4-2020

Dominican Public-School Novice Principals' Description of Their Early Career Experiences and Needs Entering the Principalship

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DOMINICAN PUBLIC-SCHOOL NOVICE PRINCIPALS' DESCRIPTION OF
THEIR EARLY CAREER EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS
ENTERING THE PRINCIPALSHIP

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
Western Michigan University
April 2020

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DOMINICAN PUBLIC-SCHOOL NOVICE PRINCIPALS' DESCRIPTION OF
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ENTERING THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Mary Francis Benzo, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2020

Research on principal leadership is extensive; however, studies suggest such research cannot be generalized across all contexts, as educational leaders' needs are a result of the specific context in which they work. Since there is limited research on principal leadership in the Dominican Republic (DR), the country can benefit from current and contextualized research on principal leadership within primary and secondary education. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study is to explore Dominican public-school novice principals' early career experiences and how they identified their needs entering the principalship. Through portraiture, this study aims to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. Participants included 10 novice principals who had one to five years of experience in the role and who worked in public primary and secondary schools in Educational Region 15 in Santo Domingo, DR. Data collection procedures involved in-depth interviews, a participant-profiling guide, and observations.

Principals in the study describe their role as one who is accountable for school processes. Findings from the study suggest that principals face the challenges and demands of the principalship without a proper induction process, which is the main issue

they encounter throughout their experience as principals. These challenges refer to finding a balance between instruction and management, dealing with the community, children's vulnerability, and their feelings as novice principals. Participants discussed their need for training in leadership strategies and management, particularly at a time of national educational reform in the DR. Principals also expressed that their main challenge with the reforms is teachers' resistance, more so than navigating these changes themselves. Finally, principals in this study reported that they would benefit from formal support groups or networks for novice principals. This study suggests further research on how principals perceive existing principal preparation programs, the influence of mentors, and induction programs in the Dominican educational system should be conducted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my dad. You were and still are my inspiration. Even after your passing, you still motivate me and keep me going. This is for you, the example you gave me, and the love I have for you.

I am very grateful for the support and encouragement of my committee. Dr. Archer, I could not have asked for a better advisor. I will be forever grateful for how in this process you pushed me to believe in myself, make my own decisions, and own up to them. It has been a privilege to work with you. My dear Dr. Reeves, since the beginning of this program, you have been an inspiration. Thank you for your insights on my research, on my work, and on life. Dr. Bjorklund, I really appreciate you taking on the challenge of working with me and your dedication.

My deepest gratitude is to my husband, partner in life, and best friend, Victor. Thank you for always supporting me, making my dreams your own, and for pushing me to fulfill them. It is the greatest gift to walk through life with you by my side. This accomplishment is for you, Emilia and Mario. Being your mom makes me want to be a better person and strive for a better world and kinder humanity. Thank you for understanding my endless hours in front of the computer. To my mom, I know I have gotten this far because of your prayers. Thank you for your love, support, and encouragement.

Acknowledgments-Continued

Laura, we made it! How lucky am I to go through this journey with you. If our friendship can endure a Ph.D., I think we're good to go. Thank you for pushing me to do this. To my "Syllabus Decode Group": Laura, Rossina, and Nidia. I couldn't have asked for a better place to vent than with you girls. I am very proud of our friendship and what we stand for. Thank you for all the laughs, the advice, the good times, and the support through the not so good times. Love you my PhD sisters.

This is for my workmates, all of you that have been so understanding, supporting, and encouraging for the past five years. Thank you for all the times that you covered me, motivated me, or simply listened to me complain or celebrate. All of you inspire me to become a better principal and a better person. It is a great gift to work with people who become your family.

I dedicate this to all my students, past, present, and future. All of you push me to be a better teacher and a better principal. I thank you for all the lessons. I learn more from you than you will ever know.

Finally, to Jesus, by his Grace.

Mary Francis Benzo Hernandez

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents-Continued

Table of Contents-Continued

Table of Contents-Continued

Table of Contents-Continued

Table of Contents-Continued

Table of Contents-Continued

Table of Contents-Continued

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

"The more effective a school leader is, the higher his or her students will soar."

