity.

The history of feminism is regularly described as three waves. The first wave happened during the nineteenth century when women struggled against exclusion from political and economic life. The second wave concentrated on issues that impacted women's lives, such as reproduction, motherhood, and sexual violence. The use of feminist methods in social research during the 1970's, or the second wave, was a radical step. Up to this point in history, most social research was based on the male experience, and researchers rarely studied women exclusively (Reinharz, 1992). According to Reinharz (1992), during the third wave, social researchers struggle for "the right to be producers of knowledge without being trapped into patriarchal ways of knowing" (p.17). The early third wave has seen a focus on the politics of the individual, but recently, there has been a shift toward cultural analyses. Third wave feminist researchers have also been opposed to overly essentialist views of feminism (Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2007). Contemporary feminists have opened some alternate spaces that allow for differences among females.

Feminist researchers have sometimes represented women as a whole, unified group. Third wave feminists have objected to the exclusive tendencies within the feminist theories of the second wave (Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2007). Overly essentialist

research suggests that the problems of all women are similar (Young & Skrla, 2003). The impact of culture on women's lives and the impact of context on their behavior cannot be ignored. For example, Haar and Robicheau (2009) suggest that educational researchers focus on women of color as leaders of positive, multi-cultural learning environments. Intersections of race and socioeconomic status with gender are important facets of modern feminist research.

Fisher and Embree (2000) suggest that feminism and phenomenology are complimentary approaches in qualitative research. They state, "Feminism can look to phenomenology in seeking an articulated framework for experiential accounts as well as a mode of expression for the issues of sexual difference and specificity that lie at the core of feminism" (p.34). While phenomenology is viewed primarily as a philosophical movement, its influence on methodology has become apparent (Fisher and Embree, 2000). Data gathering using a phenomenological perspective requires an open ended qualitative approach that enables the researcher to adequately understand the phenomenon. A feminist view can accompany many methods used in social research. However, interviewing as a research method is the principal means for data gathering by both feminists and phenomenologists (Reinartz, 1992). A feminist lens combined with a phenomenological approach facilitates an understanding of the transformation that women go through as they move from the role of teacher to that of administrator.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

As previously stated, women are underrepresented in educational leadership research. Some researchers have examined women's historical struggle to arrive at school leadership positions. However, the transformation of females making this change in

professional roles is less of a focus in leadership literature. Curry (2000) explains, “Considerations of leadership have been lacking in two ways. They have not focused on the phenomenological aspect, including such developmental experiences as the intrapsychic aspects of the individual’s ascendency to a leader position through the construction of a leader persona, and they have not substantively included the experiences of women” (p.18). Since females have a unique outlook on school leadership, it is important to provide opportunities for them to voice their perspectives on the transition from teacher to school administrator.

The concepts of role identity and role transition have been extensively studied in the medical and business worlds, but this research is less evident in educational settings. For example, Asheworth (2001) provides several examples of the transitions medical students experience as they move from student to resident but no examples of educators as they move from intern to teacher or from teacher to administrator. Role identity research indicates that changing from one role to another does not happen in a discrete step, rather it is a process which requires bridging the disengagement of one role with the engagement of another. Research about this process must include educators as they move into new roles.

Although context cannot be ignored, there are some challenges common to many women undergoing the transformation from teacher to leader. Illuminating these challenges will assist future female school leaders as they experience their own transformations. Early-career administrators may find that their experiences do not fit neatly into the models they were exposed to in university preparation programs. The

personal experiences and insights of those who have traveled the path may create a realistic preview of what is to come.

### **Summary of this Chapter**

Although the number of women administrators has increased over the past two decades, many internal and external barriers to obtaining and succeeding in school leadership positions still exist. Some of these barriers are relevant to all early-career administrators, such as role ambiguity, role conflict, and overload. Other barriers are specific to women in leadership. These barriers include androcentric assumptions, family commitments, and lack of support systems. In addition, leadership theories and psychological theories based on men's experiences and generalized to women are not useful models for female school leaders. Socialization into administrative roles is rooted in cultural contexts, which have changed over time. Therefore, we must continue to examine how female leaders think about their professional lives.

Transitioning from the role of teacher to the role of administrator requires a transformation of professional role identity. The transformation requires leaving the comfort of the familiar teacher role to the discomfort of an unknown role, that of school leader. The transformation also necessitates the development of a leadership persona. Development of a leadership persona requires self-awareness and is context dependent. It is impacted by individual traits, such as self-esteem, self-awareness, the need for achievement, and reaction to stress. Individual meaning making is also pertinent to the development of a leadership persona. This is the phenomenological aspect of the transformation. The transformation is a process, rather than a discrete step. The process

includes unfreezing (exiting the teaching role), moving (entering the administrative role), and refreezing (becoming situated in the administrative role).

Phenomenology and feminism provide the theoretical framework for understanding the transition from teacher to administrator for female school leaders. Feminism is concerned with giving a voice to women, whose voices have historically been silenced or distorted. Phenomenology is concerned with the collective understanding of the female leaders going through the phenomenon of a transition in professional roles. The success of this transformation impacts the success of women leading schools. Understanding the professional lives of female school leaders requires research methods that allow women's own voices to be heard. Although some researchers have analyzed survey results to better understand gender differences in school leadership, these studies have not yielded the rich data revealed by case studies and interviews.

In the next chapter, I explain the methods I used in describing the transition from teacher to administrator for female school leaders. I also detail the methodology governing my choice and use of methods. Feminism and phenomenology constitute the theoretical perspective that lies behind the methodology. In addition, I describe my role as a researcher as well as ethical issues related to the study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods Used in this Study**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to describe and explain selected female leaders' perspectives on the transition from teacher to school administrator. The exploratory questions that guided this study were:

1. What elements constitute the perspective of the participants?
2. What variables influence women's perspectives as they make the transition from teacher to administrator?
3. What barriers and challenges do women encounter as they move from teacher to administrator?
4. What variables contribute to resiliency and agency for female administrators?

In this chapter, I explain the methods I used for collecting and analyzing data pertaining to the transition from teacher to administrator for female school leaders. I also detail the methodology governing my choice and use of methods. Feminism and phenomenology constitute the theoretical perspective that lies behind the methodology. In addition, I will describe my role as a researcher as well as ethical issues related to the study.

#### **Research Techniques for this Study**

In this study, I endeavored to describe and explain selected women's perspectives on the transition from teacher to leader. The notion of describing and explaining rather

than identifying cause and effect indicates a qualitative approach to inquiry (Janesick, 2004; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative techniques are utilized when we need a complex, detailed understanding of an issue that is best established by talking directly with people. Qualitative research in general is also used to empower individuals to share their stories, stories which show individual differences in a way that quantitative measures cannot. In addition to individual differences, qualitative research brings sensitivity to issues of race, gender, and economic status. According to Janesick (2004), characteristics of qualitative work include:

- Holistic in its attempt to see the complete picture and context
- Concerned with relationships within a system
- Personal in its face-to-face interactions within a setting
- Focused in its attempt to understand the social setting
- Involved with equal time in analysis and in the field
- Comprised of researcher as research instrument
- Concerned with ethical issues in fieldwork

My choice of qualitative techniques is based on my assumptions and beliefs. I believe that the topic I have chosen cannot be explained easily or simply. The phenomenological aspect of this study requires that the research act is situated in the natural life world of the participants. Van Manen (1990) suggests that the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence. This requires gathering participants' experiences and reflections on their experiences, conducting thematic analysis of participants' responses, considering the researcher's own reflections on the research process, and communicating about the phenomenon and its meaning to others. A

qualitative, phenomenological interview approach, yielding complex and rich data, is the best way to explore the perspectives of females making the transition from teacher to administrator.

**Interviews.** Interviewing is well-suited for a feminist phenomenological study, and it is the primary method I used for data collection. Janesick (2004) states, “Interviewing is a meeting of two persons to exchange information or ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic” (p. 72). An interview allows the researcher to enter another person’s perspective and to discover both a factual and a meaning level (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Patton, 2002). Van Manen (1990) describes two purposes served by the interview:

(1) It may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon.

(2) The interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (p.66).

Gathering data through the process of interviewing is like borrowing participants’ experiences, allowing the researcher to better understand the essential nature of the phenomenon.

Skilled interviewers make participants feel at ease, allowing them to act naturally and speak freely. Requiring participants to become aware of and communicate about their experiences may initially hamper that taken-for-granted relation to voice and body, resulting in awkwardness (Van Manen, 1990). Drawing participants in as conversational

partners who co-construct meaning with the researcher allows them to forget that awkwardness and become immersed in the interview. Skilled interviewers elicit specific, descriptive responses and also read between the lines to formulate the implicit message. This message can be related back to the participant to seek immediate confirmation or clarification (Janesick, 2004; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe twelve aspects of a qualitative interview from a phenomenological perspective (p.28). Those twelve aspects are outlined in the table below.

Table 1

Summary of Kvale and Brinkmann's 12 Aspects

Kvale and Brinkmann's 12 Aspects	How These Aspects Relate to the Qualitative Interview in a Phenomenological Study
Life World	Topic of interview is the everyday lived world of the interviewee
Meaning	Interview seeks to find meaning in central themes of subject's life world
Qualitative	Interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language
Descriptive	Interview seeks to obtain open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of subject's life world
Specificity	Descriptions of specific situations, not general opinions, are elicited
Deliberate Naiveté	Interviewer is open to new and unexpected phenomena rather than having predetermined categories and schemes of interpretation
Focused	Interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured nor completely nondirective
Ambiguity	Statements of interviewees may sometimes be ambiguous, reflecting contradictions
Change	The interview process may cause the interviewee to have new insights or change her descriptions or meanings
Sensitivity	Different interviewers can elicit different responses on the same themes, depending on their sensitivity to and knowledge of the topic
Interpersonal Situation	Knowledge obtained is produced through interpersonal interaction in an interview
Positive Experience	A well carried out interview can be an enriching experience for the interviewee, who may gain new insights into her own life

Being mindful of these twelve aspects, I was able to elicit in depth responses about the lived experiences of participants. Interviewing allowed me to collect rich data on the transition from teacher to administrator.

Janesick (2004) emphasizes preparation for effective interviewing. She suggests preparing as many questions as possible prior to the interview. Similarly, Van Manen (1990) emphasizes that the interview must be a disciplined process which is focused on the fundamental questions guiding the study. It is easy to get diverted in an interview; so preparing a protocol is necessary. The protocol for interviews (see Appendix C) was developed from the review of relevant literature and used in a pilot study with one female early career administrator. The planned questions and possible follow-up questions for the interviews were:

1. What was your path to your current position?
  - a. Possible follow-up question (PFQ): Did you always intend to be a school administrator? (Fennell, 2008; Shakeshaft, 1989)
  - b. PFQ: What led you to pursue school administration?
2. What are the tensions you experienced moving from teacher to administrator? (Curry, 2000; Hudak, 2001)
  - a. PFQ: Which of these tensions may be specific to women in school administration? (Shakeshaft, 1989; Smulyan, 2000)
  - b. PFQ: How do you think your experiences differ from others'?
3. Who were the mentors or peers who assisted you in dealing with the transition and how did they help? (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Slaton, 2008)

- a. Were these mentors formally assigned to you or did you have an informal relationship?
  - b. Did the gender of these mentors have any impact on the mentoring relationship? If so, in what ways?
4. What does your work mean to you? (Daresh, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2002)
- a. PFQ: What do you like most about your job?
  - b. PFQ: What do you dislike most about your job?
  - c. PFQ: What characteristics/behaviors help you succeed as a school administrator? (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gupton & Slick, 1996)
5. What advice would you give to a new female administrator making the transition from a teaching role? (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gupton & Slick, 1996)
- a. PFQ: What do you wish you had known before making the transition?
  - b. PFQ: How would knowing this ease the transition?
6. Where do you see yourself five years from now? (Harris, Ballinger & Jones, 2007)
- a. PFQ: What will you do to prepare for that future role?
  - b. PFQ: How do you think your path to that role may be different than others?
  - c. PFQ: Do you foresee your path differing in any way from a male with similar aspirations?

7. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?

Probing questions were also used to delve more deeply into participant's responses. Probing questions came naturally during the conversation. Additional follow-up questions were garnered from analysis of each participant's interview data and used during the second round of interviews.

While preparation is vital for effective interviewing, there must be room to explore topics introduced by the participants through clarifying and probing questions. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) refer to this as a semi-structured interview. They suggest that the interviewer's judgment and tact determine how closely to stick to the guide and how much to follow up on the interviewee's responses and any new directions they may reveal (p.130). Semi-structured interviews allow the planned questions to be flexibly worded and the order changed as needed during the interview. My plan for the interviews most closely resembled Rubin and Rubin's (2005) river and channel pattern. I wanted to explore female's perspectives on the transition from teacher to administrator in great detail, focusing on depth rather than breadth of topics.

Selecting articulate, honest, and candid participants was imperative to successful data gathering through these interviews. I encouraged participants to be specific and concrete whenever possible. Their personal life stories helped me to explore the phenomenon to its fullest. Pauses and silence during the interviews often prompted further response. I used the Sony IC Recorder to record the audio during interviews, and I sent the audio files to a transcription service. Some participants seemed initially aware of the recorder, but once the discussion got going, they seemed to take no notice of it. Participants were able to examine all of these documents for accuracy. Member checks

(see Appendix D) were used to ensure an accurate portrayal of participants' stories and experiences. My member check form was based on Janesick's sample (2004, p.227). In addition, I took notes on the physical space and on participants' nonverbal cues while in the field. In addition, I used my researcher reflective journal to record my thoughts after each interview concluded.

**Participant Selection.** Purposeful sampling was used to intentionally select only those who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). In this case, I deliberately selected female early-career administrators in elementary schools who met the following criteria:

1. Participants must be female school administrators (likely assistant principals) who have been in their current position for three years or less.
2. Participants must be willing to be in the study.
3. Participants must be employed outside of the county in which I work.

I selected participants who would be conversational partners. Rubin and Rubin (2005) use the term conversational partner to empower participants in an interview study. They suggest that this term emphasizes the uniqueness of each participant, her distinct knowledge, and the distinct way she interacts with the researcher (p.14). In a feminist study, it is particularly important to empower participants so that each feels free to share her own story in her own voice.

Contacts in two central Florida counties each recommended possible participants who fit the criteria for selection. Meriam (2009) refers to this as network sampling. I sent letters via e-mail to each possible participant to explain the study and determine their interest in participating (see Appendix A). After choosing five of these recommended

participants, the next step was to obtain informed consent (see Appendix B). Initial interviews were scheduled over the phone with each participant. Each interview was conducted at the individual participant's work sites, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. As previously stated, I used the Sony IC Recorder to record interviews, and sent the audio files to a transcription service.

**Analytical Techniques for this Study.** Janesick (2004) advises that time in the field requires equal time in analysis. I began the analysis process with my own researcher reflective journal. Keeping a researcher reflective journal allowed me to record my thoughts after each interview and provided transparency for myself as researcher. Journaling provided a way to make my internal dialogue about my research explicit for myself and others. The journal served to provide a data set of my reflection on the research act, to refine my ideas, and to gain an opportunity for triangulation of data sets at multiple levels (p.143). In addition to my researcher reflective journal, I took notes while in the field. These notes included observations about the physical space and the participants' nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions.

Next, I analyzed each interview transcript for major and minor categories, or themes (Janesick, 2004). According to Van Manen (1990), "Theme analysis refers to the process of recovering the themes that are embodied or dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (p.78). The concept of theme is simply a way of gaining control over our research and writing. Theme is a means to get to the meaning, but is always a reduction of the meaning. Van Manen adds, "Themes are like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain life experiences are spun and thus lived as meaningful wholes" (p.90). Van Manen (1990) differentiates between incidental and

essential themes. Janesick (2004) differentiates between major and minor categories. Both of these qualitative researchers communicate the need to identify those central elements that are fundamental aspects of the phenomenon. In analysis, it is necessary to be mindful of the transcript as a whole, even when pulling out pieces by theme. In addition, both researcher and participants have input into preliminary themes as meaning is co-constructed by the conversational partners.

Analysis is an on-going process rather than a one-time task (Janesick, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest the following sequence for phenomenological interviews and analysis described in the table below.

Table 2

Kvale and Brinkmann's Steps for Interview Analysis

Step	Who	What	When
1	Participant	Describes her life world by describing what she experiences, feels, and does in relation to a topic	During the interview
2	Participant	Discovers new meanings based on her descriptions and responses, free of interpretation from the interviewer	During the interview
3	Interviewer	Condenses and interprets the meaning of what the participant describes and verbally sends the meaning back to the participant	During the interview
4	Interviewer	Listens to the recorded interview and reads the transcript several times, focusing on units of meaning or themes	After the interview
5	Interviewer	Reinterviews to give meaning back to the participant and allow her to elaborate or correct any misunderstandings	After the initial interview and analysis
6	Interviewer and Participant	Act on new insights or encourage collective action in a larger social setting	After the interview

After the initial interviews were transcribed, I sent the transcripts to participants so that they could verify the accuracy of the information (Janesick, 2004). I continued the

process of member checking by asking participants to give feedback on my emerging findings. I based my second round of interviews on my analysis from the first round and continued with member checks. Throughout the process, I analyzed my researcher reflective journal, participant responses, and any relevant documents collected in the field (documents from participants, including resumes, e-mails, or any other pertinent documents participants shared). I compiled these essential meanings to communicate the stories of the transition from teacher to leader for these women.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A qualitative study involves a relationship between the researcher and participant. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), “As part of the developing relationship with the conversational partner, the researcher takes on deep ethical obligations” (p.34). Included in these obligations are kindness, integrity, and accuracy. Although Rubin and Rubin view the relationship as a partnership, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) acknowledge an asymmetry of power between the interviewer and interviewee. They cite the specific knowledge and competence regarding the topic of the study, the researcher’s goal in the dialogue, and the hidden agenda of the researcher as possible sources of power (p.33). An imbalance of power requires that the researcher uses care to make the participants feel safe and comfortable. Merriam (1998) also acknowledges the risks to interviewees. She states, “Respondents may feel that their privacy has been invaded, they may be embarrassed by certain questions, and they may tell things they never intended to reveal” (p.214). Member checks and assurance of confidentiality may help quell participants’ fears. Merriam also acknowledges the benefits to participants. She cites the enjoyment of sharing knowledge, experiences, and opinions as well as the insight into valuable self-

knowledge (p.214). Van Manen (1990) suggests that the outcome of benefit or harm depends on the skill of the researcher. He states, “Intense conversational interviews may lead to new levels of self-awareness, possible changes in life-style, and shifting priorities in living. But, if done badly, these methods may instead lead to feelings of anger, disgust, defeat, intolerance, and insensitivity” (p.163). Researcher awareness of these potential ethical problems may prevent many of them. I considered all steps in this research process in light of the wellbeing of participants and strived to avoid any possible harm to participants.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe three ethical areas of concern: informed consent, confidentiality, and consequences. Informed consent means that participants are informed in advance of anything that might influence their willingness to participate. Confidentiality requires changing the names of participants and their schools. As previously stated, consequences refers to minimizing risk and providing benefits to the participants. My informed consent form (see Appendix B) was derived from Janesick’s example (2004, p.226). It states that I am conducting the study for educational purposes and that participants may withdraw at any time. It also states that all information will remain confidential and anonymous and that participants may see the data or writing at any time. I took all possible preventative measures and was prepared to analyze any ethical concerns that arose.

### **Theoretical Framework for the Methods in this Study**

According to Janesick (2004), qualitative researchers are obligated to fully disclose their theoretical postures at all stages of the research process. She also suggests that formulating a good question or problem is the essence of creative work (p. 9). Van

Manen (1990) adds, “To orient oneself to a phenomenon always implies a particular interest, vantage point, or station in life” (p.40). Like many doctoral students, I found myself captivated by questions. For me, these questions centered on the struggles and successes of female school leaders. The fact that these particular questions were intriguing to me already pointed to a theoretical stance. The examination of one’s theoretical stance must begin with one’s notion of reality. According to Merriam (1998), reality in positivist research is seen as stable, observable, and measurable. In contrast, reality in interpretive research is constructed socially by individuals based on their lived experiences (p.4). When I gathered thorough descriptions of my participants’ experiences and perceptions, I relied on their recollections and reflections, indicative of an interpretive stance.

The phenomenological aspect of this study falls under the umbrella of interpretive research. Phenomenology is concerned with the collective reality of all persons who experience a phenomenon (in this case, the transition from teacher to school leader) and seeks to reveal essential understandings of those persons (Cresswell, 2007). It is largely based on the work of Edmund Husserl. Husserl argued that scientific theories gradually arise out of practical life and that there is no stagnant world, only relative normality or anormality (Zahavi, 2003). To do phenomenological research is to question the way we experience the world, as it is always situated in lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Using this theoretical stance, the researcher constructs a rich description of the experiences of the participants and their perceptions of the phenomenon. The fact that I experienced this phenomenon, the transition from teacher to administrator, myself helped orient me to the experiences of the participants. Van Manen explains, “It is to the extent

that *my* experiences might be *our* experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware” (p.57). Using a phenomenological lens will help me gain a deeper understanding of the transition from teacher to leader.

Feminist researchers view gender as a lens through which school leaders make meaning of their work and lives. Researchers use a feminist lens to correct both the invisibility and the distortion historically present in male researchers’ interpretations of the female experience (Reinhartz, 1992). Feminist theory’s foundation is the notion that gender is a legitimate category for analysis (Young & Skrla, 2003). Phenomenological and feminist research both suggest an action orientation, with the aspiration of bettering the lives of the people being studied. There are many challenges common to women experiencing the transition from teacher to school administrator. In general, some challenges experienced by female school administrators differ from those of their male colleagues. This study represents an attempt to describe the experiences of women and contribute to the archive of feminist knowledge as it relates to school leadership.