(Kafele, 2015, p. xi)

The role of the principal is an intricate part of school life (Bendikson, Robinson, & Hattie, 2012). Prior research shows that principals have a positive influence on the quality of instruction and an impact on both school climate and teacher morale (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2005). Much of the research focusing on the work of principals examine their leadership styles, behaviors, self-efficacy, and motivation (Nir & Kranot, 2006; Reilly, Dhingra, & Boduszek, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Moreover, contemporary research studies present the role of the principal as entailing diverse activities, both academic and non-academic (Flowers, Barr, Billups-Thomas, & Miller, 2014). Researchers describe principals as transformational leaders (Hallinger, 2003); instructional leaders (Hallinger, 2005); managers, administrators, supervisors, and politicians (Kafka, 2009); responsible for promoting collaboration (Drago-Severson, 2009); and accountable for student learning outcomes (Kwan & Walker, 2009; Norton, 2003; Rammer, 2007). As a result of this multifaceted position, "principals are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school, administering policies, developing procedures, supervising teachers and instruction, and overall school performance" (Shue, Shore, & Lambert, 2012, pp. 217-218).

When considering the importance of the principal's role, current research highlights the reality that novice principals often face responsibilities without proper training or support, thus presenting diverse needs in their early years on the job (Lochmiller, 2014). Novice principals' needs entering the principalship have to do with training (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012;

Chitpin, 2014; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Lynch, 2012); with needing a network due to

feelings of personal and professional isolation (Cairns & Mullen, 2001; Chitpin, 2014;

Lochmiller, 2014); and the need for mentoring and coaching (Cairns & Mullen, 2001;

Lochmiller, 2014; Retelle, 2010; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Willer, 2011).

Importantly, principals' needs and experiences should not be generalized across all

contexts, since educational leaders' needs are a result of the specific context in which they are

working (Bellibas, Bulut, Hallinger, & Wang, 2016; Bendikson et al., 2012; Brauckmann &

Pashiardis, 2012; Salazar, 2007; Walker & Kwan, 2009). While there is an extensive body of

research on principal preparation programs in the United States (U.S.) (Shoho & Barnett,

2010), there is a growing focus internationally on principal preparation programs, particularly

Latin America and the Caribbean (Weinstein, Muñoz, & Hernández, 2014). As such, this study

explored novice public-school principals' early career experiences and needs entering the

principalship in the Dominican Republic (DR) during the current era of change and reform in

the nation's educational system.

Background

Principal leadership is critical for creating and sustaining successful schools (Retelle,

2010). An extensive body of research suggests that principals are increasingly accountable for

school processes and students' learning outcomes (Kwan & Walker, 2009; Norton, 2003;

Rammer, 2007; Shue et al., 2012). Both developed and developing nations evidence a growing

trend of enacting public education policies that focus on school leadership (Weinstein et al.,

2014). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are part of this trend and are recently

recognizing the importance of promoting school leadership in public policy (Weinstein et al.,

2014). Given the growing body of education policy elements that focus on leadership at the

principal level, countries that enact such policies should also make it a priority to research the lives and work of principals who serve in those countries to develop and apply strategies that consider context.

Weinstein et al. (2014) investigated how eight countries within Latin America and the Caribbean developed and enacted school leadership for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In this report, Weinstein et al. concluded that there is limited research on principal leadership in this region. The authors found that these countries lack analyses and reports of even the most basic statistics concerning the status of the principalship. Hence, the motivation to conduct investigations on principal leadership in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in the DR, might serve as the basis for ongoing research on this topic and help fill the gap in the literature on principals, their role, and their challenges as leaders of schools in this context. Such research could help scholars and practitioners to better understand the way in which principals experience their roles as school leaders and the different stages of their careers.

Following this trend on the need for research on principal leadership, Hvidston, Rante, McKim, and Mette (2015) propose understanding principals' career stages as a means to help them fulfill their role as school leaders in different phases of their professional life; thus, research on principal leadership should consider differences in career stages. This research is particularly necessary for novice principals, who encounter challenges unique to their particular stage when they enter the principalship (Fourtenbary, 2008; Lochmiller, 2014). Studies outside of Latin American and the Caribbean context identified challenges related to diverse training needs, which range across a broad spectrum of issues regarding instruction, management, and technology (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Olson, 2007; Salazar, 2007;

Terosky, 2014). Additional studies described the challenges principals encounter in meeting the demands of the position (Norton, 2003) and what is expected of them to fulfill these demands (Lochmiller, 2014; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Still, other studies have identified principals' need for networking and collaboration (Chitpin, 2014; Kafele, 2015). Brauckmann and Pashiardis (2012) claim that more research regarding how principals prepare for their position is needed to better equip them to enact their role as school leaders. While such lines of inquiry from other countries raise essential considerations for research in Latin America and the Caribbean, these considerations must be explored contextually as each country works to create a relevant and culturally-appropriate system of support for its principals.

According to the *Ministerio de Educación de la Repúblida Dominicana* (MINERD, Acronym in Spanish) [Dominican Republic Ministry of Education], the DR is undergoing many initiatives for school reform and is striving to achieve excellence in its educational system (MINERD, 2017). The DR was one of eight countries that participated in the study on school leadership in Latin America and the Caribbean for UNESCO by Weinstein et al. (2014). Although Weinstein et al. (2014) explain that there is a growing concern on the need to study principals and school leadership, there is little research to support current initiatives and projects designed to improve principals' leadership capacity in the region. Officials in Latin America and the Caribbean usually implement decontextualized strategies that developed countries have pursued previously and there are not existing policies that support these decisions (Weinstein et al., 2014). Therefore, the need for contextualized, current, and pertinent research on principal leadership in countries where there is scarce information on this topic is crucial. Such is the case for the current state of research regarding principal leadership in the DR, particularly in a time of ongoing educational reform.

Much of the research regarding principal leadership has been conducted in the U.S., Australia, and other developed countries (Gurr et al., 2005; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Norton, 2003; Rammer, 2007; Shue et al., 2012). These studies highlight principal accountability for school and student performance. However, as many of those same studies indicate, research on how principals experience and respond to accountability systems and the expectations they place on the principal role must consider the context in which the work of the principal takes place. Findings from previous studies may have broader or more general applicability to other contexts, while others may not (Bellibas et al., 2016; Bendikson et al., 2012; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012). As such, the DR would benefit from current and contextualized research on principal leadership and school leadership, which would add much to the understanding of principal leadership in the country (A. Martinez, personal communication, August 14, 2018).

For this reason, the goal of this study was to conduct research on novice Dominican, public-school principals' early career experiences and their needs entering the principalship in a current era of change and reform. Such research may add to the body of knowledge on the needs of novice principals', what they require in their academic programs and subsequent preparation for the position, and the support they need during their first years on the job. Developing an awareness of the skills needed before becoming a principal along with a deeper understanding of the experiences of practicing principals in the Dominican context could serve to inform Dominican public policy concerning principal leadership as well as add to the development of scholarship on the role of the principalship in developing nations. This study may serve as a means to fill the gap in the literature on school leadership and principals in Latin America and the Caribbean (Weinstein et al., 2014).

Current Research on Principal Preparation

Principals come into the principalship with both managerial and leadership needs (Willer, 2011). As such, principal preparation programs are designed to fulfill principals' training needs and requirements for the role (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). There are many recommendations as to what principals' training should look like and what it should address. For instance, Hallinger and Lu (2013) suggest that training for principals should consider the changing requirements of schools and school leaders, while Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012) suggest these programs be experiential and practical. According to Tersoky (2014), principals require training in managerial skills and Hayat, Abdollahi, Zainabadi, and Arasteh (2015) suggest principals need training on the leadership necessary for school improvement. Other studies propose that principals need training on how to integrate community and family (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Pierson, 2014); on how to address inclusion (Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, & Schertz, 2001; and on handling personnel (Shoho & Barnett, 2010).