### **Role of the Researcher**

When utilizing qualitative techniques, the researcher becomes the primary research instrument (Janesick, 2004). Qualitative researchers are constantly interpreting the data, looking for the meaning, and trying to elicit rich, detailed responses from participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I recorded my thoughts and experiences during all phases of the study in my researcher reflective journal. Janesick (2004) suggests keeping a researcher reflective journal to provide transparency for myself as researcher. I began my journal during the writing of this proposal, and my journal will be a continuing record of my reflection on the research act. My journal entries were aligned with the types of

reflection noted by Piantanida and Garman (1999). Reflection as recollection assisted me as I recorded specific details about my contact with participants. Reflection as introspection was revealed as I recorded my own thoughts and meaning making throughout the study. Conceptual reflection helped me marry my recollections and introspections with the broader theoretical concepts relevant to the study.

To begin, I scheduled interviews with each participant at the school sites where the participants work in order to achieve a greater understanding of their work lives. I used the Sony IC Recorder to record audio during the interviews. I also took field notes during the interviews and collected documents from participants, such as resumes, e-mails, and other documents they wished to share. Rather than transcribing the interviews myself, I utilized the CastingWords transcription service. I used this service previously during the pilot study. I shared transcripts with interviewees as a check for accuracy and to allow them to clarify as needed. Janesick (2004) suggests that as qualitative researchers, we have an obligation to allow our participants access to field notes, journals on the research project, interview transcripts, and initial and final categories of analysis (p.118). Initially, I analyzed each transcript holistically. Then I analyzed each transcript for statements or phrases that seemed essential or revealing. After that, I looked at each sentence to discern what each revealed about the phenomenon. I used Microsoft Word to highlight transcripts in different colors based on the categories or themes that I identified. After analyzing the transcripts and other documents from the first round of interviews, I scheduled a second round of interviews with participants to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives. I repeated the steps for analysis as well as member checks.

## **Assumptions of this Researcher**

Since the qualitative researcher is the primary instrument of data gathering and analysis, it is important to be explicit about the assumptions one brings to the research project (Janesick, 2004). My experience with the transition from teacher to school administrator influences my research. I experienced this transition from teacher to school administrator as I left the classroom after ten years of teaching to accept the position of assistant principal. Like the female subject of Fennell's research (2008), I did not aspire to be a school administrator. I simply wanted to be the best teacher I could be for my young students. After several years of successful teaching, my principal encouraged me to seek educational leadership certification and apply for the assistant principal position. The transition was difficult and was complicated by unexpected challenges. I know that some of these challenges were different for me than for my male colleagues. The greatest challenge was transforming my perception of myself as a professional in the new role. During my time of professional transition, I also added another role, that of doctoral student.

My personal assumptions about the transition from teacher to leader for female school administrators are influenced by my work as a school administrator and by my coursework as a doctoral student in educational leadership. First, I have a personal assumption that while there are differences due to context and individual traits, there are some common struggles experienced by female school leaders. Similarly, I make the assumption that some of these struggles can be attributed to gender stereotypes and are fundamentally different than the struggles male school leaders face. Finally, I make the

assumption that sharing the stories of women going through this transition can positively impact future female school leaders.

In addition to the assumptions of this researcher, the theoretical framework for this study, Feminist Phenomenology, carries some assumptions. A major assumption of phenomenology is that there is meaning shared by all persons who experience a common phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Likewise, a major assumption of feminist research is the notion that gender is a legitimate category for analysis. In addition, feminist researchers believe that gender is a lens through which females make meaning of their work and lives (Young and Skrla, 2003). Qualitative work using a feminist phenomenological framework requires relying on these assumptions to uncover meaning.

### **Summary of this Chapter**

In this chapter, I described my method of data collection, including the selection of participants, format of the interviews, steps for analysis, ethical considerations, and role of the researcher. This study was intended to contribute to the body of research pertaining to women in school administration. In the next chapter, I present the data from the three data sets: interviews, researcher reflective journal, and relevant documents.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Presentation of the Data**

The purpose of the study was to describe and explain selected female leaders' perspectives on the transition from teacher to school administrator. The exploratory questions that guided this study were:

1. What elements constitute the perspective of the participants?
2. What variables influence women's perspectives as they make the transition from teacher to administrator?
3. What barriers and challenges do women encounter as they move from teacher to administrator?
4. What variables contribute to resiliency and agency for female administrators?

As described in Chapter 3, the techniques of data collection included two semi-structured interviews (transcribed) with each purposefully selected participant, my researcher reflective journal, and documents collected from participants, such as resumes and personal communications.

In this chapter, I detail the work settings and demographical information for each participant. I also include the phenomenological descriptions of each participant's perspective on the transition from teacher to school administrator, using the data sources listed. According to Van Manen (1990), "A good phenomenological description is an adequate elucidation of some aspect of the lifeworld- it resonates with our sense of lived life" (p.27). I have chosen to communicate each participant's story as an individual case,

while highlighting some common themes expressed by all participants: Work/life balance; unfreezing from the teaching role; refreezing into the administrative role; leadership style; adaptive behaviors; mentorship. These common themes emerged from my immersion in the transcripts. I continuously asked, “What was it like for this woman to leave the teaching role? How has she found comfort in her new administrative role and what meaning does this role have for her?” I endeavored to communicate description and meaning within each case. I also included considerations of gender as it relates to each participant’s transition from a teaching role to an administrative role. My reflections for each individual case and thoughts about my role as researcher enhanced the phenomenological descriptions. The phenomenological descriptions contained in the stories of these women serve to deepen our understanding of the transition from teacher to administrator.

Each case presented begins with an introduction based on data from my Researcher Reflective Journal. Quotations from the transcripts illustrate the perspectives of participants. Anecdotes or stories from participants are tools for providing specificity and engaging us as listeners or readers in the phenomenon. As previously stated, the perspectives of these women are most accurately expressed through their own voices. Therefore, I have made every effort to preserve the voices of these women by quoting them directly. Shorter quotes appear in quotation marks, while longer quotes appear in block format. Clarifying phrases, which are intended to aid the reader in understanding the quote, appear in brackets. Words and phrases which are redundant or may distract the reader were replaced with ellipses. Additional data from my Researcher Reflective

Journal is used to complement and add to the quotations, as well as provide an epilogue at the end of each case.

### The Five Participants

As explained in Chapter Three, the participants were purposefully selected and met the following criteria:

1. Participants must be female school administrators (likely assistant principals) who have been in their current position for three years or less.
2. Participants must be willing to be in the study.
3. Participants must be employed outside of the county in which I work.

Basic demographic information, including age, length of time as an assistant principal, length of time in education, and accessibility to a formal mentor is summarized in Table 4.

Table 3

Participants' Demographic Data

Data Gathered	Megan Monarch	Sarah Swallowtail	Caroline Crescent	Sydney Skipper	Bailey Birdwing
Approximate Age	Late 30's	Early 30's	Early 50's	Early 40's	Late 40's
Time in Assistant Principal Role	1 year	2 years	1 year	Less than 1 year	1 year
Previous Role	Resource Teacher	Literacy Coach	Classroom Teacher	Teacher Mentor	Student Achievement Coach
Total Time in Education	9 years	7 years	17 years	19 years	22 years
Formal Mentor Assigned?	No	No	No	No	No

All five women are assistant principals in public schools located in central Florida. All five women were required to obtain a master's degree and state certification in educational leadership as well as meet specific requirements in their counties to be eligible for an administrator position. Neither ethnicity nor race was a factor in participant selection. All five of these participants happen to be white females, Non-Hispanic. Age was a factor which differed for these five women, and I was interested in the intersection of gender and age in the transition.

I conducted the two interviews with each participant in their offices at their school sites. It was important that participants work in a different county than the county in which I am employed. Although I had to quickly establish relationships with these women, not knowing them before this study nor being part of their peer group served to facilitate open and candid conversations. Open and honest conversations were also facilitated by the use of pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. I was so impressed with the ability of these women to transition in their professional roles that I chose to name them after butterflies. Butterflies often symbolize transformation. They expend an enormous amount of energy going through the change process, and embody these changes as symbols of hope and faith. Like butterflies, these five women have remained positive and hopeful, despite many challenges throughout their role transitions.

### **Case One: Megan Monarch**

**Meet Megan.** I initially reached out to Megan through e-mail. She responded quickly, stating that she was willing to participate in the study and even suggested another possible participant. We spoke briefly on the phone to schedule the first interview, but did not meet in person until the interview. Before the first interview, I did

not know how successful our conversational partnership would be, but during the interview, I quickly realized that Megan's use of narratives to illustrate her experiences would yield rich data. I found Megan to be a friendly, articulate woman who described her life as a new assistant principal in a sincere and unguarded way (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

Megan came to teaching after briefly serving in the Air Force. She is married to a police officer, and they have two children (a six-year-old and a fourteen-year-old). Like many other female school leaders, she did not set out to be a school administrator. She stated,

I don't think I always wanted to be an administrator, but I always wanted to keep learning. So that drive of learning led me in this direction. I truly believe your experiences shape you. With me, I had some negative experiences with teams that I was associated with (when) I was teaching on the teams. So that experience made me say, 'I don't want to be part of the problem. I want to be part of the solution.'

Megan's drive to learn new things and to positively impact her school were messages that emerged throughout our interviews.

Megan had about nine years of experience in education prior to becoming an administrator. She explained,

I taught (at my first school) for six years. I did two years in an intermediate pod where I taught a three, four, five. Then I moved to a different pod and I taught three, four, five again for two more years. Then my last two years there I was a

science resource teacher. I had my own little portable, and I set up a science lab. The focus was our fifth graders because they were the ones who take science.

At that time when I was doing my master's, I was teaching science resource. My science resource position allowed me to have a little more time, because I wasn't grading papers and things like that after school. I wasn't really creating lesson plans for five subject areas, so I had more time after school. I finished my master's up during that time.

I did half online and half where I attended school. I did a combination, depending on the class. Then I started going through the pool. I was at (my second school) for two years. I did a student achievement coach position, and I did a math resource for a year. So that's my educational background.

Megan's ability to juggle graduate school, a full-time teaching job, and motherhood was good preparation for the multiple demands of her new administrative role.

Megan has been an assistant principal for one year. Her school serves a population of 600 students, of which 82% are considered economically disadvantaged and 39% are considered minority. The school opened in 1977, and the current principal is an experienced male administrator.

**Megan's Work/Life Balance.** Researchers, such as Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) and Gilligan (1993), emphasize the importance women place on relationships. When I asked about her work/life balance, Megan described the need to balance the time spent on her professional relationships with her personal relationships. She explained,

My husband will say, 'Well, I thought you were going to be home at five. I thought you were going to walk out early today.' Not as in early but earlier, in

our world, it's relative. And I say, 'I couldn't. There were three people at my door.' And (staff members) come in. And not only do they tell me something school-related, but they then start opening up with personal things, and not even bad things. They're just conversational with me.

That's building that relationship. I can't send them out. I can't say, 'Oh, I'm sorry I've got to go' and start packing up all my stuff. I have to give my full attention to them. And sometimes that's to the sacrifice of your own family members. I have to call later and I have to be like, 'I'm leaving right now.' It's a quarter to seven. The hard part is that I'm in here. So once they come in I can't get out.

I noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal the competing pressures and possibly guilt Megan must have felt as she attempted to balance relationships at home with relationships at work. Interestingly, Megan recalled being a teacher, and receiving that same time and attention from her administrators. Perhaps her valuing that as a teacher impacted her willingness to give it as an administrator. She explained,

Now I can recall when I would do the same thing. I would go by my administrators' office and I would be talking. I was always conscious of their time, but I could just imagine now while I was talking, they were thinking, 'Oh my gosh, I've got to send that email, or I have this project that it's waiting for me, or I have this meeting coming up in five minutes and I've got to get them to wrap it up.'

In addition to sacrificing personal and family time, Megan also made some sacrifices of health and well-being. She described that sacrifice,

I don't ever shut my door. I rarely get to eat. I bring protein shakes so I can drink because literally I'll be sitting here and trying to eat a salad or something and somebody is in front of me and I can't really enjoy it. So, it's drinking (my meals). But that's a choice because there are other administrators that say, 'No, my time is my time.' They'll close the door or they'll go to the teacher's lounge and they'll eat in there. It's kind of an unwritten rule that while we're in here there's not shop talk going on. But there will be people that still come up to you.

I noted that as a school administrator, Megan herself is an instrument of school improvement. Sacrificing her health could work against her efforts to bring about positive change. Gilligan (1993) asserts that a concern with others, and even sacrificing for others, is typical of female leaders. These sacrifices of time are not the only challenges Megan has experienced during her transition from teacher to administrator. Some challenges are indicative of the differences between her former role as teacher and her new role as administrator.

**Megan's Unfreezing from the Teaching Role.** Unfreezing requires a bit of grieving over the way things used to be and discovering ways to find a sense of comfort and routine in a new situation. Because relationships are important to Megan, changes in relationships were the first thing she mentioned. She said,

I was always used to sitting with a team and being connected with a bunch of women where you were close knit. You shared stories. You were in it together. Now I feel like I'm kind of like an outsider.

So when I sit at a table with a group of women who are working here, the dynamics change. And I've never had that before. I was a part of the group. I

could sit somewhere, and make conversation, and be very open and comfortable quickly. But now... that was a big transition for me. It was like, 'Why can't they just be normal when I sit down?'

In my Researcher Reflective Journal, I noted the parallel experiences between my transition and Megan's, and I felt particularly empathetic for her regarding this challenge, as I experienced it similarly.

The second challenge Megan mentioned concerned learning the policies and procedures governing the goings-on at her school site. She stated,

The second biggest challenge was the policies... people don't necessarily take you at your word. You can't just say, 'Well, in my experience, this is what I've seen done, or, this is what I think.' They want to know, is that a rule? Is that in a book? Is it black and white? Where did you get that from? And, being a teacher, you don't always have that (knowledge) or that insight. You just know it because that's how the administrators at your school were leading you or leading the whole school.

In the county in which Megan works, teachers do not typically become administrators at the same site where they are currently teaching. Becoming familiar with a new staff and school site complicates the refreezing process. Megan indicated that she is dealing with this particular challenge by attending much training, reading, and taking notes along the way. Throughout her first year, Megan continued learning and growing, and eventually began to find some comfort in her role as administrator.

**Megan's Refreezing into the Administrative Role.** Refreezing renders the new and intimidating more or less ordinary. I liked the way Megan described the process of

refreezing. She explained the way her comfort was slowly growing in her new role, “It's like driving to a new location. The first time it feels like it takes forever to get there; but then, once you get there, you're like, ‘Oh, OK, now I know how to get there.’” Role complexity, ambiguity, and overload are challenges to the refreezing process. Megan described these challenges and the ways she is learning to cope with them. She explained,

There are so many hats that we wear in a day. I might be a counselor at one point. We had a teacher this morning whose stepson was in a terrible accident over the weekend. And so you're having to show that empathy. However, the school day has to go on. 600 kids are still coming in the door. Still... as that one teacher is telling me that and I'm saying, ‘I'm so sorry,’ I literally had somebody standing to the right of me waiting to ask me a data question. So you're mind shifts from being that heartfelt person, and then the minute she walks away, your mind has to say, ‘OK, that's over.’ This person needs me now and I have to say, ‘OK- Oh the data. Yes you need to bring this, this and this.’ And sometimes I could see where that could be the making or breaking point with people, because you have to be able to do that all day long.

Quickly and frequently shifting her thinking to meet the varying functions of her new role was an immense challenge. Despite this challenge that Megan described, I noted Megan's positive tone and the tactics she used to cope.

Megan attributed her growing comfort in the new role to her ability to multi-task and to her use of strategies, such as note taking. She stated,

Sometimes if I'm in my office and there's a line at the door, and one person after another is coming in, I have to keep my sticky notes. And my desk will get

stacked up here with notes because I'm like, 'OK, yes, we need the science backboards. I'll call our maintenance man. I'll call him as soon as I'm done here.' So I'll write myself a note, then I'll say, 'Next. Come on in.' So I have to write notes. I say I'm going to invent something that hangs around my neck. And it might just be a recorder. But I haven't yet. I don't think I've dropped the ball on anybody yet, but I know there's going to be a time. And I'll have to say, 'I'm sorry. I got pulled into new directions and I forgot to do that.' But I just write it.

The anxiety Megan felt over possibly disappointing a teacher spoke to the value she placed on relationships. Despite this pressure, it was encouraging to hear Megan speak of her growing confidence and satisfaction both in her new role and in her new school. She affirmed,

I'm still in survival mode. But I know my people like me, I know that morale has changed, I know that they feel like my approach is the right approach. I think this is the right match for me here at this school, because that isn't always the case. But I want to take my time, and I want to be a really good (administrator). So I know that only with experiences are you going to be better.

One reason the morale at Megan's school improved was her leadership approach. The value she placed on relationships and trust building were evident in the way she described herself as a leader.

**Megan's Leadership Style.** Like many female school leaders, Megan described a commitment to creating a collaborative culture and to empowering the teachers with whom she works. She was initially very cautious about making changes. She said, "One of the things you have to be careful of is not to change things too quickly or abruptly. I

need to come in and say, “What about if we did this? Could we try this? It's all about the approach...and winning people.” She again alluded to the time she spent developing relationships. She stated, “I'm still building my relationships and making ties with people, and the best way is to make those personal connections. So when they come in and they tell me something about data and then they also share with me something about their kids, I can ask them about that later and it shows that I care.” While building relationships, Megan endeavored to empower her teachers. However, she was hindered by the school's earlier culture. She explained,

They want permission. They are going to look to you as that leader and to know that it's OK for this, that or the other. And I think that's something that's different to each culture of their school. And truly, as a principal one day, I want to be able to create that culture where my staff is able to make those decisions and know that I'm going to support instead of question.

When an emergency situation happened while the principal was not on campus, she had to be more direct. She contrasted that with the type of environment she prefers to build. She said,

And I think it's setting up that environment so they feel safe to (make decisions), because I was only one person that day but I was literally calling the shots for everything. And I handled it well, I did fine, I communicated. I'm very calm in a crisis like that. I just felt like that was the one time when I had to be more direct with everybody. ‘Jay, I need you to go stand out in the street and wait for the ambulance and flag them in to come through this direction.’ I was never hostile or abrupt with anybody but I had to be more direct. And I'm really more of a

collaborator of let's put all of our heads together and make a decision. That's my leadership style, but in that case it needed more directives.

Megan indicated that she spent some time reflecting on that day. She conveyed her use of writing and reflection to strengthen both her vision of school leadership and her practice.

**Megan's Adaptive Behaviors.** In addition to a collaborative style of leadership, Megan's personality traits and adaptive behaviors enabled her to make the transition from teacher to administrator successfully, without feeling like she wanted to give up and return to her previous role. In addition to being a multi-tasker, she listed being adaptive and approachable as keys for her success. She also credited authenticity and being true to herself. She explained, "You are who you are and in this job, that comes out. You can't hide who you are. So I think that's the difference between good administrators that just do what they're supposed to and great administrators." As her conversational partner, I agreed that she was authentic and reflective. A sense of purpose and passion also reinforced her resiliency. Megan shared that helping people is the best part of her new role, not necessarily solving a problem, just listening and guiding.

State and district accountability pressures as well as budgeting shortfalls created a great deal of tension for all administrators recently. Megan talked about how she has handled those pressures. She said, "For me, all the emails that come to our district about the legislature and this and that proposed bill, I don't let it bring me down because half of it's probably not going to happen and the things that do happen, we're just going to have to deal with them when they do." However, she communicated an understanding of those early-career administrators who make the decision to return to teaching. She stated, "I always asked, 'How could they leave their AP position and go back to teaching? How

could they step down? Didn't they know they wanted to do that?' But now from doing the job I can honestly say that there are so many things that come at you that you would never have been able to predict." While role complexity, ambiguity, and overload are challenges to refreezing, the support of peers and mentors facilitates it.

**Mentorship and Megan.** Unfortunately, Megan does not have a formal mentor assigned to her. She divulged that it would have been helpful to have a "lifeline" during those first few days. She stated,

The old AP leaves right away, they have to go to their new school. And so you're coming in and there's not somebody that can on-the-job train you. I think I would have wanted somebody to give me a lifeline when I was here, my first week or something, so in case I was in a situation where I didn't know what to do, I had a go to person to call. I wish I would have had somebody give me a care package, like a box that had district numbers, policies, procedures, a code of conduct book- all of that kind of in a lump sum, specific to my school, like a welcoming gift.

I noted that Megan's feelings and suggestions posed important implications for districts aiming to support new administrators. Megan did not mention having a mentoring relationship with her male principal. However, she credited her previous administrators, now peers, with helping her. She said,

They were so giving. I said, 'I can never repay you for all the time you're sitting here and coaching me on how to interview and sharing all your experiences.' I always felt bad, because her husband would be calling in the middle of it, and she'd say, 'I'm coming soon. I'm getting ready to go.' When I would say, 'I don't

know how to repay you,' she'd say, 'You don't have to repay me. You just have to return the favor to somebody else coming up through the ranks.'

Megan expressed appreciation for the time given to her by those predecessors and also expressed a dedication to paying it forward. She had already assisted prospective administrators at her current school.

**Considering Gender with Megan.** Megan's transition confirmed much of the research on women in school administration. Her teaching experience and initial reluctance to jump into administration were typical of female school leaders. In addition, her concern with relationships and commitment to a collaborative culture were congruent with the ways many women lead. However, Megan did not acknowledge any differences between her transition and the transitions of her male counterparts. She felt that they encountered similar challenges.

Megan works with an experienced male principal, and she attributed parents asking to speak to him instead of her as due to position, rather than gender. She stated, 'They always seem to want to ask for the principal. 'I want to talk to the principal.' Well, it's kind of like that chain of command, so a lot of times they have to go through me first to get to him. We communicate a lot, and we'll tag back and forth. And, with our employees, too, there might be some where I'm like, 'Oh, I can't win that person over. Can you talk to them?' I don't know that it's a female-male thing, but it could be.'

Megan portrayed her relationship with her principal as friendly and supportive. She pondered whether she would have a difficult time working with a female principal. She explained,

When somebody comes to me and they're choosing to come to me over him because of our styles or our approaches, I can laugh it off and say, 'Oh, you know that's a man for you,' because we have that relationship and we joke about it all the time. Now I picture myself with a female principal and I don't know what excuse I would be able to say because it would actually be choosing between the two of us, personalities rather than genders. When they say, 'I need to go home early because my child is sick.' They might come in to me more so than him.