Due to its importance in the principal's role (Hallinger, 2003, 2005), instructional leadership is highlighted by current literature as an important training area of principals (Bendikson et al., 2012; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Salazar, 2007). Principals who practice instructional leadership promote school effectiveness and improve student achievement (Hallinger, 2003); create a shared purpose, foster continuous improvement, monitor student learning outcomes, and coordinate curriculum (Hallinger, 2005). According to Lynch (2012), principal preparation programs should focus on the role of the instructional leader.

In addition to focusing on specific areas of training and development for principals, recent studies have also addressed other needs and challenges outside the training realm,

particularly regarding the expectations of fulfilling the role (Chitpin, 2014; Kafele, 2015; Lochmiller, 2014; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). New principals endure powerful feelings of apprehension, isolation, and frustration as they become familiar with the expectations of the role (Lochmiller, 2014). Chitpin (2014) found that principals feel isolated in their schools, thus are in need of support and of a professional network. As such, current literature points to the importance of collegial relationships as essential for a successful principalship (Scott, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, & Gareis, 2015).

Principal Preparation and Educational Reform in the Dominican Republic (DR)

MINERD developed initiatives for principal preparation and continuing education, such as *La Escuela de Directores para la Calidad Educativa* (EDCE) [The School of Principals for Quality Education] directed by *the Instituto Superior de Formación Docente Salomé* Ureña (ISFODOSU) [Higher Institution of Teacher Training Salome Ureña], which started in 2011 (González, 2012). ISFODOSU is an institution that belongs to MINERD and responds to MINERD's directions, laws, and policies. Since Dominican principals come from diverse backgrounds regarding their training, academic preparation, and professional experience (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* [Operations Manual for Public-Schools], 2013), they would benefit from a standardized program that focuses on principal leadership, such as the EDCE. In its first five years, the EDCE graduated 2,142 principals (*Egresados de la Escuela de Directores del MINERD* [Alumni from School of Directors from MINERD], 2017) trained in a number of important skills for principals including curriculum development, assessment, and human resources. According to the *Resolución 0667-2011* [Resolution 0667-2011], the purpose of creating the EDCE is to train and certify school principals to lead the transformation processes that Dominican education policy demands from schools and, as a

result, positively impact student learning outcomes. The establishment of the EDCE indicates a trend toward more formalized principal preparation in the DR since its creation in 2011.

The current educational system in the DR is undergoing change and reform and the implementation of new initiatives to achieve excellence (MINERD, 2017). According to MINERD's (2017) strategic plan, educational reform in the DR considers different policies to promote quality education, which include: developing competency-based curricula, developing teachers' careers, and promoting sustainable schools. During times of educational reform, such as what is occurring in the DR, principals face additional trials, pressures, and demands to comply with this reform (Brown, 2006), which may be even more challenging for novice principals. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how principals describe their experiences and their needs when entering the principalship during such times of change.

Periods of ongoing educational reform, as is the case for the DR, reinforce the need for research on principal leadership to better understand their role, the additional demands they will face, and the requirements to occupy that position. Moreover, the diversity of needs that previous studies suggest principals bring into the principalship demonstrate the need to conduct studies that help identify these early career experiences and needs as a means to inform the planning and design of future preparation and training programs, as well as support and continuous training during their early years in the position. Hence, understanding principals' experiences and needs when they start their role as principal in the DR may develop knowledge related to a variety of issues regarding novice principals' leadership. Findings from this study may help to inform requirements for becoming principals in the DR; what principals need in their training; update the requirements for the position; inform public policy and resource allocation for promoting quality certifications for principals; ensure improvement in the

educational system; and gain a deeper understanding of the skills and experiences needed prior to becoming principal.

Problem Statement

Principals are an integral part of schools (Bendikson et al., 2012) and carry out a variety of tasks and responsibilities (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). However, novice principals often face these duties without proper training or support and present diverse needs in their early years on the job (Lochmiller, 2014). Therefore, research regarding principal preparation plays a critical role in identifying ways to better prepare them for their role as school leaders (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012).