I know I work better with a man because I'm not competing. It would be hard for me if I had somebody just saying, 'Well, do it because I said so,' (especially if) it was a female just saying, 'Do it because I said so.' And that has to do with your own experiences growing up.

Although she described a congenial relationship, when asked about mentoring relationships, she did not mention her current principal. The peer support she mentioned seemed to come mainly from female colleagues. I wondered to what extent she had considered gender differences in leadership prior to our interview (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

**Megan Monarch- Summary.** Considering the transcripts and my Researcher Reflective Journal, I identified similarities between Megan's transition and researchers' findings on women in school leadership. Like many women in school leadership, Megan did not set out to be an administrator; so she brought many years of teaching experience and instructional expertise to her new role. She began the journey in response to the needs she saw for positive change. Megan's motive for entering school administration is consistent with the motive to help others that Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) identify in

many female leaders. Similarly, as a leader, she has been dedicated to developing a culture of collaboration and empowerment. This type of collaborative leadership, along with instructional expertise, were factors Darling-Hammond (2007) found to positively impact school culture. Although Megan's responses were aligned with researchers' descriptions of the ways women lead, she indicated no differences between her own challenges in the new role and those of her male peers. This may have been due to a lack of familiarity with the experiences of male assistant principals, as most of the mentoring and supportive relationships she experienced were with other female leaders.

Megan's challenges were aligned with those of other early career female administrators. The first challenge she mentioned was a change in relationships with staff members, from casual, comfortable, friend relationships to more formal relationships between those at different levels of hierarchy. She also talked about the challenge of balancing the time needed to develop those work relationships with the time she needed to devote to her personal relationships. In addition, she explained ways in which the complexity of the new role was sometimes overwhelming. Strengths she brought to the transition included being authentic and true to herself in the new role and using reflection to learn and grow.

As the year progressed, Megan reported feeling greater comfort in her decision making and feeling excited about her plans for the next school year. She said that she is learning to prioritize in order to better protect her time and is also working on managing worry and stress. Settling conflict among staff members has become a bigger challenge, as more staff members seem to come to her with these problems. However, Megan communicated a commitment to continue building a collaborative culture of shared

decision making and trust. It was evident that she has continued to learn, grow, and become more situated in the role.

Megan's most prominent challenges in the transition from her previous role to her current role as well as the strengths that assisted her are summarized in Figure 2.

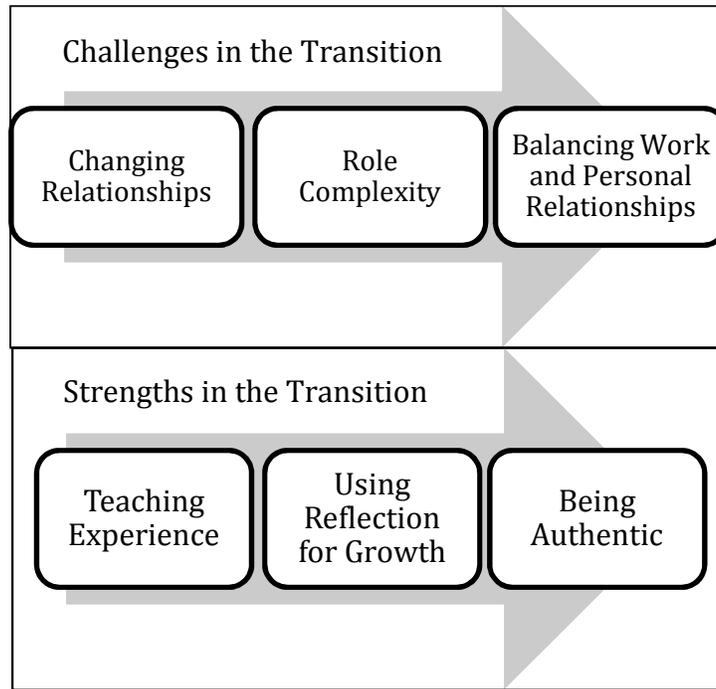


Figure 2. Megan's Challenges and Strengths in the Transition

**Reflections on the Conversations with Megan Monarch.** Megan and I met in her office. The extensive amount of binders and notes were evidence of how busy she was. Although it was obviously a busy place, the office was very organized and felt peaceful and inviting. Megan was friendly and attentive, and even apologized for a broken blind in her window. She mentioned that she never shuts her door, but she did so during our conversations. The parallel between Megan's experiences in the transition and my own experiences created a level of comfort between the two of us. When I learned that she had been an assistant principal for less than a year at the time of our first meeting, I was surprised at the confidence and calm demeanor she portrayed. State

writing test results were released the morning of our last interview in May. Despite the fervor created by the release of scores, she remained unruffled and focused on our conversation. Because of her calm and reflective nature, I was not surprised at the success she experienced her first year and also not surprised by the goals she set for her second year. Most of those goals were indicative of her passion for a collaborative school culture. Megan's focus on relationships and her strong interpersonal skills allowed her to slowly change the school's culture. I did find Megan's statements about her preference for working with a male principal interesting, particularly since she valued a leadership style more typical of a female leader. I wondered if her feelings about male leaders were attributable to her military experience. I also wondered if she had considered gender and leadership before our conversations. Megan's candidness and use of narratives to illustrate her experiences made her a valuable conversational partner (Notes from my Researcher Reflective Journal January 19, 2010 and May 5, 2011).

### **Case Two: Sarah Swallowtail**

**Meet Sarah.** Sarah was the first to respond to my e-mail seeking participants. She even suggested another possible participant. We scheduled our first interview via e-mail; so we did not speak until the interview. Therefore, I was anxious about how successful our conversational partnership would be. However, I found Sarah to be a confident and energetic young woman (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal). She was very conscientious about being a good conversational partner and about adequately answering my questions.

Sarah is married but does not have children. Unlike the other participants, she spent her time in education with an eye on administration. She stated,

Once I was in education it was always the path I saw. And I kind of always thought I'd be in the classroom for a period of time, I didn't know how long it was going to be, and then be in administration afterwards. It just seems to go along with my personality.

The conscientious and dedicated approach she took to our conversational partnership was also evident in the approach she took to her career.

Sarah was a devoted teacher before becoming an administrator. Sarah has spent seven years in education. She explained,

I was an elementary school teacher. I taught third grade, fourth grade and then third grade again. I taught for about three and a half years before I was hired in as a literacy coach in a Title One School. As a literacy coach, I was tasked with making sure that that school would meet AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) in writing, and I was really hired in to coach and mentor our fourth grade teachers in Writing Units of Study.

I went through the leadership program at (my university), and it was a fantastic two-year program. I graduated right before I became a literacy coach, went through the pool process that year and then actually was hired in as an administrator last year.

Sarah was in her second year as assistant principal during our conversational partnership. Her school serves a population of 600 students, of which 85% are considered economically disadvantaged and 32% are considered minority. Sarah works with a male principal, and this is his first principal assignment.

**Sarah's Work/Life Balance.** Sarah was in her second year as an assistant principal when she participated as a conversational partner in this study. This enabled her to compare her first year with her second year in the role. She reported greater challenges with the work/life balance during her first year as an assistant principal. She explained,

I think since I've gotten this job I've been trying to find a balance. This year I've gotten better where at night and on the weekends I really don't do much work. I don't take it home unless I have something that's due that week that I have to. So I feel like I've started to find balance. I spend more time with my husband and my dogs, where last year I spent a lot of time doing my work at night or on the weekends.

I'm sleeping again, which is wonderful. I stopped sleeping last year. I had insomnia and I'd get up in the middle of the night and work. But now that's not happening. But exercise, I was working out last year but I'm not now. So it's still trying to find that balance. I think it's getting there. It's not perfect yet, it's not intact yet. I'm still working on it.

Although Sarah reported that she was sleeping again, she still expressed a desire to find more balance between her work and personal life. The work/life balance was not the only thing improving for Sarah during this second year in the role. However, she had an easy time recalling the challenges she faced that first year.

**Sarah's Unfreezing from the Teaching Role.** Many female school leaders are coming from the ranks of curriculum coaches, like Sarah, rather than coming directly from a classroom teaching position. The challenges may be slightly different, but there is still a significant role transition. Sarah stated,

First of all, learning all the responsibilities that an AP has was a challenge. I really didn't know all of the responsibilities; I didn't know them coming in. I had a good idea; the program at (my university) tried to prepare me. I had done a practicum where I was just kind of shadowing an administrator and taking on extra leadership responsibilities at the school, but I don't think that that really gave me a very good understanding about all the responsibilities. So it took a little while just to learn those. And then shifting from my thinking as a coach to more of an evaluator, I still see myself as a coach in many ways but now I coach and evaluate. So it has a different feel than just being a coach and a cheerleader. So that was tricky.

Sarah was not the only participant to mention the lack of practical preparation for her new role. Many others mentioned the need for more practical preparation to prepare for the tasks associated with the assistant principal role. I noted Sarah's need in my Researcher Reflective Journal and reflected on the implications for both university programs and school districts. In addition, as a coach, Sarah was committed to being an instructional leader. That passion for instructional leadership was difficult to fit into a day full of managerial tasks and interruptions. She explained,

Learning how to really juggle the managerial with the instructional leadership piece is a challenge. The instructional leadership comes naturally for me, and managerial tasks are not complicated -- it's just finding the time to do that. And I think finding that balance is really the tricky part.

One of the new tasks Sarah had to deal with was student behavior, specifically referrals. A challenge associated with referrals was having difficult conversations with parents.

Similarly, reprimanding teachers was also a new challenge in the administrative role.

Sarah described both:

I hate dealing with referrals. Usually, dealing with some unpleasant referrals means talking with parents that are very angry and upset and just don't seem to understand the situation. That causes quite a bit of stress because I feel it's like my job to help them understand. And a lot of times I just can't achieve that goal, because for some reason the experiences that they've had in their life aren't allowing them to hear me out or see the situation for what it is. So that's hard. That causes a lot of stress.

And then also having to reprimand teachers is very difficult and uncomfortable, when you know they're not using best practices, or they believe that their kids can't learn. Trying to have those conversations with them, and coach them through that is very difficult. I know that's been a part of my job, but it's uncomfortable.

These difficult conversations created stressful situations for Sarah. I wondered how her young age affected the challenge of having difficult conversations (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

**Sarah's Refreezing into the Administrative Role.** Refreezing entails developing a sense of comfort and ease in the new role. For Sarah, becoming comfortable in the administrative role was complicated by her age.

I wonder if my age affects it just because I find that sometimes I second guess myself because I'm so young. And it's not like me second guessing myself; it's just that I'm wondering, 'Are other people second guessing me because of my

age?’ And that happened more the first year. It's not really happening the second year, now that I'm more comfortable in my role and I know the responsibilities. Age had a greater impact during the unfreezing part of the transition. As she became more confident and comfortable in the assistant principal role, the impact of age diminished.

Sarah described continuing to grow in her new role and continuing to focus on instructional leadership through professional development. She said,

I try to attend as many professional development things that I can that are leadership-based. I am always reading articles or watching videos ... I try to hold onto that information I've learned and apply it in my role. I try to read as many books as I can. I better start reading this one soon (points to book on desk), *Learning by Doing*, my literacy coach just got me this one. I'm in the midst of reading this other book, and I just read Haberman's book about interviewing star teachers.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) propose that the prominence of instruction and learning at the center of women's leadership drives instructional change that improves student learning. Instructional leadership was the thing Sarah spoke of most, but she also mentioned the importance of interdependence and developing relationships.

**Sarah's Leadership Style.** One of the first things Sarah mentioned regarding her leadership style was building a leadership team. She named her student achievement coach, literacy coach, and technology specialist as members of that team. Sarah said, “I started to trust them more and would delegate more and would let some responsibilities go.” She mentioned professional learning communities and collaborative problem

solving. She said that she enjoyed, “Seeing it when they put the puzzle pieces together, and then they start to get it. Then we start living it.” Sarah described a reliance on interpersonal skills as she developed her leadership persona. She stated,

I do rely on my relationships or my social skills techniques and my sense of empathy. I always seem to understand where everyone is coming from, which sometimes can actually be a little bit more difficult, because then it's harder to make a decision, because you can understand both sides so well. But I think that empathy can be a strength because I feel like I can connect with people.

I noted that Sarah seemed to reject the traditional model of management using an impersonal, school-as-business approach. She connected on a personal level with staff members, students, and families. I viewed this as one of Sarah’s strengths, and I was surprised that she sometimes viewed her sense of empathy as a challenge.

Sarah also described the conflict between her desire to be collaborative and the occasional need to be more direct. Getting buy-in from staff was the key. She said,

I try to build relationships with all the people in the school and build that trust, and try to seek to understand what's happening at the school first before I jump to make a lot of changes. Some changes are not going to be able to wait. And when I have to make those changes, I try to get buy-in by telling my idea to different people, and planting seeds, and getting people on board to help make that change.

Sarah felt the demands from her district and state and the pressure for rapid change.

Rapid change is incompatible with the empowerment that Sarah values. Those conflicts, in the way she wanted to lead versus the way she had to occasionally lead as well as the other stressors of the role, required some strategies for coping.

**Sarah's Adaptive Behaviors.** Sarah mentioned several techniques she used to cope with the stress of her role. She stated,

Sometimes I just take a few minutes for myself. I use deep breathing, or sometimes I'll go on like a quick walk around the campus. That seems to help me be successful, give me time to collect to myself so I can keep going.

I noted that Sarah had enough self awareness to realize when she needed a break. She also knew what worked for her as far as stress relief. In addition, Sarah mentioned drive and optimism as keys for resilience. She explained,

I'm very motivated. I have like this drive- I don't know where it comes from- that keeps me going all the time. And tied in with that motivation is sometimes unrealistic optimism or expectations. But in such a good way that it makes me not want to stop. It keeps me moving forward no matter what kind of hurdles are in place.

Like Megan, Sarah communicated that she felt a sense of purpose and passion in her new role and that also helped to sustain her. She said,

The best part is seeing the kids learning and seeing them involved and engaged, and excited about what they're learning, and really getting it. That's the best piece.

The next best piece, I think, is seeing teachers excited about what they're doing and really embracing those best practices and using them in the classroom.

That passion is congruent with Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) suggestion that the opportunity to help others is a major motivator as women move into school leadership and strive for improvement once an administrative position is attained.

**Mentorship and Sarah.** Sarah does not have a formal mentor and had to work to develop a support network, as she came to her new role from another county. She named several members of her university cohort as well as a professor as sources of continued support. When asked if her current principal provided a mentoring relationship, she replied:

Not in those needs for mentoring. I think he helps me understand what my job is, and what my responsibilities are, and helps me solve some problems here at school. But, that self-reflection that I like to do and then analyzing how I solve the problems, or analyzing relationships here at the school, or dilemmas and things like that, I seek elsewhere, I guess, because I don't have that kind of relationship with him.

Similar to her desire for mentoring relationships, Sarah mentioned the need for a support network outside of her school. When asked what advice she would give a brand new assistant principal, she suggested,

Seek out other people that you can trust outside of the school that you can talk to on a regular basis. And share what's going on in your day, and share your frustrations openly. And make sure they're people who can help you pick you up when you start to fall apart, or be able to be honest with you and tell you that you're slacking or whatever.

This type of support is critical because Sarah described her job as one that could easily be overwhelming and all consuming. She shared that she was learning to leave some of it behind at the end of the day. She stated, "It will be there the next day and you can solve

that problem the next day too.” Despite the challenges, Sarah expressed a commitment to continuing her path as a school administrator. She said,

Five years from now, I hope I grow enough in my position, that I'd be ready to be a Principal. I'm always trying to seek out ways I can grow as a leader. And I would like to be a Principal and have my own school, and take that on, and experience that. That's kind of where I see myself right now. But I'm not sure, I guess it could change, because that's another thing I've learned about life the last ten years, is boy, life changes so quickly, and no matter how many plans you make, it doesn't always turn out that way. And I think that's the other thing I realize, is that ... I'd be OK with that, too.

Although Sarah is a very driven female leader, she communicated that she was developing a willingness to go with the flow and accept the things she could not control.

**Considering Gender with Sarah.** Sarah was not representative of most women in administration in her short tenure as a classroom teacher as well as her early goal to attain an assistant principal position. Sarah discussed age as a factor impacting her transition, and during our conversations, she also considered gender's affect on the transition. She was the only conversational partner who identified a difference between early career female administrators and their male colleagues. Sarah stated,

I think men are wired differently than us. As women, we constantly think about things all the time, and one idea will mesh into another idea, and so, our brains just never turn off; whereas men tend to put everything in boxes. So, they can compartmentalize. Once they're at home, they just turn that off and boom, they

don't think about it anymore. But, I think that that would go for any job, really. I think men can turn things off maybe a little bit easier than women can.

I wondered if she was confessing to bringing work worries home, and if that had contributed to her inability to sleep and difficult work/life balance. It seemed as if this tendency was not as evident in her male colleagues (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

**Summary- Sarah Swallowtail.** Unlike the other participants, Sarah did begin her career in education with the intention of being an administrator. She is also the youngest participant. Sarah's age caused her to be concerned about others' perceptions of her confidence and competence. However, she came across as very self-assured and confident during our conversational partnership (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal). With one year under her belt, she became focused on building a leadership team and fostering collaboration. That collaborative culture and growing trust allowed her to delegate some tasks and improve the balance between her time spent on managerial tasks and her time spent as an instructional leader.

Sarah experienced challenges as she shifted from a coaching role to an evaluative role, although she still found opportunities to act as a coach at times. The difficult conversations with both parents and teachers also challenged Sarah. In addition, like the other participants, Sarah struggled with the task overload associated with her new role. The overload affected her work/life balance and even caused insomnia for a while. Sarah did not have a formal mentor assigned to her, and did not develop a mentoring relationship with her male principal. She did develop a support network of peers, and gained some confidence and skill in the new role by pursuing a variety of professional

development opportunities. Sarah's optimism, drive to succeed, and passion for school improvement contributed to her resilience as she made the transition in professional roles.

Sarah's most prominent challenges and the strengths that assisted her in the transition from her previous role to her current role are summarized in Figure 3.

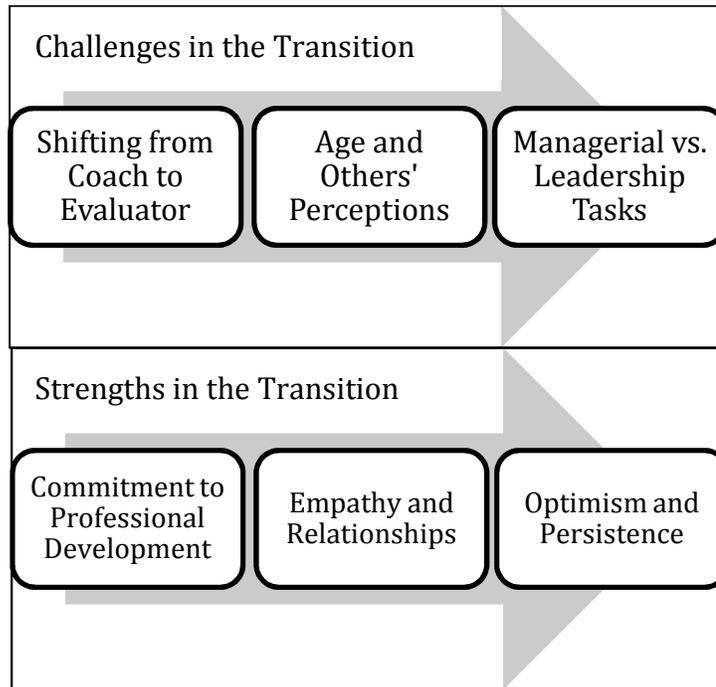


Figure 3. Sarah's Challenges and Strengths in the Transition

**Reflections on the Conversations with Sarah Swallowtail.** In my Researcher Reflective Journal, I noted that Sarah was much different than my other participants. Although she was the youngest, she was in her second year as an assistant principal. Therefore, she was able to make some contrasts between her first and second year. Her depictions of an improving work/life balance and growing confidence caused me to feel optimistic for the other participants. We met in her office, which was very neat and decorated with a large piece of modern art. Sarah was very conscientious and often asked if she had sufficiently answered my questions. During our second interview, she expressed some concern over the upcoming, drastic budget cuts in her district and the

effect they were having on her principal. I could tell that she was taking on greater responsibility in her school and feeling the burden of those growing demands. Despite that, Sarah continued to project enthusiasm and a positive view of her transition (Notes from my Researcher Reflective Journal February 11, 2011 and May 21, 2011).

### **Case Three: Caroline Crescent**

**Meet Caroline.** Caroline was the second conversational partner to agree to participate in the study. We spoke briefly on the phone to schedule the first interview, but did not meet in person until I arrived for the interview. I found Caroline to be a quiet, reserved, and contemplative woman. I was apprehensive that, having been in the role for such a short period of time, she may not yet have much to say. However, our conversational partnership was successful, and her growth in comfort and confidence over the year we spent as conversational partners was exciting (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

Caroline is married with grown children. She did not set out to become an administrator. In fact, she delayed starting a teaching career until after having children. She stated,

No, I really didn't (want to be an administrator). I just wanted to be a teacher. In fact, I started teaching later in life and didn't go to college until after I was married and had the children. Then, I saw, as a teacher, that leadership just started to come naturally to me and the opportunities were there. Then I had so many of my administrators suggest that I go into (school administration).

Caroline had almost sixteen years of teaching experience before becoming an administrator. She experienced much success as a teacher, including achieving National Board Certification. She explained,

I was a teacher for almost sixteen years before I became an administrator. I was at two different schools. One was Title I, another was kind of a middle class school. And, I had great experiences at both schools: getting to know the different policies, as well as the different types of families and kids, and appreciating the benefits of both and the challenges of both, as well. It was really interesting. I had always been a team leader and done that kind of thing. I always enjoyed taking that leadership-type position. I've been a trainer for the district, differentiated instruction and new teacher induction. I've always gotten into the role of mentoring new teachers. I did National Board Certification in my fourth year. I did not renew, I was getting a master's and becoming Ed Leadership Certified and (preparing for) administration. But, I was really, really seriously contemplating renewing my National Board Certification because it really was something I feel was the pivotal part of my career, making me reflect, and understand what national standards are all about and do deeper, deeper thinking about my instruction and how to deal with the kids and the parents.