Educational leaders' needs are situational and based on the context in which they are working, which suggests that research regarding principals' needs and experiences should not be generalized across all contexts (Bellibas et al., 2016; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Salazar, 2007; Walker & Kwan, 2009). This is an area that has not been systematically researched in the Dominican K-12 educational system. The limited data on the principalship in the DR does suggest, however, that individuals who currently serve as principals in the country come from a variety of previous roles and experiences (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos,* 2013; Weinstein et al., 2014). This suggests that there may be significant diversity in the ways that novice principals prepare for and experience their work as school leaders, even with the policy changes instituted by MINERD and the creation of the EDCE in 2011. Thus, because of this diversity in previous roles and experiences before becoming principals and additional differences in how DR principals prepare for and move into the job, there is a need for exploratory studies that attempt to gain a better understanding of Dominican public-school principals' experiences in those early years and their needs when entering the

principalship.

A more thorough understanding of principals' experiences and needs entering the principalship may be useful in better understanding how Dominican principals approach their job, their pathways to those positions, and their early career experiences in that role. Additionally, it would help determine if, and in what ways, professional background, training, and academic credentials shape or influence Dominican public-school principals' experiences and needs when they enter the principalship, particularly under the current educational system. Such an investigation could yield understandings that better define both job requirements and preparation programs and first years' support for principals who serve public-schools in the Dominican context.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to explore Dominican public-school novice principals' early career experiences and how they identified their needs entering the principalship. For the purposes of this study, *early career* is defined as the first five years in the principal role. Additionally, through portraiture, this study aimed to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: *How do Dominican public-school principals describe their early career experiences?*

To further understand novice principals' experiences and needs, this study sought to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What do Dominican principals early career experiences reveal about their needs in preparing for and carrying out their early years in the principal role?

2. How do novice principals describe their pathway to the principalship and their first experiences in the role?

3. How do novice principals describe their role as a K-12 public-school principal?

Significance of the Study

Research shows that countries in Latin America and the Caribbean usually implement decontextualized strategies from other developed nations regarding improvement of school leadership strategies (Weinstein et al., 2014); hence, this study constitutes a basis for necessary up-to-date, contextualized, and pertinent research on principal leadership in the DR, particularly in this era of change and reform. Nonetheless, the significance of this study is to inform how novice principals experience their role and what they express they need to better enact this role. Brauckman and Pashiardis (2012) highlight the importance of principal preparation as a means to ease the transition process, while Oplatka and Lapidot (2017) suggest mentoring as a means to facilitate principals' shift to their new role. As such, this study may inform public policy on what principals in the DR need to adapt, transition, and carry on their role as new principals.

Additionally, this study may serve as basis to better understand and revise the requirements for becoming principals; what principals need in their training; what support they need on their first years on the job; inform public policy and resource allocation for promoting quality certifications for principals; ensure improvement in the educational system; and gain a deeper understanding of the skills and experiences needed prior to becoming principal. Also, through principals' stories, this study attempted to reveal their pathways to the principalship and their experiences during those first years in the principalship. These stories illustrate the

Dominican Educational System, its context, and portray a part of the DR's culture which

provides information on how the DR conceptualizes and understands the role of the principal.

Methodology

This study utilized a basic interpretive qualitative methodology. The critical feature of a

basic interpretive qualitative research is to make meaning of a specific phenomenon (Merriam,

2002). For this study, I also used portraiture as a method to narrate principals' life stories

(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Together, these features complement this study because

this combination provides a thick description of novice principals' early career experiences

during their first five years in their role and reveal their needs entering the principalship. The

basic interpretive qualitative methodology allowed me to make meaning of principals'

significant experiences in their early years and the different needs they bring into the

principalship. As for portraiture, this method allowed me to document principals' life stories,

background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals, which contributed to a better

understanding of the Dominican context for educational leadership.