I graduated (from my university) just this past May, and then I went ahead and pursued getting into the pool and taking the FELE and all that. September 8th was the day that I was hired. I was surprised. I thought I'd be in the pool for a while, you know? We have a great leadership program, Aspiring Leaders, for people who are in the pool or pursuing the pool and for people who just basically

may be looking at getting into more leadership opportunities. It's three different levels. So, I was looking at going into level three, being in the pool and then getting to go to AP meetings and learning different things about the job. But I'm learning the job now.

Caroline's school serves a population of 550 students, of which 48% are considered economically disadvantaged and 47% are considered minority. Caroline works with a very experienced, female principal.

**Caroline's Work/Life Balance.** When I asked Caroline about the work/life balance, she shared that the work/life balance was a bit easier for her than for many other assistant principals. Her children are grown, and she was used to grading projects, tests, and papers during the evenings in her previous role as a classroom teacher. She distinguished between the two roles by stating, "It is not as heavy a load as when I was a classroom teacher, but it's a different type of load now. The deadlines are more intense, and you know that you have to do the best job you can do because now it's going to district people, and your principal is depending on you as well." She also mentioned having to be at events on evenings and weekends, but she was grateful that her principal split those duties with her.

Finding balance and peace at work was a challenge that Caroline discussed. She stated, "The key for me is finding that quiet place, but still being connected. I always let the front office know that I'm going to be working on schedules or whatever, but please radio me. That's how I get time, sometimes moving away from this office and being somewhere else, even if it's in the conference room." Finding a quiet place but still being connected was a strategy that Caroline mentioned a few times during our conversations.

**Caroline's Unfreezing from the Teaching Role.** Caroline was my only conversational partner to move directly to administration from a classroom teaching role, rather than a resource or coaching role. I was interested in discovering how this differentiated her transition from the other conversational partners. She mentioned that it had been difficult to get out of her classroom to gain practical experiences as she prepared for an administrative role. She also conveyed “not even knowing what I didn't know” and “having to remind myself that I am the administrator” as elements of the unfreezing process. Caroline revealed that her university coursework was helpful, but she would have benefited from more practical experiences. She described an early experience conducting a fire drill. Caroline said,

Right away, (my principal) said, ‘You're going to do the drill and log it in.’ I said, ‘Log it in?’ She said, ‘Here's the drill tracker, and here's the key, and you turn this off, and everybody's spread out...’ That was just overwhelming to me... I didn't have that experience, and it was surprising how complicated and how official it was.

Caroline also was surprised by the daily schedule in her new role, which differed greatly from the regular routine of her previous role. She explained,

There is not a set schedule like teaching. I thought there would a set schedule, like at 10:00, I have to do this, and at 4:00, I am going to make sure all of this was done. I thought there was a set schedule; I honestly did, because my administrators always were busy, busy, busy. I thought there has to be some kind of set thing that you have to do every day. Well, there's not, other than your bus duty.

Like other assistant principals in the state of Florida, Caroline felt pressure related to the (high stakes) state achievement test. This was a challenge I could relate to, because in addition to being her conversational partner, I was also an assistant principal preparing for the state assessment. Assistant principals at the elementary level are responsible for the secure administration of the test. She described her anxiety in this way:

I have a meeting coming up in the district, explaining the do's and don'ts, that kind of thing. I feel like I don't know what to do to prepare, at this point, until I go to that training. Then I feel like it's going to really hit me. It's going to be non-stop, probably until (the test) time is over. Right now, it's the calm before the storm. But, I'm anticipating the storm's coming, which to me means, just a little bit of stress, and something new.

She expressed concern that the test will be all encompassing, and she would still have her other responsibilities.

In addition, Caroline also described the interruptions typical in her day. Most of these interruptions were the result of teachers needing her attention. She stated, "I do keep the door open, and I shut my computer. I want to give them the attention they deserve, but then the next person is on break and then they all come through." Rapid decision making was another unexpected challenge Caroline experienced in her new role. She said, "I'm making decisions all the time, and I don't think anyone understands how many until you get into this position, those decisions you have to make." I noted that Caroline was not the only participant surprised by the irregular schedule and fast pace of the job. I also noted that this had implications for districts and universities who prepare

future administrators, as these challenges should not come unexpectedly. Fortunately, Caroline also expressed increasing comfort in her role as the year progressed.

**Caroline's Refreezing into the Administrative Role.** When I met with Caroline for our second interview, she indicated that she started to feel a sense of ease after the winter break. She explained,

It didn't really sink in until right after winter break, when I came back. It was like, 'Wow, this is my school.' It's weird how that happens. You wake up one day and you're like, 'This is my school.' You really are much deeper vested into the school at that point.

Caroline's greater comfort was also grounded in her perception that others were beginning to view her as more competent in the role. She said, "I think I have the confidence now because I see that all the school community now recognizes me more as the administrator, the Assistant Principal. The Principal has empowered me with so many things." Her comfort in knowing her staff impacted her comfort in carrying out her responsibilities. She stated, "I am building those relationships -- the comfort level has really increased. I feel more comfortable talking to the staff and doing that mentoring/coaching piece, as well as having to look at some problem areas and problem-solve."

Caroline's comfort in her own abilities facilitated her ability to do something that is often difficult for women, to delegate. She explained, "(My principal) is encouraging me now to delegate. Some things that I thought I would certainly do on my own; she wants me to encourage my leadership team to jump on board and work with me. That has been so fulfilling." However, Caroline expanded on that by sharing that her recent

experience in the classroom helped her look at things from a teacher's perspective. She stated,

I always keep in mind, what the other person has, as a teacher, on her plate -- because I still feel that connection to the classroom. Is it going to be overwhelming? Is it going to be too much? Do we need more than one person? I'm looking to appreciate what teachers have to go through, and take all that into consideration before I ask them to do something. But when something has to be mandated, of course, I'm a district person. I'm going to follow the mandates. But I'm the kind of person who will say, 'Well, let me help you. I'll coach, mentor, whatever it takes, to get you to where you can do these things.'

Caroline expressed growing confidence and fulfillment in her new role as assistant principal. I noted that, as she developed comfort in her role, she was also developing a leader persona, and reflecting on her leadership style.

**Leadership Style.** Caroline described herself as a hands-on leader who spends a great deal of time in classrooms. Caroline's focus on instruction confirms Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) notion that instruction and learning is often at the center of women's leadership. Caroline said,

The best part of this job for me is seeing the whole school, and being able to get myself into the classroom, seeing what people are doing, looking for strengths, and looking for areas where I can help. And then, being able to talk to the teachers, and agreeing, 'Yes, this is where we can improve.' The meeting I had this morning with the fourth grade writing teachers - I mean, it took a lot of my time going in, observing, looking at their assessments, and having them trust me

enough to give me copies of their student writing to look over. Then sitting with them and discussing it.

Caroline mentioned keeping a student focus and improving student learning by targeting teachers' practices. She admitted that she frequently asks, "What's best for kids?" She also expressed her effort to build trust and to differentiate within relationships at her school. Caroline explained,

I feel like our relationships are closer. We have conversations that take place on the sidewalk or in my office or at after-school activities. I ask about their families and focus on getting to know them more and they know that I care. So it really has improved. It's deeper- it's on a deeper level now. There's definitely a trust level. They're not afraid to come to me. But there are some that are still - you know - that I appreciate their privacy. I go in their rooms. I still do my walk-throughs and have discussions and open up conversation with them. And so, everybody has that different level that they let you in.

To illustrate her commitment to building relationships, Caroline shared that she made great efforts to praise teachers and to leave notes in their mailboxes. Although she prefers a collaborative approach, she also became more secure in her ability to be direct when needed. She said,

I love to get others involved. I don't like anyone to ever feel like they're on an island and I'm just giving directives. So I say things like, 'Let's talk about it. If you have a problem, please come and talk to me about it.' I do like to collaborate, but then there is that fine line where I say, 'Here's what's best for kids.' I've had to use that here, 'Here is what's best for children, and these are the reasons why

you need to do it.’ Because I do have teachers that’ll push back and say, ‘I don’t want to do something.’ And that’s where I do have to step up and be more authoritative and say, ‘But here’s what’s best for students. Here’s our time line, and what can I do to get you there because this is where we’re going.’

The passion and purpose for improving educational opportunities for students helped Caroline develop a leadership persona but also contributed to her resilience as she made the transition from teacher to administrator.

**Caroline’s Adaptive Behaviors.** In addition to passion and a sense of purpose, Caroline reported that her stage in life contributed to her resilience. She explained, I think it’s just the time in my life, this time period, being in my early fifty’s now, and just having seen so many changes, and knowing myself, improving myself and testing myself in so many different situations- I’m not afraid anymore. I ask, ‘What do I have control of and what do I not have control of?’ The things that I don’t have control of, I ask, ‘What am I going to do to make myself more comfortable with it? How can I deal with it?’ I try not to dwell on things and be stressed out, because things work out.

Caroline’s ability to let things go and not dwell on them, but still reflect and learn from them were powerful factors in her resiliency during this transition. She shared,

Sometimes when things don’t go right, I deal with it and move on, and then follow through later. I ask, ‘Did everything fall into place? Do I need to revisit that?’ But I try to do a good job the first time. When I deal with a parent, I try to do a really good job with that parent at that time, so that I know I’ll be able to say,

‘Hey, it's good to see you again.’ Because I don't want things to linger, I problem solve.

Caroline also credited patience and persistence as aspects of her resilience. Persistence was necessary for her to secure a support network, as she was not assigned a formal mentor.

**Mentorship and Caroline.** Caroline listed other assistant principals, her current principal and former professors as those who mentored her through the transition. She said, “When I went to my first AP meeting, the people that I sat with just immediately embraced me. They just said, ‘Call me when you need me.’ They've called and checked in on me.” Certainly, Caroline’s warmth and interpersonal skills served her well in developing this support network.

In regard to a mentoring relationship with her current principal, Caroline stated, “I feel like the person who's sitting in (the principal’s office) is the one who is providing the opportunities for the assistant principal, because we're here basically to assist them. I feel like whatever light she sees me in, that's the opportunities I'm going to get.” She expressed gratitude for the opportunities her principal had given her. She shared something her principal said that made her feel empowered. She said, “When she's in a meeting, she'll say ‘Caroline and I.’ And it's so refreshing that she'll say, ‘If I said it, then that means it stands for Caroline as well, and if Caroline said it, it stands for me as well.’ I just feel like we’re connected. Conflicting attitudes about what it means to be female and what it means to be an administrator necessitate supportive relationships with veteran female administrators (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995). Caroline acknowledged how fortunate she was to be working so closely with an experienced female leader who was dedicated

to helping her grow. Caroline expressed a commitment to mentoring and empowering others in the same way.

Caroline's growing satisfaction in her new role was evident. As we finished our last interview, she wrapped things up by describing how she felt at an evening chorus concert. She said,

I looked around in my cafeteria, and I'm standing there, and I'm in charge of getting the school together for that event, and making sure everybody is happy and safe. And this light bulb went on. Like, 'Oh my goodness, I can't believe I'm really here,' because it really took me back to those days when I was so unsure and uncertain. And now the confidence is really different from back then. It was neat to have that reality check again and think, 'Wow, how far I've come.' So I had to let my principal know and thank her again for giving me the opportunity. You can't ever stop being thankful.

It was reassuring to hear this affirmation from Caroline that she felt content in her decision to transition into administration and felt gratitude for the growth opportunities.

**Considering Gender with Caroline.** Caroline's transition was typical of female school leaders in her initial reluctance to pursue an administrative position. She delayed entry into administration for several reasons, including a commitment to teaching and to raising her family. In addition, her leadership style, emphasis on relationships, and focus on instruction are typical of the ways women lead.

When I asked her about gender differences, she explained that she was not aware of differences between her transition and the transitions of her male colleagues. However,

she did reveal that male teachers were given more practical opportunities to prepare for an administrative role. She stated,

That's hard for me to answer. I've never really had experience watching a male transition. So, I really don't know about that. I do know that male teachers, usually overall, will have opportunities. Things like the bus duty or the things that seem to be a little more on the administrative side.

Caroline explained that there are fewer male administrators in elementary schools in her district, and that she tends to collaborate more with female peers.

The male APs, they're the ones that I don't talk to as much. But, it could be my own fault. I guess women just relate with women. I haven't really sat with any (at meetings), because they assign our seats. But, I have been open to conversations with the male AP's. There are just not that many, actually.

Conflicting attitudes about what it means to be female and what it means to be an administrator necessitate supportive relationships with veteran female administrators (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995). Caroline expressed feeling fortunate to have a female mentor in her current principal.

**Summary- Caroline Crescent.** Caroline was the only participant to move directly from a classroom teaching role to the assistant principal role. She lacked practical experience with administrative functions, and had not experienced the whole school focus that benefitted those transitioning from resource positions. However, she faced many of the same challenges as the other participants. For example, the lack of a regular daily schedule, constant interruptions, and the variety of tasks were challenges Caroline

described. Finding a sense of belonging began as a challenge but progressed considerably during our time as conversational partners.

Caroline identified her age and life experience as strengths in her transition. No longer having children at home made the work/life balance a bit easier for Caroline than for some of the other participants. She credited the perspective she gained through life experiences for her lack of fear and ability to let go of things outside of her control. Another strength Caroline described was her supportive relationship with her experienced, female principal. Her principal purposefully presented them as a unified team, and intentionally used “We” or “Caroline and I” when addressing the staff. She indicated that her principal also provided many opportunities for growth, along with plenty of support.

Caroline’s many years as a classroom teacher influenced her focus on instruction and learning. She mentioned her drive to do what is best for students and commitment to improving the instructional practice of teachers. She expressed a commitment to relationships and to finding a win-win solution in a conflict. During our last conversation, Caroline described a growing sense of ownership in her new school and gratitude for the opportunities brought about by her new role.

Caroline’s most prominent challenges in the transition from her previous role to her current role are summarized in Figure 4.

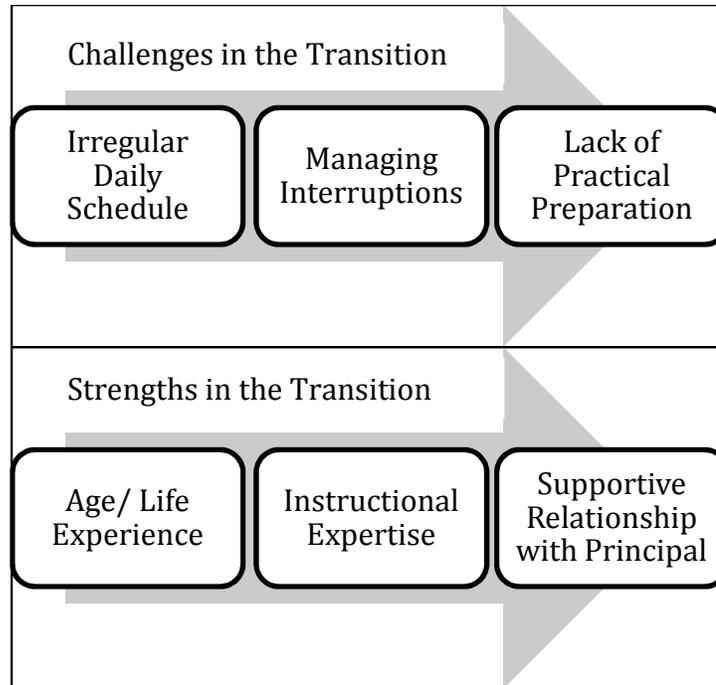


Figure 4. Caroline’s Challenges and Strengths in the Transition

**Reflecting on the Conversations with Caroline Crescent.** Caroline had only been in her assistant principal role for a few months at the time of our first conversation. Initially, I was apprehensive about what she would be able to say about the role, being in it for such a short period of time. We met in her office, which was neat and welcoming. When I entered the building, her principal was excited to be hanging Caroline’s new picture on the office wall. The principal’s support and commitment to growing Caroline as a leader were evident. Despite her short time in the role, Caroline seemed to have an ease and relaxed approach even when discussing the challenges of the role. At first, I attributed her unruffled demeanor to being so new that she did not yet know what she didn’t know. However, as our conversations progressed, I came to realize that her life experiences enabled her to navigate this transition without the constant worry many others experienced. I enjoyed my conversations with Caroline, particularly our last one, when she was solidly in the refreezing process and expressed growing satisfaction in her

new role and a sense of ownership in her new school. There was a definite movement from the unfreezing process into the refreezing process during our time as conversational partners (Notes from my Researcher Reflective Journal, January 28, 2011 and May 14, 2011).

#### **Case Four: Sydney Skipper**

**Meet Sydney.** Sydney and I arranged our first interview via e-mail; so we did not speak until I arrived to conduct the interview. Like Caroline, she had been in the role for only a few months at the time of our first interview. I was again apprehensive about how much she would be able to say about her new role. However, Sydney turned out to be a worthy conversational partner, and I enjoyed her cheerful disposition and friendly, casual manner (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

Sydney is married with two young children. She has always (somewhat cautiously) considered becoming an administrator. She stated,

It was something I always had in the back of my mind. I wanted to make sure I was cut out for it before (I started that path). I wanted to make sure I had strong leadership in my classroom, great rapport with my families as well as great rapport with the staff. Through the years, through the leadership positions I held (as a teacher), the respect that I had, and the ability to do different things, I realized I needed to do something more challenging for myself.

Sydney had been a school administrator for only a few months when she became my conversational partner, but she had been in education for nineteen years. She experienced many leadership roles during her tenure as a classroom teacher. She explained,

I've been teaching eighteen years. I went from a first grade teacher, self-contained, to a kindergarten teacher. Within my first couple of years I went into leadership positions within my school, team leader as well as chairing all different committees. I always teased my principal that he needed to get me many different hats because it always seemed like I was always chairing something. If I wasn't asked, I was volunteering. From that point he kept bugging me and asking me to move from kindergarten to third grade. They needed strong teachers there. I said, 'No, no, I'm happy where I am.' Then he said, 'Well, why don't you go to National Board?' 'Try National Board?' I said, 'Why go to National Board? I don't need to do that.' So he was the first person that kind of nudged me, by giving me many different leadership opportunities. Then I started getting bored. I was challenged all the time in my classroom and challenged with the new leadership positions, but I started getting bored of doing the same thing all the time.

In 2004, I started my graduate work. At the time I wasn't sure whether I was going to major in instructional or ed. leadership, and I had several people nudge me into the ed. leadership area. I went full time, before children, and graduated in 2006. I'm not a test taker at all, but studied until I couldn't study anymore and went through the FELE. Our process here to get into the principal or AP pool is pretty stringent with the different levels. I got in it the first time, for which I felt very lucky. As they say, I swam in the pool for three years because the right fit wasn't there. I decided to fatten my resume. I went from Title 1 to Non-Title 1, a school of 450 to a school of 800. From kindergarten to third grade,

and with a brand new reading series, and just a whole different world. Then I became a mentor for twenty-two new teachers, and I was over thirteen mentors. So, with that, I just was the pyramid. I looked over the mentors and the mentees the mentors looked over, that kind of thing. That opened my eyes to new experiences, and it also made me realize something I definitely wanted to do- to lead a faculty. Then I got the job here in 2010.

Sydney's school serves a population of 920 students, of which 26% are considered economically disadvantaged and 46% are considered minority. Sydney works with an experienced, female principal.

**Sydney's Work/Life Balance.** I was interested to find out about Sydney's work/life balance, as she was my only participant with two very young children at home. Having been in the assistant principal role for less than a year, Sydney reported that the position was still overwhelming. When asked about the work/life balance, she said,

There is no balance. I still spend a lot more time doing work than I do with my family. Last night I was working at 2:00 a.m. trying to get things done. And I'd say probably three out of the five nights I stay up late. But I'm home and I do my family things, and once the children go to bed, I'm up being Assistant Principal again doing paperwork.

Fortunately, Sydney does have a great deal of support from her husband and extended family. She described that support:

I'm very fortunate. I have a very supportive husband. My mom lives next door. So I have support. My husband owns his own company, and his business is a little more flexible than mine. I get here at eight o'clock in the morning on the dot,

usually, and I leave anywhere from five-thirty to six-thirty. I go home--my husband is incredible. He has things already prepared and everything ready. He's definitely a hands-on father, very supportive when I went through school for my graduate degree, and continues to be supportive.

Sydney did express some optimism that the work/life balance may improve after she has more experience in the role. She said,

I am thinking because I am into all these new things that it may be easier once I've had a little bit of experience. It might be easier just to be able to have a set time for when I leave and know how long the things I need to accomplish will take.

The work/life balance was not the only challenge Sydney expressed. She found many challenges that stemmed from leaving her previous role.

**Sydney's Unfreezing from the Teaching Role.** Like the other participants, Sydney found difficulty adjusting to a new dynamic with teachers. She stated, "I think my biggest challenge is trying to remove myself from the mindset that I am one of you, too. I'm not one of you any longer." Her challenge was compounded by following a very successful assistant principal, who left to become principal at another school. She explained,

One of the biggest challenges I had this year was moving in the middle of a school year and following a very successful administrator. The person that I came after was appointed to a principalship at a struggling school and she did some absolutely fantastic things here and had a lot of rapport built with all of the faculty and staff and the families. And I think coming in, I felt I needed to try to follow suit, but know that I need to also form my own identity.

As she worked to build her own reputation, Sydney also described frustration in trying to uncover the unwritten rules of her new school. She described it as “the fear that you don’t know what you don’t know.” She revealed a time when she felt that everyone else knew something she did not:

I think the most frustrating thing is not knowing all of the questions to ask. Like, today, I walked in and in my past experience, on teacher planning days, you can wear jeans. I walked in wearing jeans and did not realize that the school was not a jean day on teacher planning days. So, it's those things that are understood, but not necessarily in writing that I'm learning every day. And my hand wasn't slapped, nothing went wrong, but it's just those little things that you just wish you knew to ask.

A similar situation happened when she was asked to sit in on a teacher evaluation. She explained,

(My principal) was doing an evaluation with a teacher. I didn’t realize that teachers get really nervous when you sit and take notes. In the middle of the evaluation she looked over at me, and she hadn't asked me to do anything, I was just supposed to be a silent observer. And instead I had my notebook out and I was taking notes. And she said, ‘OK, I'm going to stop with you right now (to the teacher) and I'm going to turn to you (meaning me). Well, what are you doing?’ I said, ‘I'm sorry,’ and I looked at the teacher across. I said, ‘I'm not writing anything about what you're responding.’ I said, ‘I'm learning from (the principal) how to ask those questions to probe and get that information out of you.’

Sydney's lengthy and recent teaching experience was a strength and helped her keep the perspectives of teachers in mind. However, she was challenged by the need to consider teachers' perspectives while rapidly making multiple decisions in her new role. She described that challenge:

I needed to hit the ground running and not look back. Well there's no time to look back. You have to make your decisions quickly. You have to make the smartest decisions for your faculty and staff. You have to always keep them in mind. This isn't a position that you could ever be selfish; it's something you have to put other people first. And if you're not willing to put other people in front of your needs, then you probably shouldn't be here.

Putting others needs above her own was typical of Sydney, and also typical of the way women lead. Fortunately, during our second interview, Sydney reported a growing comfort with making tough decisions and with finding more confidence in her new role.

**Sydney's Refreezing into the Administrative Role.** Like the other conversational partners, Sydney had a great concern for developing relationships in her new role. Relationships with staff members were the first things Sydney mentioned as improving over time. She said,

At the beginning they didn't know me at all. They knew my reputation because, of course, when anything new happens they are quick to ask people that they know in the district. But I think establishing those relationships (with staff members) was the key thing for me coming in. And slowly letting people know who I am and just being myself around them. They understood that I wasn't out to

get them, that I was there to support them. And that was just one of the key pieces.

Sydney made progress in seeing herself as an administrator and letting go of viewing herself as a teacher. She was even able to give away some of the things she had been hanging on to from her classroom teaching. She was still struggling with learning to delegate, although she acknowledged the importance of delegating in order to manage her time. She explained,

I should be able to delegate people filing for me, but I can't, because I need to know exactly where it goes. The little things are easy for me to delegate, but I still want to know what's going on. So, if I give somebody something to type, I want to make sure I've read over it because I'm just that kind of person. But delegating has to become easier for me simply because time is so difficult to come by.

I noted that, as Sydney progressed in learning the behaviors associated with her new role, her behaviors affected her thoughts. Both her thoughts and behaviors became evidence of her emerging leadership style.

**Sydney's Leadership Style.** Sydney shared that her recent experience in teaching allowed her to understand things from a teacher's point of view. She remembered asking herself, "What was I missing as a teacher? How can I provide those supports?" Her commitment to supporting teachers was evident in the way she reported spending her time. She stated,

Paperwork, (my principal) has taught me, can wait until the afternoon when all the teachers are gone. Being in the classroom visible to the children and visible to the teachers is your most important thing because you can't do that once they're

gone. Being in there to make sure that your guest teachers (substitutes) are on top of things and not just sitting behind a desk and doing nothing, that's one of the things, and just making sure that the needs of your children are met. When they're here, that's my top priority.

Putting herself in proximity to teachers and students during the school day required Sydney to streamline other tasks. When asked about the way she shares information, she commented that her preference is face-to-face but she has to rely on other methods for efficiency. She explained,

I usually like to communicate person to person, especially if it has a high level of importance. If it's something that needs to be done right away, I do person to person and if it's something that involves something that might be a little bit controversial or a little bit iffy in nature. But in general, if I just need everybody to know, I will do an e-mail out to the staff, or I will deliver that information in a meeting.

Sydney's concern for communication and focus on relationships is typical of female leaders. While spending most of her time with students and staff, she had to become very organized in order to get all of the required tasks completed. She credited organization as one factor that contributed to her success and resilience.

**Sydney's Adaptive Behaviors.** During our second interview, it became evident that Sydney was developing some coping strategies and finding ways to not only survive, but to thrive in her new role. Although she had a myriad of new tasks to complete, Sydney reported feelings of satisfaction in completing difficult tasks. She said,

I have done accountability fixes for the very first time this year. Of course, I also did the whole (state test) scenario, organizing the specials and the schedules for that. Even human growth and development, and the schedule for that was a huge undertaking with a school of this size. If it were a smaller school, it may have been a little easier and I wouldn't of have to dodge so many areas of making sure I am giving those teachers their planning time and using the contract language. It's just a lot of scheduling, and a lot of being sure that I'm organized, and I do not have just the information -- That I have given the information out to other people.

Sydney said that after completing difficult tasks, she liked to reflect on how things went. She stated,

And then, like I said, I go back and reflect and say, 'OK, that's something I need to take a step back and look at. How did I affect that person? Did I make that person think things in a different way? Did I provide change?' It's just one of those things that, after a day you're either worn out, or you're rejoicing because you've done something and you feel accomplished.

Sydney confessed that to avoid feeling overwhelmed, she tried to take things day by day. She explained,

Taking it day by day- I'm in a really good spot. I have, like I said, an administrator that has lots of experience. She has wisdom beyond belief. So I'm very fortunate to be working under someone that has that wisdom, coming from different schools. She opened this school and she has a lot of history here, and the parents respect her. So knowing that I am gaining her trust and knowing that the families are seeing that is a really, really good thing for me. Just making sure that

when she asks me something I do it to the best of my ability, but when she gives advice I need to soak it in like a sponge. I do take a lot of notes.

Like Caroline, Sydney's principal provided great support for her, and they developed a mentoring relationship. Dunlap & Schmuck (1995) propose that conflicting attitudes about what it means to be female and what it means to be an administrator necessitate supportive relationships with veteran female administrators. Sydney expressed feeling fortunate to have such a supportive relationship with her current principal. I noted from many of the statements Sydney made that in addition to being supportive, her principal seemed to be very direct and give her a good deal of feedback (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

**Mentorship and Sydney.** Sydney benefited from working with an experienced female principal who was committed to helping her grow. She believed that observing her principal was a large part of her development. She said,

Just being able to watch and observe her and see how she acts, and how she behaves and how she listens are great things that I'm soaking in. Because I'm a people person and I like to please, I do a lot of head nodding or smiling when I really should just kind of be stoic and listen, and it's really tough for me. So that's one thing I'm learning from her.

Although Sydney did not have a formal mentor assigned by her district, her long tenure in the district afforded her a great support network. She explained,

I have friends who are AP's just because I've been in the county for so long. I also network at meetings. I call the past AP here and say, 'OK, you put this system in

place. Tell me what your goal in mind was.' So, we talk about that. I have her number memorized.

In addition to observing her principal, seeking advice, and calling the former assistant principal, Sydney also liked to reflect on her practice as a new administrator. She was a reflective conversational partner, and even mentioned that our conversations assisted her development. She said,

It's a nice thing to be able to answer your questions because I reflect as I'm answering, and I'm going, "Really?" It's the things that you take for granted, you know? I know I need to start a journal. But at the same time, when is the time to jot it down because you're running from one direction to another? So, when I stop to think about things, it's just that kind of... it's that peace.

I noted that between Sydney's busy work life and busy home life, time to reflect must be difficult to find.

**Considering Gender with Sydney.** Sydney's transition was typical for female school leaders in many ways. She brought extensive teaching experience and instructional expertise to the assistant principal role. Like many women with young children at home, she felt the pressure of balancing motherhood and work. However, she benefitted from strong family support and a husband who worked at home and took a non-traditional, hands-on approach to parenting their young children. When I asked about gender differences in the transition, Sydney did not identify any challenges attributable to gender. She said that she felt assured that the staff would have been welcoming to anyone hired for the role, but did not reveal any differences in developing a leader persona

between herself and her male colleagues. I wondered if she had considered gender and leadership prior to our conversations (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

**Summary- Sydney Skipper.** Although Sydney spent nineteen years as a teacher, a move to administration was always a consideration. Sydney benefitted from a good deal of support from her family as she completed the requirements for her administrative role and began her administrative journey. She also benefitted from a strong network of peers pursuing similar goals. Sydney was my only conversational partner with two children under the age of five. She described the challenge of balancing motherhood with her new role as assistant principal. Many days she went home to care for her children, and then stayed up late to complete tasks for work.

In addition to challenges at home, Sydney encountered many challenges at work in her transition. Like the other participants, she had to shift from feeling a part of the group of teachers to feeling a bit like an outsider. While the length and recency of her teaching experience helped her understand a teacher's perspective, she also had to begin to consider things from an administrator's point of view. In addition, Sydney had to learn the unwritten rules and hidden culture of her new school. Fortunately, Sydney found a strong role model in her new principal, an experienced and highly regarded female leader. During our time as conversational partners, Sydney reported a growing confidence and satisfaction in being able to solve difficult problems and complete challenging tasks. This satisfaction along with her appreciation for opportunities to reflect contributed to her resilience.

Sydney's most prominent challenges in the transition from her previous role to her current role are summarized in Figure 5.

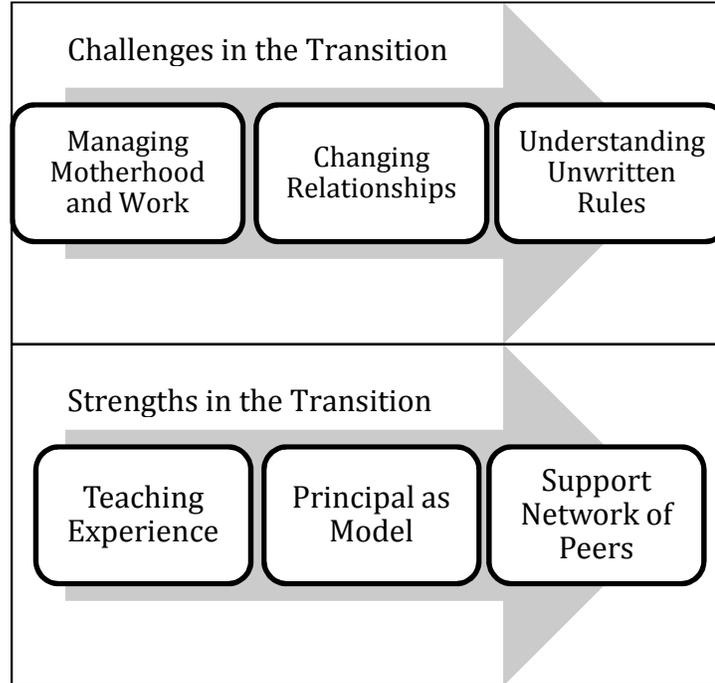


Figure 5. Sydney's Challenges and Strengths in the Transition

**Reflections on the Conversation with Sydney Skipper.** Sydney and I met for both interviews in her office. It was neat and warmly decorated. There was a cheerful and nurturing nature evident in Sydney's presence and in her office, indicative of her many years as a teacher of young children. It was evident that Sydney regularly operates at a fast pace. I noticed that she sometimes tried to answer my questions without sufficiently giving herself time to process them. So, she gave answers that did not adequately address the question. However, Sydney was warm and friendly; so I would rephrase the questions when necessary. She was also the newest assistant principal of the five participants, with just a couple of months under her belt. Considering the demands of her brand new role and the demands of her young family, I was surprised that she was willing to participate. She indicated in our last conversation that she enjoyed having the chance to just sit down

and reflect for a bit (Notes from my Researcher Reflective Journal February 24, 2011 and May 11, 2011).

### **Case Five: Bailey Birdwing**

**Meet Bailey.** Bailey and I spoke briefly on the phone to schedule our first interview. We did not meet until I arrived to conduct the interview. However, after speaking with her on the phone, I felt very optimistic that we would have a gratifying conversational partnership. I found Bailey to be a self-assured, and in some ways daring, woman who had not viewed her career as a series of discrete steps from teacher to administrator (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal). She had pursued her passions and had a variety of experiences. She stated,

I did (always want to be an administrator), but I know that most people have a plan, like five years as a teacher, three years outside the classroom, and then become an administrator. My plan was to enjoy every day of what I do, and when I'm ready, and my kids are, I feel, where they need to be, I'll pursue my other goals at that point. And, it just so happened that my daughter went off to college the same week I got an administrator's job.

Bailey had been an administrator for less than one year at the time we began our conversational partnership, but she had worked in education for twenty-two years. She did not start out in education, but since changing fields, she has held a variety of roles. She explained,

I graduated with a psychology degree, and was actually planning to go to law school, but my plans changed. I decided that my entire life, at different points, I kind of had worked with children, and decided to do special education. So, I went

back to school in (another state), which is where I was from, and got my masters right out of college in special ed. I worked there for three years at a very unique program. It was called an adolescent partial hospital program. I was the educational component, and there were a lot of mental health components. It encompassed five different towns, and it was 6th grade through 12th grade. And the only thing they gave me was a phone to the sheriff's office. So, that was quite an experience for being fresh out of college, and my first teaching experience. Then I moved to Florida and taught where I am now currently assistant principal in a drop-out prevention program. I did one year at (another school, a high school) in an EBD unit.

Then I became a program specialist here, in the county, for twelve years. So, I was out of the classroom, and really traveling to different schools, taking care of all the ESE compliance and files, staffings, and all of that. And then I went to (another county) for five years. I was a behavior specialist for three, and an achievement specialist for two. I had no intention of returning to (my previous county). I went back to school, oh, I think six years ago, and got my Ed.S. in ed. leadership and got in the pool, but wanted to get my feet wet first. Then, my youngest daughter, actually, joined my older daughter in college. Someone told me, "Why don't you come back (my previous county), where you know everybody?" I said, "I'm fine. No, I like where I am." And, we went online and this school had an opening for an AP. It was the last day to apply. I applied, and five days later was hired. This is the school I opened (as a teacher) twenty years ago.

When Bailey and I met to do our first interview, she worked at a school a population of 900 students, of which 74% are considered economically disadvantaged and 30% are considered minority. Bailey worked with an experienced female principal. We planned to meet again for a second interview at the end of the school year. However, this turned out to be a hectic and stressful time for Bailey. The principal of her school returned to an assistant principal position. A new principal came to the school and brought an assistant principal with her. Bailey was moved to an assistant principal role at another school with a similar population. We spoke again as she was launching a new year as assistant principal at her new school. At the end of our conversational partnership, she was settled in her new school. She was now working with a male principal, and this was his first principal position.

The traumatic events at the end of the school year made Bailey a unique conversational partner and highlighted her resilience. Enduring her first year with an ineffective principal who did not provide her with the model or the mentorship she needed was difficult, but the way she was informed of her move to a new school was quite distressing. She shared that she knew of her former principal's move at the end of the school year. However, she did not know that she was moving to a new school until the new principal arrived on the last day of school with a new assistant principal. The new administrators thought Bailey knew about the change, but no one from the district told her. She described this day as uncomfortable for everyone involved and very upsetting. Fortunately, all worked out well. During our last conversation, Bailey said, "It was really difficult, but I'm in a good place now and it's wonderful. This has been an awesome beginning of the year." I was able to note some of the contrasts between her

administrative role at her first school setting and her current school setting during our conversational partnership.

**Bailey's Work/Life Balance.** During our first interview, Bailey shared her struggle to find a balance between her work and personal life. She said, "I think my biggest challenge is to get done what I need to have done and still meet the needs of everybody else. I spend maybe twelve to fourteen hours a day here." She expressed some optimism that things will improve as she becomes more experienced. She stated, "That balance is very, very difficult. I hear that once you do it long enough, you learn to balance, but, at this point, everything is important to me. So, I'm having a hard time prioritizing." Bailey reported that some changes in her personal life have made it a bit easier to focus on her job. She explained,

It's just my life situation has changed. I recently got divorced and my kids went on to college. I've got this new job. Instead, I'm just so energized by it, it's just so positive to me that my whole life is open. So, I guess I see myself wherever this road takes me.

That energy as well as the depth and variety of experiences made the transition for Bailey different from the other participants in some ways.

Bailey described an improvement to the work/life balance by the end of our conversational partnership, after moving to her new school site. She said,

Last year absolutely no balance, it was horrible. I was surrounded by work till nine o'clock every night. This year, I went to a training called the Breakthrough Coach. It's awesome and there are days (assigned to different tasks). My office is

empty (of clutter). Wow- I have been out in classrooms more, and I would say eighty percent of my days I go home on time.

It was relieving to hear Bailey describe such improvement in her work/life balance. Her daily schedule had been such a source of frustration during the unfreezing process.

**Bailey's Unfreezing from the Teaching Role.** Like the other participants, Bailey indicated that adjusting to the schedule was a big challenge in the transition from teacher to administrator. She said,

I think the biggest challenge I have is time management. You know, as a teacher, or as a coach, or even when I was a program specialist, my day was scheduled by what I needed to do. I find that it doesn't matter how often I schedule my day, it depends on what everybody else needs.

In addition, although she occasionally had difficult conversations with teachers and parents in her other roles, she reported more intensity in this new role. She stated,

I had to have difficult conversations before, but it was more peer to peer. Now, it's very evaluative and there's no way around it. So, I am used to being a cheerleader and sometimes you can't cheer anymore, you have to just say, 'I've cheered and cheered and now it's time to say, it's this or this.' So, it's very difficult, it's very uncomfortable. But, again, I focus on the students and I get through it, because it really is about the students.

One surprise to Bailey was the fact that it was often veteran teachers, not newcomers, who took much of her time and attention. She explained,

I wish I could remind them of why they are here, which would solve a lot of personnel issues, which would also solve a lot of our achievement issues. And

that is probably my most difficult task right now is to remind teachers of why they got into teaching. They are angry and saying, 'That's not what we used to do and teaching never used to be like this. And students never used to be like this. And the government never used to be like this. This is a pain.' But teaching is still teaching and kids are still kids and the values are still there, but they forget that. Perhaps Bailey's past experiences allowed her to quickly get past some of the challenges of time and task and sink into deeper issues of personnel and student achievement. I noted that some of the frustrations she was having with veteran staff members seemed to stem from the deeper culture of the school she was working in (as noted in my Researcher Reflective Journal).

**Refreezing into the Administrative Role.** Bailey reiterated the way her past experiences expedited her transition and helped her accept the challenges that thwart many new assistant principals. She stated,

Every job I've had required me to try to change the culture or the belief systems of schools. So, I think if I didn't have those experiences, I would be disheartened coming in as a new AP, but because I know the difficulty and that change is painful, I'm not - it's not new to me. I think that would be the most difficult thing that a new AP would not understand if they're coming out of the classroom. Because when you're in your classroom, you think everybody does what you do, you don't have that big picture. I've always had that big picture, so I knew what I was getting into.

Although Bailey felt eager to change the culture of her first school, it was difficult without a collaborative relationship with the principal. Other participants described their female principals as mentors and supporters, but Bailey did not.

The refreezing process for Bailey was complicated by her move to a new school site at the end of her first year as an assistant principal. At first, she felt like she took a step back. However, over time and in a more positive school culture, she regained her confidence. She stated, “With the move and just all of that, it was difficult. But after I got settled here, it felt like getting back on a bike- and it was awesome. I'm in a different culture, and so it has been wonderful. Now I'm very comfortable.”

Bailey conveyed a dedication to students as key to her transition at both schools. She said, “I just love the students and I love the idea that my classroom grew. That's how I see it, my classroom grew and my students got bigger. So, I just look at it as this is my classroom.” Bailey described that connection to students and focus on instruction as central to her leadership.

**Bailey's Leadership Style.** Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) suggest that a connection to a higher power is an important aspect of leadership for many women. Bailey described a spiritual side to her leadership. She said,

Just that, as corny as this is going to sound, every night when I lay down, I still - I can still remember my first day of teaching ever. And it was in this crazy program with twelve high school students from two different counties that had just got released from prison, actually JDC. And I was scared to death and I remember just kind of praying, you know, ‘Please let me do right by these students.’ I still every night say, ‘Please let me do right by my students.’ And every morning, I

thank God that it's a new day and I have another opportunity to do better than I did the day before. And, as corny as that sounds, I just feel so blessed that I have this opportunity.

She indicated that she found strength in her spirituality and used that strength to encourage and empower others, both teachers and students.

**Bailey's Adaptive Behaviors.** This spirituality and passion also contributed to Bailey's resilience during her transition in professional roles, despite the traumatic events at the end of her first year. She explained,

Yes, I'm going to change the world. I'm going to make a difference. I'm going to - I still have, as a matter of fact, last year I had a former student from about twenty years ago, actually, she was here, send me a card. And then she called me, because I live in the same house (as I did back then), and said that she was getting married and she would not get married unless I was there. She said it's because of me that her life is the way that it is. It's those things that keep me going; so I feel blessed that I have this job and I have these opportunities.

She mentioned her passion for bettering the lives of students as well as the positive energy she derives from students several times during our conversational partnership. For example, she said, "It's all about my students. Whenever I am having a really difficult time making decisions or frustrated with something, I just go out to the classroom."

While less intriguing than passion and spirituality, Bailey's skill in multi-tasking also contributed to her success in the transition. She said,

I am a phenomenal multi-tasker, so I almost do better with interruption. I focus better when I know I have a limited time. So, if you give me two hours to do a

task, I will take two hours. If you give me ten minutes, I will do the same task in ten minutes. So, I don't mind the interruptions, it's the, I think, prioritizing the importance.

Along with the ability to multi-task, the ability to remain calm was a benefit to Bailey during the transition from teacher to administrator and in the move to a new school. She stated,

Multitasking and that's a biggie. I think I have the ability to size up situations pretty quickly and problem solve at that same moment. So, I'm not a real panicker, I don't panic, I don't get flustered or upset. I'm a very positive person and I'm very calm. And, as a crisis arises, I kind of calm even more. So, I think just because I'm not young, I'm not old but I'm not young, and I've had a lot of experiences, I know that things resolve themselves.

Thankfully, Bailey had a great deal of professional experiences to fall back on. Those experiences helped her strategize and problem solve. Those past experiences were particularly valuable since she did not have a formal mentor assigned.