Conceptual Framework and Narrative

Current Educational System in the Dominican Republic

Framework
for the Principalship
Principal and Building
Leader Framework 2.0
(Reeves & McNeill, 2017)

Understanding of principal's
role based on US research

Novice
Principals
1-5 years

Description

Understanding

Experiences and Needs
Entering the Principalship
and the first years on the job
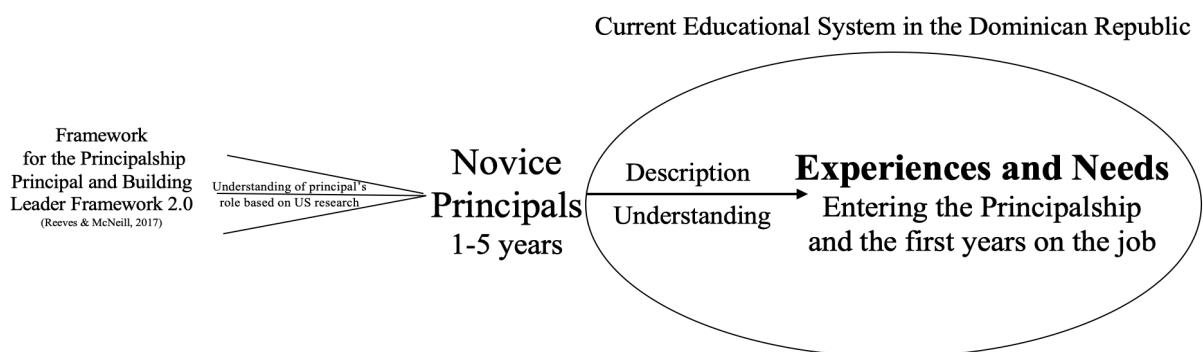
Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework for Dominican Public-School Principals' Early Years' Experiences Study.

The conceptual framework proposed for this study (Figure 1) focused on how novice principals, with one to five years in their roles, described their experiences and reflected on their needs entering the principalship as well as on their first years on the job in the current educational system in DR. Since there is little research on principal leadership in the DR or in similar contexts like Latin America or the Caribbean (Weinstein et al., 2014), I utilized the framework developed by Reeves and McNeill (2017) that describes in detail the role of the principal. This framework provides an overview of the principal's role according to five domains that address the roles, tasks, attitudes, leadership behaviors, and skills principals should embody. I selected this framework because it is grounded in research from the U.S. and other developed countries' and there is no such framework based on the DR perspective. Although from a different context, I used this framework in an open-ended manner as a lens to further understand the role of the principal in the DR while also allowing any contextual distinctions to emerge and be recognized. The responses principals provided served to compare and contrast the role of the principal in the DR to what Reeves and McNeill (2017) suggest, leading to a better understanding of the principalship in the DR.

Based on principals' descriptions of their experiences and reflections on their successes and challenges, I looked for indications of their met and unmet needs entering the principalship. I tried to understand how their professional experience, academic background, professional training, external and internal expectations, assumptions, and/or other factors have shaped the way principals understand and enact their role in those first years and how they

relate these to their needs. Additionally, I looked to differentiate between what principals wished they had learned before starting their work as principals and their descriptions of their ongoing needs for learning and support as they carry out their first years on the job as novice principals. As a basic interpretive qualitative study, the main goal of this research was to make meaning of how these principals understand, reflect upon, and describe their work lives as novice principals during their first five years on the job.

Reflections on My Identity

As a researcher, I have a close relationship with this topic. First, I am a Dominican principal and, second, I had a million needs when I started the principalship. My road to becoming a principal was rocky and very confusing. I worked as an assistant teacher in a Montessori school immediately after graduating from high-school. I loved teaching. I became a teacher because I was so inspired by my high school principal that I felt I had to do something similar to her. Early on in my career, I was aware of how principals shape the lives of their students. In addition, as a teenager watching movies like *Lean on Me* and *Dead Poet Society,* fueled the belief I had that teachers and principals had to be inspiring and held a great responsibility; to me, they held their students' futures. And, somehow, that attracted me.