**Mentorship and Bailey.** Bailey did not have a formal mentor but indicated that she was developing a support network. She said,

I have a friend who is an assistant principal. We get together weekly, just to talk. We have very similar schools, so we just talk about our experiences and see if they're common. And, we help each other that way. I don't have a mentor, but I know many people because I've been in this county for a long time. This county really does lack in that type of mentoring program. They're trying. They just hired

someone from (another county) who knew all about mentoring, and was involved in all the AP trainings.

Bailey indicated that she did not experience a mentoring relationship with the principal at her previous school, but she said she is developing a mentoring relationship with the principal at her new school. I noted that the relationship may be limited by his being a very new principal and presenting a male model of school leadership. Therefore, she may still need to lean on her support network.

Although she spoke about her resiliency and developing a support network, Bailey was not necessarily committing to stay in the assistant principal position for a long time, nor to follow the typical career ladder to the principalship. She explained,

I'm not going to make a plan - I'm just riding it. And, I would like to be a principal, but - I'd also like to be a professor. So, I'm thinking of going back for my doctorate so I can sit under the Eiffel Tower and do online classes. You know, really. My children are always first in my life and they have international goals and they're like, 'Mom, you need to have them too so we can all travel together.'

As Gilligan (1993) suggested, women have different needs than men. Bailey had different ideas about achievement and self-fulfillment than her peers following the typical career hierarchy.

**Considering Gender with Bailey.** Bailey's path to school administration is quite unique. She did not set out to be a school administrator and is not committed to a traditional career ladder in education. As a woman who has recently become single and sent her children off to college, she communicated feeling free to pursue her passions. Her passion for helping students with special needs constituted a social justice

perspective indicative of many female school leaders. When I asked Bailey about differences between her transition and the transitions of her male colleagues, she indicated that the most important considerations are the fit between the assistant principal and the school and the assistant principal and the current principal. She suggested that some male principals tend to prefer working with other males. However, she was feeling a growing connection with her new, male principal.

Bailey described some differences between male and female principals that she thought might be attributable to gender. She said, “Males tend to want to get to the point. They don't have time for the whining and the crying (we sometimes experience) in elementary.” When asked if she was referring to the students or the teachers, she replied that she meant both. She added, “I think there is less of a tendency to go to a male principal with those kinds of issues.” I wondered if this decrease in fussing at her new school was also due to the difference in culture between the two schools, rather than due to the gender of the principal.

**Summary- Bailey Birdwing.** Bailey was a unique conversational partner as she had both life experience and a variety of work experiences over her twenty-two years in education. She was a teacher for hospitalized adolescents, a teacher for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, a dropout prevention specialist, an exceptional student education program specialist, and a student achievement coach before becoming an assistant principal. These experiences as well as her recent empty nest (she became single and her youngest child left for college), resulted in a transition a bit different than the transitions of the other conversational partners. She still found the work/life balance to be a challenge, but did not have the added pressure of family members needing her

attention at home. Although she had no formal mentor assigned, her vast work experience facilitated the creation of a support network of peers. The sudden change in school sites at the end of the year also gave Bailey a unique perspective as a conversational partner.

One challenge Bailey experienced which was similar to the other participants was lack of control over her own daily schedule. She explained that the needs of students and staff members often dictated how her day would flow. She found some strategies for improving this struggle after attending a training called The Breakthrough Coach. In addition, difficult conversations were a challenge experienced by Bailey and the other participants. Bailey indicated that the most taxing conversations were those with veteran teachers who had not retained the same passion and positive outlook as she upheld. This challenge eased as she experienced a more positive culture at her new school.

Her passion for bettering educational opportunities for students contributed to her resilience in the transition from teacher to administrator and in the traumatic events at the end of her first year. Improving educational outcomes for those students often ineffectively served, such as those with special needs, was especially important to Bailey. Coupled with her passion for helping students was a spiritual connection that kept Bailey centered in the transition. She spoke of the ability to multi-task and to remain calm as strengths which sustained her. These strengths are likely linked to both her life and work experience.

Bailey's most prominent challenges in the transition from her previous role to her current role are summarized in Figure 6.

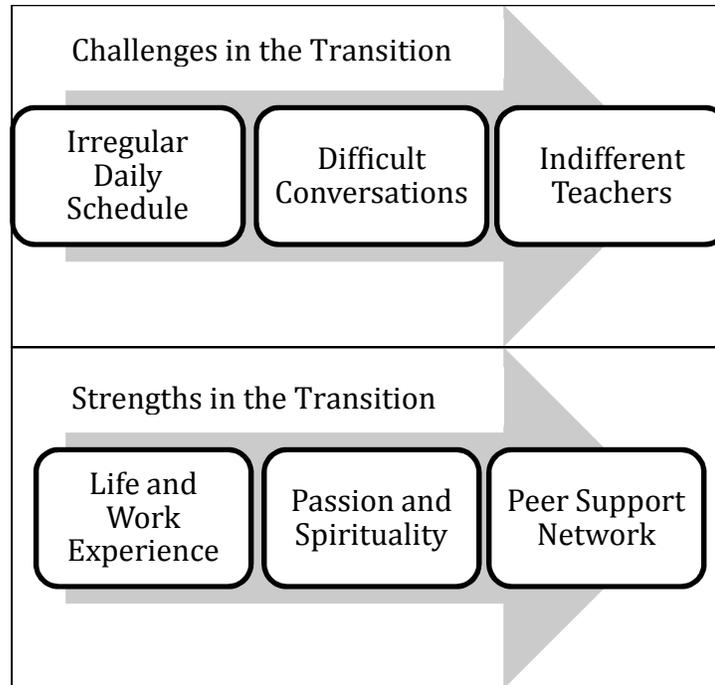


Figure 6. Bailey’s Challenges and Strengths in the Transition

**Reflections on the Conversation with Bailey Birdwing.** Bailey was the conversational partner with the longest tenure in education and the greatest variety of experiences. It was interesting to note the contrasts between Bailey’s work life at the first school where she became an administrator with her new school. The differences in school culture and the impact on her transition could not be ignored. Some of the challenges, such as the negativity of veteran teachers, changed. The change was not the result of improvement over time, but was instead the result of moving to a school with a more positive culture.

Bailey asked many questions about my dissertation journey as she communicated an interest in pursuing a doctoral degree. We shared a passion for exceptional student education and also shared a social justice perspective regarding school leadership. Therefore, I found the conversations with Bailey to have an ease and flow. I encouraged Bailey to share her experiences beyond this dissertation in the form of her own studies.

She also described an interest in writing articles or books (Notes from my Researcher Reflective Journal, January 26, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

As stated in Chapter 1, the growing number of female administrators requires an examination of how women leaders are fairing. These five early-career administrators are faring well, despite many challenges. During their transitions, all five struggled to balance their work lives with their personal lives. Also, as these women experienced unfreezing from their teaching roles, one of the most prominent challenges discussed by all was the change in professional relationships. Additional challenges included role complexity, task overload, and lack of a consistent schedule. None of the five participants had a formal mentor assigned. Not one of them benefited from overlapping time when the former assistant principal was still on the campus. Furthermore, all five indicated that they needed more practical experiences to prepare for the assistant principal role. However, as they experienced the refreezing process, all five developed greater confidence and comfort in the assistant principal role. During the last round of interviews, all five women reflected positively on the school year, and all five were committed to staying in the assistant principal role for the upcoming year.

The indication that women's leadership positively impacts school culture and student achievement necessitates a closer look at the work lives of women in school administration. All five of these participants described their leadership style as collaborative. They spoke of empowering teachers and developing a leadership team. Instructional expertise and a commitment to social justice were positive attributes they brought to their new roles.

These five participants differed in age, experiences prior to beginning the assistant principal role, and demands outside of work. Despite these differences, their transitions were remarkably similar and highlight some changes that universities and districts need to make to ensure the success of early-career administrators. Additionally, describing the transition from teacher to administrator for these five women may assist future female leaders as they go through the internal changes necessary to develop their own leadership personas.

In this Chapter, I have described the work settings and work lives of the five participants making the transition from a teaching role to a school administration role (specifically, assistant principal). I presented detailed accounts of the data I collected from interviewing each of the five women twice. I summarized the data into a phenomenological description of each case, highlighting common categories within each one. In the next chapter, I will present a cross-case analysis of each woman's case, including common themes. I will make a distinction between essential meanings, without which the phenomenon would not retain its essence, and other common themes, which are more incidental. I will highlight some individual differences and notable exceptions. I will discuss implications for research on women in school leadership, as well as implications for aspiring female administrators and the school districts who will hire them.

## Chapter 5

### Analysis, Interpretations and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain selected female leaders' perspectives on the transition from teacher to school administrator.

My exploratory questions that guided the study were:

1. What elements constitute the perspective of the participants?
2. What variables influence women's perspectives as they make the transition from teacher to administrator?
3. What barriers and challenges do women encounter as they move from teacher to administrator?
4. What variables contribute to resiliency and agency for female administrators?

The transition from the comfort of a familiar role, that of teacher, to the discomfort of a new role, that of school administrator, is a transformative process (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Transforming oneself requires leaving what is known and venturing into the unknown. Researchers have illuminated women's struggle to attain school leadership positions, but the transformation of females making this change in professional roles is seldom addressed in leadership literature. Curry (2000) explains, "Considerations of leadership have been lacking in two ways. They have not focused on the phenomenological aspect, including such developmental experiences as the intrapsychic aspects of the individual's ascendancy to a leader position through the construction of a leader persona, and they have not substantively included the

experiences of women” (p.18). Although context cannot be ignored, I intended to reveal some experiences common to many women undergoing this transformation.

The concepts of role identity and role transition have been extensively studied in the medical and business worlds, but this research is less evident in educational settings. Role identity research indicates that changing from one role to another does not happen in a discrete step; rather it is a process which requires bridging the disengagement of one role with the engagement of another. It requires shedding one persona and donning a new one (Ashforth, 2001). New school administrators are prepared through coursework and practica prior to being appointed to an administrative position. However, once appointed, these former teachers do not suddenly view themselves as administrators. They must go through a process of disengaging from the role of teacher while engaging in the role of administrator. The process may be confounding for women who came to school administration with greater reluctance than their male counterparts. Harris, Ballenger, and Jones (2007) indicate that men often enter the teaching force with their eyes on administration while women are committed to teaching for several years. Thus, women experience a less direct path to school leadership. Darling-Hammond (2007) suggests that factors associated with behaviors of female school leaders, such as providing support to staff, establishing a supportive culture, and establishing a participatory decision-making structure are strong predictors of organizational learning and also impact teacher motivation and empowerment. In addition, female leaders often bring several years of teaching experience and knowledge of effective instructional practices. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) propose that the prominence of instruction and learning at the center of women’s leadership drives instructional change that improves student learning. Thus,

with the need for strong instructional leaders, it is essential to recruit and retain female school administrators.

The need to recruit and retain strong female leaders brings about the need for research applicable to women in school administration. According to Shakeshaft and Grogan (2011), only five percent of articles published in *Educational Administration Quarterly* over the last twenty years mention gender. Dissertation research is only slightly more likely to target women, with nine percent of dissertations over the past twenty years centering on gender. Strong female leaders must become more frequent participants in research both because of their increasing number and because of the way they positively impact the schools they serve.

This study was intended to describe and explain selected women's perspectives on the transition from teacher to leader. My theoretical framework, Feminism and Phenomenology, as well as my personal experiences and my coursework shaped the study. Feminist researchers view gender as a lens through which school leaders make meaning of their work and lives. Young and Skrla (2003) explain, "Researchers of gender and educational leadership have centered women in their work and have explored the characteristics of women leaders and the institutional and professional cultures within which they work" (p.1). Researchers use a feminist lens to correct both the invisibility and the distortion historically present in male researchers' interpretations of the female experience (Reinhartz, 1992). Feminist theory's foundation is the notion that gender is a legitimate category for analysis (Young & Skrla, 2003). I used a Feminist lens to explore women's perceptions on the transition from teacher to administrator. Phenomenology is concerned with the collective reality of all persons who experience a phenomenon. It

aims at gaining a better understanding of the experience. Specifically, phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal meaning structures of lived experience. Phenomenology is concerned with both the concreteness and the essential nature of an experience (Van Manen, 1990). I used phenomenology to gain a better understanding of the essential meanings in the transition from teacher to administrator.

It is necessary to revisit the terms used in the study to facilitate the reader's understanding. The following terms were used throughout this study. Definitions of terms were derived from the review of the literature in Chapter Two:

*Early-career Administrator:* In this study, an early career administrator is a school administrator (likely an assistant principal) who has been in her current position for three years or less.

*Professional Role Identity:* In this study, professional role identity refers to the definition of self-in-role and encompasses all of the values, beliefs, and interaction styles one associates with that role.

*Role Transition:* In this study, role transition refers to the process an individual experiences as she moves from one role to another or changes her orientation to a role already held.

*Unfreezing:* In this study, unfreezing refers to the process an individual experiences as she exits the teaching role.

*Refreezing:* In this study, refreezing refers to the process an individual experiences as she becomes situated and more comfortable in the administrative role.

In Chapter 4, I presented the data gathered from interviewing five purposefully selected participants. This data was derived from interview transcripts, my Researcher

Reflective Journal, and relevant documents gathered from participants. I conducted two interviews with each participant at the school sites where the participants work in order to achieve a greater understanding of their work lives. I used the Sony IC Recorder to record audio during the interviews. I also took field notes during the interviews and collected documents from participants, such as resumes, e-mails, and other documents they wished to share. Rather than transcribing the interviews myself, I utilized the CastingWords transcription service. I shared transcripts with interviewees as a check for accuracy and to allow them to clarify as needed. Initially, I analyzed each transcript holistically. Then I analyzed each transcript for statements or phrases that seemed essential or revealing. After that, I looked at each sentence to discern what each revealed about the phenomenon. I used Microsoft Word to highlight transcripts in different colors based on the categories or themes that I identified. After analyzing the transcripts and other documents from the first round of interviews, I scheduled a second round of interviews with participants to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives. I repeated the steps for analysis as well as member checks. Following these steps resulted in my presentation of each participant's case in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I presented each participant's case as she made the transition from teacher to administrator. In this chapter, I will present a cross case analysis based on the experiences of all five participants. I will describe those elements that are essential to the transition from teacher to administrator. I will address the questions that guided this study. I will also provide recommendations for districts and university preparation programs responsible for preparing teachers to make the transition from teacher to administrator and responsible for socializing them into their new roles.

## **Cross Case Analysis**

In Chapter 4, I chose to communicate each participant's story as an individual case, while highlighting some common themes expressed by all participants: work/life balance; unfreezing from the teaching role; refreezing into the administrative role; leadership style; adaptive behaviors; mentorship. These common themes emerged from my immersion in the transcripts. According to Van Manen (1990), theme analysis is the process of recovering the themes that are embodied in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work. I used these six themes as a means of organizing the data into meaningful clusters. Van Manen (1990) suggests, "Ultimately, the concept of theme is rather irrelevant and may be considered simply as a means to get at the notion we are addressing. Theme gives control and order to our research and writing" (p.79). In other words, I used these six common themes as tools for organizing my data and reaching the true essence of the phenomenon. I also considered gender's impact on the transition for each participant. As I organized the data into the six themes, it became evident that the five participants described many parallel experiences relating to their transitions from teaching roles to administrative roles. Although there were differences in ages, school settings, and previous work and life experiences, the transition from teacher to administrator was remarkably similar for these five women. The similarities among the five participants' experiences along with the similarities in my own experiences led me to believe that there are many commonalities encountered by most women making this transition in professional roles. A summary of participant similarities across the six common themes is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of participant similarities across the common themes

Common Theme	Similarities Across Cases
Work/Life Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extension of work day due to constant interruptions</li> <li>• Sacrifices of family time</li> <li>• Sacrifices of health, including time for meals and sleep</li> </ul>
Unfreezing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in relationships with teachers</li> <li>• Lack of predictable schedule</li> <li>• Understanding policies, procedures, and unwritten rules</li> <li>• Lack of practical preparation</li> <li>• Inexperience with teacher evaluation and difficult conversations</li> </ul>
Refreezing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning to multi-task and to delegate</li> <li>• Building trust and deepening relationships with staff members</li> <li>• Feeling a sense of ownership for students and school</li> <li>• Becoming more confident and developing a leadership persona</li> </ul>
Leadership Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on instruction and learning</li> <li>• Building a collaborative culture</li> <li>• Empowering teachers</li> <li>• Differentiating for different needs of staff members</li> </ul>
Adaptive Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relying on passion, purpose, and spirituality</li> <li>• Gaining perspective through life and work experience</li> <li>• Using relaxation techniques</li> <li>• Feeling satisfaction in completing difficult tasks</li> <li>• Authenticity, patience, and persistence</li> </ul>
Mentorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal mentors assigned</li> <li>• Effective female principals met some needs for mentoring</li> <li>• Male principals offered support, but did not meet needs for mentoring</li> <li>• Developing a support network of peers</li> </ul>

**Work/Life Balance.** All five participants reported difficulty balancing work with their personal lives. Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) describe the difficult work/life balance for assistant principals. They state, “New AP’s expect that the job will require more time than teaching, but they usually do not realize the impact this load will have on them” (p.39). In addition to longer hours and evening events, Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) propose that the hours worked by assistant principals are not just quantitatively from those of teachers; they are qualitative different as well. While at work, assistant principals must be “physically, legally, and politically alert and responsible” (p.39). Activities are demanding, continuous and punctuated by interruptions.

Similarities within the theme of work/life balance included extension of the work day due to constant interruptions, sacrifices of family time, and sacrifices of health. The work/life balance was especially difficult for Megan and Sydney; both had children to care for at home. All of the participants described the need to stay late in their offices and complete work at home because their days were spent meeting the needs of students and teachers. Bailey stated that she was unable to complete tasks assigned to her during her regular work day because of continual interruptions from staff members or students. Sacrifices of health were also frequently described. Megan often skipped lunch to meet with teachers. Sarah described the insomnia that plagued her during her first year as an assistant principal. Caroline explained that weekend and evening events often took her away from home and family.

Although the work/life balance was difficult, all participants expressed optimism that the work/life balance would improve with more experience in the assistant principal

role. Sarah's response that the work life balance did improve as she entered her second year in administration was an encouraging sign. It made sense that tasks would take less time to complete with more experience. As school leaders, these women were the instruments of change and improvement at their school sites. The negative impact of unbalanced work and personal lives may lead to feelings of ineffectiveness at both work and home.

**Unfreezing from the Teaching Role.** Unfreezing requires disengaging from a previous role as well as a bit of lamenting over the way things used to be. Similarities among participants during the unfreezing process included changing relationships with teachers, lack of a predictable schedule, and lack of practical preparation for the assistant principal role. All of the participants described changes in work relationships as a major part of the unfreezing process. Sigford (2005) proposes that because there is a power differential due to the hierarchical relationships, a certain amount of tension between teachers and administrators cannot be avoided. Megan described walking into a room full of teachers and the way the dynamics changed. She longed for the teachers to feel comfortable with her as they would with a peer. Caroline described the process of gaining teachers' trust, a challenge she had not anticipated. Sydney talked about having to change her thoughts about the teachers with whom she worked. She described her thoughts when working with teachers, "I think my biggest challenge is trying to remove myself from the mindset that I am one of you, too. I'm not one of you any longer." Similarly, Sydney also described the challenge of creating her own identity as a leader when following a very experienced and highly regarded assistant principal. Forming an identity in their new roles was a basic motivation in the unfreezing process for these five women.

Role complexity, ambiguity, and overload were also part of the unfreezing process for all participants. Marshall and Hooley (2006) assert, “The assistant principal seldom has a consistent, well-defined job description, delineation of duties, or way of measuring outcomes from accomplishment of tasks” (p.7). Therefore, lack of practical preparation was a considerable challenge. Megan discussed not knowing the policies and procedures that governed the decision making process in her school and district. Sarah stated that the job responsibilities were unclear when she began in the assistant principal role. Caroline mentioned being unfamiliar with tasks assigned to her, such as overseeing a fire drill.

Participants also reported feeling unprepared for the difficult conversations their new roles required. The participants had been used to acting as colleagues or coaches, but difficult conversations with teachers were often necessary. Avoiding these kinds of conversations is more detrimental than summoning up the courage to have them. According to Scott (2002), leaders succeed or fail one conversation at a time” (p.1). Bailey described her frustration about having these difficult conversations with veteran teachers who had become jaded or negative about students and teaching. In addition to these difficult conversations with staff members, these early-career administrators also had to manage student discipline and facilitate difficult conversations with parents. None of these challenges should have been surprising to participants, yet they felt unprepared to deal with them.

**Refreezing into the Administrative Role.** Refreezing is a process that renders what was once new and intimidating more or less ordinary. Similarities in the refreezing process among participants included learning to multi-task and delegate, building trust

and deepening relationships with staff members, and feeling a sense of ownership for the school and students. In addition, participants were developing their own leadership personas during the unfreezing process. By the end of our time as conversational partners, all five women reported growing in comfort and confidence in the assistant principal role.

Changing relationships were prominent in the unfreezing process, and changing relationships also permeated the refreezing process. According to Daresh (2006), “Administrators have to rely on their teaching staff to ‘make things happen.’ As a result, one of the most important issues for any school leader to consider may be his or her ability to relate effectively to classroom teachers” (p.85). All five women spoke of building relationships with staff members. Megan and Sydney both described learning about staff members and conveying a sense of interest and caring about staff members’ lives. Caroline and Sarah described building leadership teams and learning to delegate. Also, as new administrators, all of these women sought to identify the strengths of staff members and increase their knowledge about staff members’ strengths and interests.

In addition, all five women developed strategies for dealing with the demands of the assistant principalship. Megan described her growing ability to quickly shift to meet changing needs on any given school day. She stated that she learned to quickly shift from manager, to counselor, to data analyst. Similarly, all women described their increasing ability to multi-task. These strategies contributed to growing comfort in the role. The participants’ growing confidence in their roles was attributable in part to the perceptions of others. Caroline described the way other staff members started to see her as a capable leader. Other participants described the growing trust they felt from the teachers with

whom they worked. Caroline confessed that she felt a growing sense of ownership for her school and began using the terms “my students” and “my school.” Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) propose that at the completion of the first year in the role, assistant principals feel invigorated by feelings of greater confidence, professionalism, and a new sense of self. The unfreezing and refreezing processes were not separate and discrete for these five women. Comfort and familiarity in some aspects of the role came more quickly than in other aspects.

**Leadership Style.** As they developed individual leader personas, each participant’s leadership style also became evident. Similarities in leadership style included a focus on instruction and learning, building a collaborative culture, empowering teachers, and differentiating for the differing needs of staff members. The ways they described their leadership styles were aligned with the research about the ways women tend to lead. Megan spoke about a collaborative culture and empowering teachers. She stated that she wanted teachers to feel safe to take risks and make decisions. Sydney said that recently being in a teaching role helped her understand new initiatives from a teacher’s point of view and anticipate the support that teachers need. Although all participants spoke of a collaborative culture, all of them also mentioned the need to be more direct when there was a safety issue or when staff members’ actions were not in the best interest of students.

These five women put teaching and instruction at the center of their leadership. Daresh (2006) states, “The most critical issue for school administrators must involve directing all activities in any school toward the needs of students” (p.3). Caroline described the time she spent in classrooms and engaging teachers in conversations about

student achievement. Sarah said that she frequently employed her skills as a coach to provide professional development and improve instruction at her school. Bailey described a spiritual connection that is an important part of her leadership style. All five women spoke of their passion for bettering educational opportunities for students as an important part of their leadership. This passion and sense of purpose also contributed to participants' resilience.

**Adaptive Behaviors.** According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the assistant principal role is ripe with unmanageable stress and unanswerable demands, and as novices, assistant principals often have not yet developed coping strategies. The participants in this study developed coping strategies throughout their first year. They revealed behaviors and inner traits that contributed to their resilience during their transitions. Adaptive behaviors that were similar for the five participants included using relaxation techniques, feeling satisfaction in completing difficult tasks, and relying on authenticity, patience, and persistence. Sigford (2005) refers to this process as developing "emotional teflon." She states, "Because so much of what an administrator hears is negative, it is difficult to stay upbeat. One needs to develop emotional teflon. One needs to be able to let negativity slide off" (p.73). Participants used adaptive behaviors and relied on their commitment to helping students to stay positive in their new roles.

In addition, the five women utilized their life and work experiences to maintain perspective. They also relied on passion, a sense of purpose, and spirituality to keep going through the challenging times. Their sense of purpose was largely tied to improving educational opportunities for students, a social justice perspective that is common for female school leaders (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011). Similarly, according

to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the career passion of educators often comes from their desire to improve society by helping children, particularly the less advantaged. The participants in this study talked about empowering both students and teachers toward an improved school culture.

The growing ability to multi-task was mentioned by all five participants. In addition to multi-tasking, Megan described authenticity, or being true to herself, as a key to her success as a new assistant principal. Taking quick walks around the campus and using relaxation techniques were behaviors Sarah indicated as essential to her resilience. In addition, Sarah said that her sense of purpose and passion for helping students kept her going in difficult times. Caroline described learning to delegate as useful in her new role. She also revealed that her life experience helped her put problems in perspective and facilitated patience and persistence. Similarly, Bailey's repertoire of work experiences provided extensive tools for problem solving and also helped her remain calm in a crisis. Bailey's spirituality was also a significant part of her resilience. Inner traits, such as spirituality, passion, and persistence, coupled with behaviors, such as multi-tasking, delegating, and utilizing relaxation techniques fostered resilience in these five women.

**Mentorship.** Although factors of resiliency were crucial to successful transitions for all five participants, developing a support network was also important. Surprisingly, none of the five participants had a formal mentor assigned as they transitioned from teacher to administrator. Mullen (2005) describes mentoring as "A relationship between two people- a knowing, experienced professional and a protégé or mentee- who commit to an advisory and long term relationship that often involves a long-term goal" (p.2) Although authentic mentoring is difficult to assign or monitor, these participants at the

very least needed effective models to demonstrate the technical aspects of the job. In addition, there was no overlap when the previous assistant principal would be able to introduce the new assistant principal to the role.

Some of the participants were fortunate to have mentoring relationships with the principals with whom they worked. Megan did not mention having a mentoring relationship with her current male principal, but she described the way she leaned on female administrators with whom she previously worked for support. Sarah clearly stated that her current male principal did not meet her needs for mentoring, but she said that she was developing a support network of peers. Caroline shared her gratitude for a mentoring relationship with her current female principal. She described the way her current principal presented them as a united leadership team, provided opportunities for growth, and helped her reflect. Similarly, Sydney benefitted from working with an experienced female administrator committed to helping her grow. She described the helpful feedback provided to her by her principal. Bailey was initially in the unfortunate position of working with an ineffective principal, but she indicated a hope that she will find a mentoring relationship with her new male administrator. Entering her new position without a strong role model at her first school site was a significant challenge for Bailey. Mason (2007) asserts that as the assistant principal's immediate supervisor, the principal's perception of the assistant principal position and how it fits into the overall picture of the school can help or hinder professional growth.

Sydney stated that her long tenure in the district enabled her to call upon peers for help and support. Supportive peer relationships are crucial to navigating some of the unexpected challenges that participants described as part of the unfreezing process.

Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) claim, “Newcomers look to members of their immediate work group for clues on deciphering the new setting. Research clearly shows that peers play important roles in helping newcomers feel at home and be effective” (p.118). Therefore, while a mentoring relationship with the principal is valuable, even more important is a supportive relationship with a more experienced assistant principal.

**Considering Gender.** With the exception of Bailey, participants with female principals indicated more effective mentoring relationships than participants with male administrators. Therefore, I was surprised at how little they had considered the impact of gender on their transitions. They had considered the impact of age and life experience on the transition, and perhaps even the intersection of age and gender in terms of motherhood. However, they had not substantively thought about gender; they had only given it brief consideration. Sarah described her belief that males may be better able to compartmentalize, or leave work worries at work, something that she and her female colleagues were not able to do. Caroline mentioned that males in administrative preparation programs seem to get more practical opportunities than females. Except for those two descriptions, no differences were mentioned between early career female and male administrators.

The five participants seemed unaware that their paths to administration, with longer time as teachers and less direct routes to the assistant principalship were indicative of female leaders. They were also unaware that their leadership styles were aligned with the ways women tend to lead. Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggest that school reform efforts have failed to challenge male-dominated conceptions of schooling. Preparation programs do not often offer opportunities to look through feminist and critical lenses.

Therefore, these participants had probably not previously been given opportunities to reflect on gender's role in their transitions. One participant, Megan, mentioned that she was more comfortable working with a male principal, even though her belief in a collaborative school culture was more aligned with the leadership style of female principals. Participants attributed their lack of consideration of gender on the fact that they tend to associate with other female administrators, and that there are fewer male administrators at the elementary level.

I found that there were more similarities than differences in the work lives of these five women. Variables that impacted their transitions and accounted for some differences were age and family dynamics. The person sitting in the principal's office also accounted for some differences. Participants with female principals were more likely to have their needs for mentoring met by their principals than those with male principals. Additionally, much of the stress Bailey experienced during her first year as assistant principal could be attributable to the negative school culture propagated by an ineffective principal. Aside from the variables of age and the principal, the transitions from teacher to administrator for these five women were remarkably similar.

### **Essential Meanings**

Van Manen (1990) suggests that the aim of a phenomenological study is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence. This requires gathering participants' experiences and reflections on their experiences, conducting thematic analysis of participants' responses, considering the researcher's own reflections on the research process, and communicating about the phenomenon and its meaning to others. As previously stated, the six common themes identified served as tools for

organizing and reflecting on the data. Van Manen (1990) describes themes as knots in the webs of experiences, giving structure and meaning to these experiences. Using the themes as tools, I sought to uncover the essence of this phenomenon, the transition from teacher to administrator, and identify those elements without which the phenomenon would lose its meaning. Van Manen (1990) suggests that we use this question to reveal essential meaning: Is the phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete these elements? As I strove to address the questions that guided this study, I found three essential meanings: Unexpected surprises; self-reliance; surviving and thriving. These elements are essential to the phenomenon such that it would not exist in the same way without them.

The common themes derived from the transcripts and used to organize the data facilitated the discovery of essential meanings of the phenomenon, with each theme scaffolding my understanding of the essential meanings. The common themes and essential meanings were all influenced by the umbrella of gender. Figure 7 illustrates the way the common themes uncovered in the transcripts influenced the essential meanings.

Figure 7

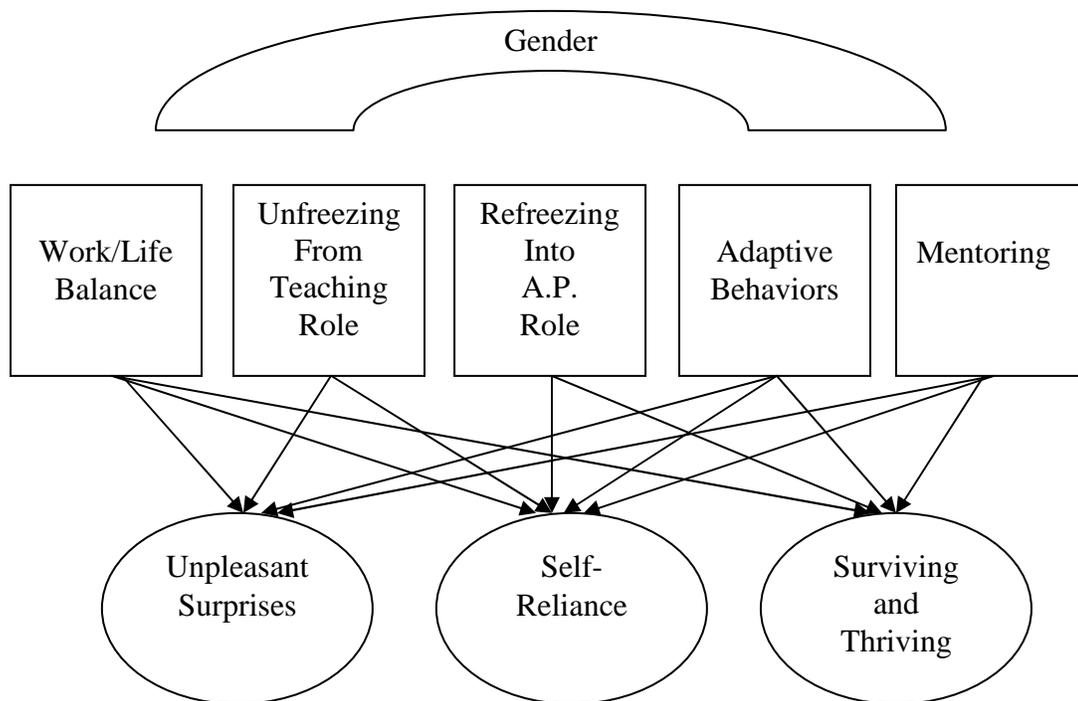


Figure 7. The Common Themes and Essential Meanings

**Unpleasant Surprises.** Unpleasant surprises were evident in conversations about work/life balance and the unfreezing process. The new demands of the assistant principal role may prevent processing of the loss of the teaching role, including the loss of easy camaraderie with teachers and the feeling of belonging to a large group identified with being a teacher (Sigford, 2005). According to Ashforth (2001), entry into a new role activates needs for identity (defining self-in-role), meaning (sense making), control (mastery and influence), and belonging (attachment). Unpleasant surprises work against these needs, and unpleasant surprises pervaded the transition from teacher to administrator for all five participants. Figure 8 illustrates aspects of the essential element of unpleasant surprises.

Figure 8

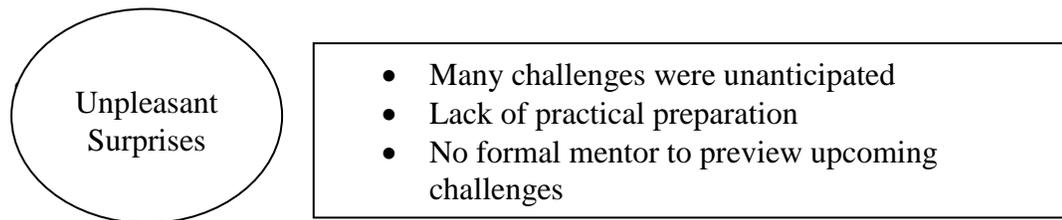


Figure 8. Aspects of Unpleasant Surprises

Many challenges the participants experienced during the transition from teacher to administrator were not expected. Participants anticipated a challenging work/life balance, but underestimated the degree to which the new assistant principal role would impact the time they could spend with family and friends. They also did not realize the negative impact this new role would have on their health. Similarly, participants were accustomed to a fairly predictable daily schedule in their teaching roles. None of them anticipated the constant interruptions and lack of routine in the assistant principal role. Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) address this challenge. They state, “The work lives of teachers are measured in fixed periods; they control the type, number, and flow of activities. An AP’s work life is one of continuous activity, largely unpredictable in order and scope and frequently dictated by the needs and wants of other people” (p.27). They also add that the technical parts of the job are often surprising to new assistant principals because the tasks are often more complicated than they appear. One of these tasks includes dealing with discipline, which often intrudes on other tasks. Additionally, Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1995) describe “decision-press” situations which require administrators to quickly adjust modes of operation, methods of analysis, and levels of language complexity, depending on which stake holders they are dealing with.

Role ambiguity and overload were challenges described in the research of Marshall and Hooley (2006). Both of these challenges were experienced by these five women as they transitioned from teacher to administrator. Perhaps the most prevalent surprise was the change in the way teachers reacted to the new assistant principals. While it took some time for participants to view themselves as administrators, teachers began to view them differently right away. These five women had to grieve the comfortable and congenial relationships they used to have as teammates with teachers. New assistant principals are often surprised at the range and quality among teachers. In their previous teaching roles, they often assume that all teachers perform at the same high levels that they do (Mason, 2007). The participants saw great and poor instructional models. They also had to broaden their ideas about what constitutes good instruction. In addition, they had to find a sense of belonging while being the only assistant principal at a school site. Gender had a great impact on the unpleasant surprise of changing relationships with teachers because of the value these women place on relationships.

Unpleasant surprises were an essential part of the transition from teacher to administrator for these five participants. They knew there would be challenges, but they did not anticipate many of the challenges they encountered. They were assigned practical tasks for which they felt unprepared. They were familiar with leadership theories but had not reflected on those theories in the context of the tasks associated with the role. In addition, they had no formal mentor to illuminate the path from teacher to administrator. Without unpleasant challenges, the transition from teacher to administrator for these five women would have been notably different than it was.

**Self-Reliance.** Ashforth (2001) describes transition bridges, which help professionals preserve a sense of personal continuity as they move from one role to another. Reducing unpleasant surprises is an important bridge, and providing support is also essential. The lack of formal support provided along with the lack of practical preparation put these early-career administrators in a sink or swim situation. They had to rely on their ability to problem solve, their ability to learn the job while doing the job, and their resiliency. Figure 9 illustrates aspects of the essential element of self-reliance.

Figure 9

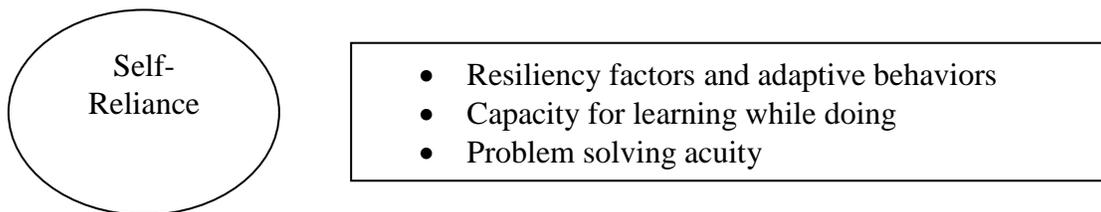


Figure 9. Aspects of Self-Reliance.

The lack of formal mentoring and purposeful induction for all five participants required them to develop support networks for themselves. Luckily, this group of women proved to be very self-sufficient. They were successful in securing their own support, seeking professional development, and obtaining answers to questions. Two of them were fortunate to have effective principals who gave them meaningful feedback and explained their decision making processes explicitly. Two had supportive and congenial relationships with their principals, but had to find other ways to meet their needs for mentoring. One worked with an ineffective principal who made the first year in her new role even more difficult.

All five of the participants described behaviors and traits which contributed to their resiliency. They brought these to the role or developed them on their own, without the support of a formal mentor. An additional benefit of a mentoring relationship with a successful administrator who recently experienced the transition would have been the modeling of adaptive behaviors. Without this model, participants had to discover or develop adaptive behaviors on their own. One participant, Megan, admitted that she understood why some early-career administrators chose to return to teaching. In addition to adaptive behaviors, resiliency, and self-sufficiency, these five women also relied on their passion for improving educational opportunities for students to sustain them through the transition.

The five participants felt unprepared for the rapid decision making required by their new roles. Fortunately, the ability to problem solve, particularly in the fast paced world of a school administrator, was a strength cultivated by all five of the women. Megan described her ability to quickly shift roles from counselor, to facilities manager, to instructional leader as she solved the problems presented to her on any given day. Caroline discussed the way she put students at the center of her decision making, and when solving any problem sought the solution best for kids. The growing confidence they gained from staff members provided affirmation for the success of these five women as problem solvers.

The self-reliance of the participants was an essential part of the transition from teacher to administrator. As new assistant principals, they had to enter a new peer group, redefine relationships with teachers, and undertake the complicated and fast paced tasks associated with the role. They negotiated these challenges successfully. If they had

experienced greater support designed to ensure their success, their transitions would have been much different. The participants acknowledged that some early-career administrators choose to return to their previous roles, and they indicated an understanding of why new administrators would make that choice. However, these five women relied on adaptive behaviors to swim rather than sink.

**Surviving and Thriving.** Ashforth (2001) contends that role transitions are mainly about normalization. He claims that two conditions are necessary for women to feel growing comfort and confidence in a new role. The first is a work context that provides a virtual cocoon in which the newcomer's experiences are sharply regulated as the newcomer is slowly immersed in the culture of the new setting. The second is the individual's predisposition to become involved in the role and the organization. As previously stated, these five participants lacked the support and intentional development that would characterize a cocoon. Fortunately, they were all very motivated to succeed in their new roles and to ensure the success of their new schools. Therefore, their willingness to dig in to the new role despite the lack of support facilitated their progression towards normalization in their new roles. They survived the lack of purposeful socialization in the new role and all eventually began to thrive. Figure 10 illustrates aspects of the essential element of surviving and thriving.

Figure 10

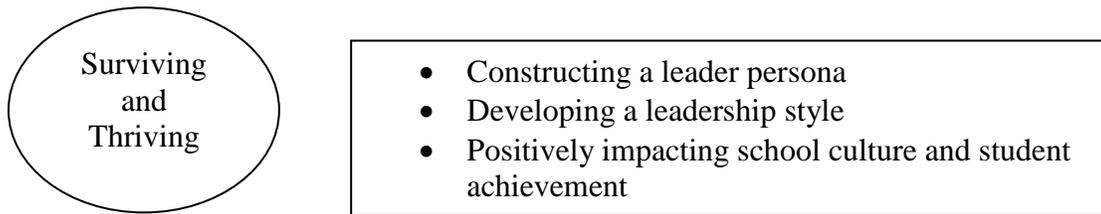


Figure 10. Aspects of Surviving and Thriving.

The development of a leader persona was an internal process for the participants. Sydney described the challenge of no longer seeing herself as a teacher, a challenge shared by all of the participants. This internal process of beginning to view themselves in a new role was accompanied by the outward enactment of a leadership style. All five women described their leadership styles as collaborative and empowering. They discussed a focus on instruction and learning. This type of leadership was identified by Darling-Hammond (2007) as one that positively impacts student achievement.

The refreezing process for all five participants was characterized by a move toward a new normal. They had accepted the challenges that were initially unpleasant surprises, and they were employing strategies to cope with the difficult aspects of the role. Sigford (2005) suggests that assistant principals eventually learn to put up a virtual plexiglass shield around themselves. They stop taking things personally and letting the emotional impact of the role cause personal damage. All five of these participants communicated an optimistic belief that the next school year would be better than the one they were completing at the end of our conversational partnerships. All had begun to positively impact the schools they served. Throughout our year as conversational partners, all five participants moved from surviving to thriving. This movement from

surviving to thriving was an essential element of the transition from teacher to administrator for these five women.

The elements of unpleasant surprises, self-reliance, and surviving and thriving constitute the essence of the transition from teacher to administrator for the five participants. First organizing the data into common themes, then identifying the essential meanings of the transition led me to a deeper understanding of the transition from teacher to administrator for these women. Based on the meaning constructed with the participants, I established recommendations for both districts and universities who are responsible for preparing school leaders.

### **Recommendations and Implications**

The transition from teacher to administrator for these five women elicited implications for future study as well as recommendations for districts and universities who prepare and socialize early-career administrators. Implications and recommendations are organized into three areas: recruitment; preparation; induction. The discussion of recruitment is concerned with active, purposeful selection rather than self-selection, particularly active recruitment of those less likely to self-select themselves for the role. The discussion of preparation is concerned with university and district partnerships, development of leadership dispositions, and more supported and substantial internships. The discussion of induction is concerned with planned and purposeful induction programs, which are responsive to the identified needs of participants. The concept of mentoring is weaved throughout recruitment, preparation, and induction.

**Recruiting.** Darling-Hammond (2007) suggests that factors associated with behaviors of female school leaders, such as providing support to staff, establishing a

supportive culture, and establishing a participatory decision-making structure are strong predictors of organizational learning and also impact teacher motivation and empowerment. In addition, female leaders often bring several years of teaching experience and knowledge of effective instructional practices to their schools. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) propose that the prominence of instruction and learning at the center of women's leadership drives instructional change that improves student learning. Thus, with the need for strong instructional leaders brought about by recent reform efforts, it is essential to recruit and retain female school leaders. These participants work in districts that rely on self-selection rather than purposeful recruiting to fill administrative vacancies. Marshall and Hooley (2006) explain that teachers considering the administrative path look for affirming signals. These signals from others, such as their principals, encourage or discourage them from pursuing a transition from teaching to administration.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) acknowledge that there exist very few specific, agreed upon, definable criteria for selecting administrators. They also acknowledge that school systems seem to reward and advance compliance and weed out innovators. Women who raise questions and challenge ideas are not likely to be viewed as potential leaders. However, outside the box thinking is necessary to lead schools through the challenges of today's accountability movement. Districts would be wise to actively recruit leaders who are critical thinkers and creative problem solvers.

A natural recruiter for promising future administrators is the principal. Marshall and Hooley (2006) state, "Principals provide the resources for training experiences in the school as well as access to information sources and opportunities for visibility. The

relationship of the teacher-aspirant and the principal is vitally important to the socialization process and in gaining the principal's support and sponsorship" (p.67). Training principals to look for qualities the district deems essential in school leaders is a necessary first step. In addition, principals must be explicitly trained to look for those leadership traits in groups that may be reluctant to self-select administration, such as women.

**Preparation.** Once a plan for purposeful selection of leaders is in place, districts must focus on preparing these new leaders. Because many states, including Florida, require an advanced degree and leadership certification, districts must partner with universities to develop leaders. The most useful preparation programs provide ample opportunities to experiment with decision making in a realistic environment (Marshall and Hooley, 2006). Mullen (2004) describes a gap between theory and practice which does not serve early-career administrators well. She uses the metaphor of binoculars to illustrate the importance of integrating theory and practice. These five women in this study had successfully completed educational leadership preparation programs. They were familiar with the major theories and current research on effective school leadership. However, while learning these theories, they were not able to reflect on them within practical situations. Caroline's difficulty because of her unfamiliarity with conducting an emergency drill proved that the lack of practical preparation is not only a disadvantage, but can also lead to a dangerous situation. Sarah's wish for some type of handbook or step-by-step guide for different situations underscored the need for additional practical experiences in the participants' preparation programs. Mullen (2004) states, "While doing seems to fill the gap in the education of the new administrator, the issue of knowing will

drive the impulse to organize activity into theory and within a body of knowledge” (p.21). Reflecting on theories of leadership while engaging in difficult conversations or while making decisions about resource allocations would have provided a more integrated preparation for the assistant principal role. Students must be given an opportunity to reflect on theory in the midst of problem solving in authentic situations. This may be achieved through required practical experiences at school sites (completed with efficacy) or through simulations using real school situations.

Furthermore, districts must develop initiatives that provide release time for teachers preparing for administrative roles. Teachers must have opportunities to gain experience in administrative functions for two reasons: To be better prepared for the tasks ahead and to preview some of the challenges associated with the role. While a full time internship is not realistic for those preparing for administrative roles, more experiences with administrative functions are necessary. Marshall and Hooley (2006) support the need for more substantial and supported internships. They call these experiences “dressing rooms” where aspiring assistant principals can try on the role to see if it is comfortable and satisfying (p.135). An interesting trend in administrator preparation illustrated by these five participants is the growing number of assistant principals coming from semi-administrative support roles, such as literacy coach, mentor, or resource teacher. The transition for the women coming from these roles was essentially the same as the transition directly from a classroom teaching position. However, with some careful guidance by principals and district leaders, these positions can become more closely tied with instructional leadership and the role of the assistant principal.

Because the role of the assistant principal is rather ambiguous and changing, districts and universities may better prepare administrators by training the disposition associated with success in the role. Curry (2000) emphasizes the importance of cultivating personal growth as part of a leader's development. Similarly, Daresh (2004) agrees that it is critical for new assistant principals to clarify their personal values and beliefs while navigating the transition. Megan discussed the importance of authenticity in her transition, and all of the women in the study discussed a commitment to doing what is best for students. Daresh (2004) uses the analogy of cooking to illustrate leadership development. He states, "Becoming a great chef is not simply the by-product of acquiring a huge number of recipes that are drawn from dozens and dozens of existing cookbooks. Most diners realize that a just knowing that a sauce contains one cup of this, one cup of that, and a pinch of spice stirred together and heated for an hour does not necessarily result in a fabulous dish. There is more to it than that" (p.29). Prescriptions for leading are limited, but helping the leader develop a unique leader persona is critical (Curry, 2000). A mentor (in the form of a current assistant principal) may help the aspiring leader develop this disposition. While task learning, a mentor can provide feedback, assistance, and support to the aspiring leader (Marshall and Hooley, 2006). Mentorship allows the mentee to reflect on her developing skills in addition to learning a task.

Examining this transition from teacher to administrator has implications for those who prepare women for administrative positions, including universities and school districts. The impact of gender on this transition cannot be ignored. Women cannot base their leadership on theories derived from male models. As more women are entering school leadership, women need to be more frequently represented in leadership studies.

There also must be an acknowledgement by districts that same gender models are important for early career, female administrators. In addition, all of the participants indicated that lack of practical preparation presented a challenge. While a full time internship is not realistic for those preparing for administrative roles, more experiences with administrative functions are necessary. Integrating theory and practice must be an essential part of university preparation programs. Although the challenges associated with this transition in professional roles cannot be avoided, these five participants would have benefited from additional practical preparation.

**Induction.** These five participants encountered challenges they did not anticipate, and all felt unprepared for the role early in their transitions. During their first year, these five women had to rely on their own interpersonal and problem solving skills. A purposeful induction program, which was responsive to their identified needs, would have prevented some of the stress and challenges in their transitions. Daresh (2004) asserts that the first year is a defining phase in the process of becoming a career administrator. He states, “The attitudes they develop and the repertoire of responses they build have substantial influence on later behavior patterns and leadership capabilities” (p.23). These five women identified their own needs and sought corresponding professional development. For example, Sarah spoke of the books she read which contributed to her development. In addition to more purposeful professional development, a mentoring relationship is an integral part of induction for new assistant principals.

A formal mentor or guide could have illuminated the path and provided a preview for the challenges to come during the preparation phase. A mentor could have also

provided guidance, support, and opportunities for reflection for these women during the induction phase. Although Sydney and Caroline had principals who provided for their needs for mentoring, the best guide for these early-career administrators would have been someone with more recent experience in the role. The principal is a logical mentor for the new assistant principal, but the principal is also the one with the least amount of time to provide for the assistant principal's needs for mentoring (Sigford, 2005). Mullen (2004) suggests that administrators just completing their third year in the role serve as both models and beacons of hope for new administrators. Megan discussed her desire for "a lifeline" during her first year, and Sydney talked about her struggle with uncovering unwritten rules. Sarah revealed her need to have reflective conversations. All of these were needs because of the lack of a mentoring relationship with someone who had recent experience as an early career administrator.

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), "Assistant principals need more than a job description and abstract knowledge of administrative duties and skills; they need to see how the particular tasks are carried out by effective practitioners" (p.36). Task learning guided by a mentor includes feedback and support. Mullen (2005) proposes that lack of mentoring relationships may lead to stagnation, attrition, dissatisfaction, low morale, and burnout. Although authentic mentoring relationships cannot be mandated or monitored, the mentoring relationship is too vital to induction to leave to chance. Mentors need to be provided time and compensation for this challenging work. In addition, mentors need specialized training to effectively work with new assistant principals and facilitate their growth and development.

Mentors and support systems must be provided for new assistant principals. Unlike my five participants, not all early-career administrators can succeed in a sink or swim system. There is much more support and planning needed before districts can provide the “virtual cocoon” that Ashforth (2001) subscribes. It is often assumed that principals can provide for the early-career administrators’ needs for mentoring. However, not all principals are capable of providing for these needs. In addition, this study supports previous findings that women benefit from same gender role models. Mullen (2004) suggests that the best person to guide and support a new administrator is one who just completed the three year journey of early career administration. These guides can model adaptive behaviors and illuminate pending challenges.

### **Impact of this Study on the Researcher**

This study impacted me as both a doctoral student and an assistant principal. Janesick (2004) proposes that qualitative researchers must be explicit about their theoretical frames at all points in the researcher process. In order to do this, I had to first clarify my beliefs and values as well as my interests as a researcher. Additionally, Janesick (2004) explains that in a qualitative study, the researcher becomes the research instrument. From the initial identification and contact with participants to quickly developing conversational partnerships, I had to push past my comfort zone. In addition, I quickly realized that I needed to develop my skills as a writer. Beginning my researcher reflective journal and forming daily writing habits was the start to advancing my writing skills. I realized that I tend to be very concise and was not giving adequate phenomenological descriptions to tell my participants’ stories. Feedback from my major

professor and persistent revision facilitated improvement in that area. These challenges pressed me to grow as a student and scholar.

As an assistant principal myself, I became aware that I was co-constructing meaning with the participants. Listening to them describe their experiences propelled me to reflect on my own. Like the participants, I had not previously considered gender's impact on my professional role transition. I now think about the way gender influences my choices and my leadership style. I also feel better prepared to support the early-career administrators I come in contact with, having become so familiar with the transition. I recently received an e-mail that the district I work for is seeking experienced assistant principals to mentor new assistant principals, and I eagerly applied. My passion for bettering the work lives of early career female administrators that sustained me through this study will continue to propel me to offer support.

The conclusion of this study represents the end of a journey. The journey encompassed three years of coursework followed by two years of dissertation research. While on this journey, I learned much about the transition from teacher to administrator for women, but I learned even more about myself. The journey has required patience, persistence, and determination. Like my participants, I have had to learn to balance this work with my other roles. Also, like my participants, I have had to rely on my passion and sense of purpose. For me, this purpose involved bettering the work lives of women in school leadership. I will continue to strive to support new female administrators and do what my participant Megan referred to as "paying it forward." If women are to succeed and lead our schools to meet the needs of all learners, we must support each other. I am

proud to be associated with a group of women, such as these five participants, who have so successfully navigated this difficult transition from teacher to administrator.

## **Conclusion**

The data gathered in this study indicates that there were many commonalities among these women making the transition from teacher to administrator. These commonalities included a difficult work/life balance, challenges during the unfreezing process as they exited the teaching role, and growing comfort and confidence as they became situated in the administrative role. In addition, there were common factors that contributed to the resiliency of these five women. These factors included behaviors such as the ability to multi-task, cope with interruptions, and employ relaxation techniques. However, the lack of formal mentors impeded the transition for all five participants.

Immersing myself in the data led me to identify three essential meanings in the transition from teacher to administrator for these participants. The first was unpleasant surprises. Changes in relationships with teachers, lack of a predictable daily schedule, role ambiguity and role overload were challenges for which these women felt unprepared. Those who prepare women for administrative roles must illuminate the impending challenges; they should not come as unexpected surprises.

The second essential element was self-reliance. Lack of formal mentors and lack of overlap with the previous assistant principal during those first days on the job set up a sink or swim situation for these five women. They had to rely on their own self-sufficiency and resiliency factors to successfully make the transition. The impact of the person sitting in the principal's office also became apparent. Some women experienced

supportive relationships and opportunities for growth, but not all principals were capable of providing that support to their assistant principals.

The third essential element was surviving and thriving. After mastering the adaptive behaviors necessary for survival in the assistant principal role, participants focused on creating a leader persona and developing a leadership style. The leadership styles of these five participants were congruent with the ways women tend to lead. They focused on collaboration, empowering teachers, and impacting instruction. They all described a sense of purpose and passion for their work. These factors have been identified as positive influences on student achievement.

The fact that we have a greater number of female school administrators than we had in past decades requires an examination of how they are faring. Despite the challenges, these five participants have been faring well. However, we cannot afford to depend on the self-sufficiency and persistency new administrators bring to their roles. We must actively recruit women who demonstrate critical thinking, creative problem solving, and the dispositions districts have identified as essential to successful school leadership. We must prepare aspiring administrators through an adequate preview of the role, opportunities to integrate theory and practice, and more supported and substantial internships. We must also socialize new administrators through more purposeful and responsive induction programs. Mentoring is an essential component of recruitment, preparation, and induction. Within positive and supportive cultures, women can fulfill their visions for bettering the lives of children in schools.

## References

- Ashforth, Blake E. (2001). *Role transitions in organizational life: an identity based perspective*. NJ: Lawrence Eelbaum Publishers.
- Belenky, M.F., Blythe, M.C., Goldburger, N.R., & Tarule, J.M. (1997). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. NY: Basic Books.
- Blackmore, J., (1999). *Troubling Women*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Blackburn, C.H., Martin, B.N., & Hutchinson, S. (2006). The role of gender and how it relates to conflict management style and school culture. *Journal of women in educational leadership*, 4(4), 243-252.
- Browne-Ferrigno, T. (2003). Becoming a principal: role conception, initial socialization, role-identity transformation, purposeful engagement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(4), 468.
- Chereim, S., Williams, B.E., & Hinings, C.R. (2007) Interlevel influences on the reconstruction of professional role identity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(6), 1515-1539.
- Christman, D. & McClellan, R. (2008). Living on barbed wire: Resilient women administrators in educational leadership programs. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 44(1)-3-29.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Curry, B.K. (2000). *Women in power: Pathways to leadership in education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M.T., & Cohen, C. (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: lessons from exemplary leadership development programs*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.
- Daresh, J.C. (2004). *Beginning the assistant principalship : A practical guide for new school administrators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- de Casal, C.V., & Mulligan, P.A. (2004). Emerging women leaders' perceptions of leadership. *Catalyst for Change*, 33(2), 25-32.
- Dunlap, D.M., & Schmuck, P.A. (1995). *Women leading in education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Fennell, H. (2008). Walking a fine balance: the life history of a woman principal. *Journal of women in educational leadership*, 6(2), 93-113.
- Fisher, L. & Embree L. (2000). *Feminist phenomenology*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Florida Department of Education (2009). *Gender Representation among Professionals in Florida's Public Schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.fldoe.org/eias/eiaspubs/word/genderpro.rtf>.
- Funk, C. (2002). Cutting down the tall poppies: horizontal violence. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 469273.3-15.
- Gilligan, C. (1993). *In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Gillis, S., Howie, G., & Munford, R. (2004). *Third wave feminism*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grady, M.L., Curley, V.R., & Lacost, B. (2008). Women leaders tell their stories. *Journal of women in educational leadership*, 6(4), 275-291.
- Grogan, M., & Shakeshaft, C. (2011). *Women and Educational Leadership*. Thousand San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gupton, S. L., & Slick, G.A. (1996). *Highly successful women administrators: the inside stories of how they got there*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Haar, J.M. & Robicheau, J.W. (2009). Women of color school leaders: leadership schools should not ignore. *Journal of women in educational leadership*, 7(1), 33-41.
- Harris, S., Ballenger, J., & Jones, A. (2007). Women leaders and spirituality. *Advancing women in leadership online journal*, 23.
- Hartzell, G.N., Williams, R.C., & Nelson, K.T. (1995). *New voices in the field: The work lives of first-year assistant principals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hudak, J.M. (2001, November). *The new "golden age" for female leaders*. Paper presented at the Annual Pennsylvania Research Association annual Conference, Hershey, Pennsylvania.
- Janesick, V.J. (2004). *Stretching exercises for qualitative researchers (second ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Second edition interviews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Leedy, P.D. & Ormond, J.E. (2001). *Practical research: planning and design*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

- Lunenburg, F.C., National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, & Perreault, G.M. (2002). *The changing world of school administration*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press.
- Marshall, C., & Hooley, R.M. (2006). *The assistant principal : Leadership choices and challenges (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Mason, C. (2007). *An assistant principal's guide...into the fire: How to prepare for and survive the transition*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- McFadden, C., Maahs-Fladung, C., Beck-Frazier, S., & Bruckner, K. (2009). Perceptions of leadership behaviors by female principals in North Carolina. *Journal of women in educational leadership*, 7(3), 115-133.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mullen, C.A. (2004). *Climbing the Himalayas of school leadership: The socialization of early-career administrators*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.
- Mullen, C.A. (2005). *Mentoring Primer*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2008). *Percentage distribution of elementary and secondary principals by school type and sex*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2010/charts/chart29>.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Piantanida, M. & Garman, N.B. (1999). *The qualitative dissertation: a guide for students and faculty*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc.

- Reinhartz, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Riehl, C., & Byrd, M.A. (1997). Gender differences among new recruits to school administration: Cautionary footnotes to an optimistic tale. *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis*, 19, 45-64.
- Rubin, H.J. & Rubin, I.S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scott, S. (2002). *Fierce Conversations: Achieving success at work and in life one conversation at a time*. New York, NY: Berkley Books.
- Sigford, J.L. (2005). *Who said school administration would be fun? Coping with a new emotional and social reality*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press Inc.
- Slaton, J.D. (2008). *Women as educational leaders* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 80143267).
- Smulyan, L. (2000). *Balancing acts: women principals at work*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Shakeshaft, C. (1989). *Women in educational administration*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Weller, L.D. & Weller, S.J. (2002). *The assistant principal: essentials for effective school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

- Winter, P.A., Rinehart, J. S., & Munoz, M.A. (2002). Principal recruitment: an empirical evaluation of a school district's internal pool of principal certified personnel. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 16(2), 129-141.
- Wojtalik, J.R., Breckenridge, M.B., Gibson, M.K., Sobehart, H.C. (2007). There's no place like Home? The effects of childhood themes on women's aspirations toward leadership roles. *Journal of women in educational leadership*, 5(1), 41-64.
- Young, M.D. & Skrla, L. (2003). *Reconsidering feminist research in educational leadership*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Zahavi, D. (2003). *Husserl's phenomenology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- students' experiences as researchers in the field of education. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Idaho).(UMA 3205370).
- .

## Appendices

## Appendix A: Letter to Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational leadership and Policy Studies at the University of South Florida. I am pursuing my dissertation topic on the transition from teacher to leader for female early-career administrators. The purpose of the study is to describe and explain selected women's perspectives on the transition from teacher to leader. Your participation is requested because of your past work as a successful teacher and your current work as a school administrator.

Participating in this study will require approximately two one-hour in-depth interviews. The interviews, with your permission, will be audio taped and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will not be identified by name on the tape. A professional typist will be transcribing the tape; however, the typist will be able to identify you only as participant A or B, etc. The tapes will be kept in a secure place in my house. Each participant will be offered a copy of the tape as well as a copy of the transcription. The participants and I will be the only ones with access to the tapes. Once the tapes are transcribed, a master tape will be made from the originals and they will be erased. The master tape will remain in my possession and will be destroyed three years after the publication of the dissertation.

In addition, you may be asked to share relevant artifacts and documents. Your name, the name of your school, and any other information gathered in this study, will remain confidential and will only be used for educational purposes.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my request. I look forward to your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Julie Hasson

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Signature Page

This study involves interviewing female early-career administrators about the transition from teacher to leader, and is therefore research.

1. The purpose of this study is to describe and explain selected women's perspectives on the transition from teacher to leader.
2. The study is expected to last from November 2010 – March 2011.
3. The number of people to be interviewed is five.
4. The procedure of the research involves asking participants about their views on the transition from teacher to leader.
5. The interviews will be one hour each in length and each participant will be interviewed twice. The audiotapes will be protected in my home and will be kept for two years.
6. There are no foreseeable risks to the participants and they may leave the study at any time.
7. Possible benefits are educational, that is to contribute to the body of knowledge about the transition from teacher to leader for female school administrators.
8. Members may choose to be completely anonymous and all names will be changed for reasons of confidentiality. This information will only be known to me and the chair of my dissertation committee.
9. For questions about the research contact me, Julie Hasson at [REDACTED] or [jhasson@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:jhasson@tampabay.rr.com).
10. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. Refusal to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits.
11. There is no cost to you to participate in the study.
12. The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board, IRB, may be contacted at [REDACTED]. This IRB may request to see my research records of the study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print your name here above) Agree to participate in this study with Julie Hasson. I realize this information will be used for educational purposes. I understand I may withdraw at any time. I understand the intent of this study.  
Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Interview Protocol**

1. What was your path to your current position?
  - c. Possible follow-up question (PFQ): Did you always intend to be a school administrator? (Fennell, 2008; Shakeshaft, 1989)
  - d. PFQ: What led you to pursue school administration?
2. What are the tensions you experienced moving from teacher to administrator? (Curry, 2000; Hudak, 2001)
  - c. PFQ: Which of these tensions may be specific to women in school administration? (Shakeshaft, 1989; Smulyan, 2000)
  - d. PFQ: How do you think your experiences differ from others?
3. Who were the mentors or peers who assisted you in dealing with the transition and how did they help? (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Slaton, 2008)
  - c. Were these mentors formally assigned to you or did you have an informal relationship?
  - d. Did the gender of these mentors have any impact on the mentoring relationship? If so, in what ways?
4. What does your work mean to you? (Daresh, 2004; Marshall & Hooley, 2002)
  - a. PFQ: What do you like most about your job?
  - b. PFQ: What do you dislike most about your job?
  - c. PFQ: What characteristics/behaviors help you succeed as a school administrator?

5. What advice would you give to a new female administrator making the transition from a teaching role? (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gupton & Slick, 1996)
  - c. PFQ: What do you wish you had known before making the transition?
  - d. PFQ: How would knowing this ease the transition?
6. Where do you see yourself five years from now? (Harris, Ballinger & Jones, 2007)
  - d. PFQ: What will you do to prepare for that future role?
  - e. PFQ: How do you think your path to that role may be different than others?
  - f. PFQ: Do you foresee your path differing in any way from a male with similar aspirations?
7. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?

## **Appendix D: Member Check Form**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for an enjoyable and insightful interview. Attached please find a draft copy of the verbatim transcripts of the interview. Please review the transcription for accuracy of responses and reporting of information. Please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED] should you have any questions.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Julie Hasson

### About the Author

Julie D. Hasson received her Bachelor of Science degree from Florida Southern College with a major in psychology. She earned a Master of Arts in Teaching in Elementary Education from Rollins College. She spent ten years as a teacher for grades prekindergarten through second. Julie earned certification in Educational Leadership at the University of South Florida. She is currently an assistant principal, and has been in that role for five years. As a doctoral student, she published a book review in *Education Review: A Journal of Book Reviews in Education* (2007). Julie is interested in the work lives of female school leaders.