My initial intention was not to become an elementary school principal, nor did I foresee becoming a principal so early on in my career. I felt there was so much more I needed to learn, to explore, and to experience as a teacher. I sadly confirmed all of these assumptions when I started working as principal twelve years ago and realized that I genuinely had a lot to learn and that there was so much I did not know. I undertook the principalship with little choice, as I had to substitute for the previous principal who was ill. Circumstances eventually placed me in that role permanently, and my former principal became my director, not my mentor.

Personally, there is a vast difference between a mentor and a director, and it became clear to me in those early years as principal. I encountered so many training needs that were necessary for me to be successful in a leadership position. I had no managerial skills, no previous experience as a leader, plus I was really young. I was in the hands of someone who desperately wanted to shape me according to her standards (my director) and gave me little room to create professional experiences of my own. Another subtle issue I encountered was that I was married to my director's son, who was also the school's owner. So, all my colleagues and workmates thought nepotism was the reason I was promoted to principal, not to mention the other teachers who were older than me, had more years of experience, and felt they deserved it more than I did. So, there I was, the 28-year-old principal, whose best qualifications (from my perspective) were drive and passion. For all others, however, being married to the right person was the asset that placed me in the role. Little did they know that I did not want this position at the time nor under those circumstances.

All of this is not to say I was not academically qualified to be a principal, nor that I was not dedicated to my job. I had a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, a masters' degree in Educational Psychology from an international university, which I believe gave me perspective. Also, I had 14 years of experience as a teacher (I began teaching when I was 14). When I started, I identified some needs in my training and professional background, particularly in management and support. I had no training in managerial skills. Acknowledging this handicap, I subsequently pursued a second master's degree in Educational Administration from a prestigious local university.

The first few years of the principalship were tough. I was being trained, advised and directed by someone who had a lot more experience than I did and who tried to shape my

leadership approach, behaviors, and beliefs to her standards. She had extremely high expectations of me. As a novice principal, I acknowledged some of the needs I had and some of the needs my director presented in properly training me as a novice in that position. Time went by, and eight years passed under that same dynamic: director-novice, high expectations, high demands, high performance, and needs growing, developing, and strengthening. This was when I decided I could not work, nor be a principal, under these conditions anymore, so I quit.

That was a very rough period for me, both professionally and personally. I took on a job with a government-funded project working with public-school teachers where I was in charge of coordinating teacher training. During that time, I worked closely with public-school teachers and principals. I learned a great deal about my own country and our educational system. I understood a little more of our cultural idiosyncrasies as well as the reality of the differences between Dominican public and private schools. This knowledge helped me to recognize better how those differences might impact the experiences of teachers and principals who serve in the Dominican context. Although it was a difficult time, this experience ultimately restored some of my confidence as a professional.

It was during this time, working for that project, that I applied for my current Ph.D. program. I saw this as an opportunity to rethink my career as an educator. I found myself lacking inspiration and direction. I thought I was not cut out to be a principal due to my past experiences with my director and the fact that I was never able to meet her high expectations of me. Although I loved this new job working with public-school teachers' training, it was not my calling. I was doing a good job in this position; yet, I missed the feeling of "the school," teachers, students, leading, inspiring, and, I guess, I missed being a principal. So, I thought, that maybe I was not such a bad principal after all and considered going back.

A year after I left my previous school, my director retired, and I became the principal again. But this time around, it was different since I was alone to take on this position. There was no director, pseudo-mentor, or advisor in place. I was a novice principal all over again, with a new set of needs and a new-found respect for the job. So, for the past four years, I have been pursuing my Ph.D. and working as the principal for the Montessori elementary school I love so much in parallel. It has been an interesting couple of years since I have been applying all of the readings, theories, ideas, and my learnings from my Ph.D. classes to my work as a principal.

As the Ph.D. program came to an end, choosing a dissertation topic was not hard for me. From my first exploration of a possible dissertation topic, I have always been inclined to focus on principal leadership. It was not until near the end of my program, however, that I was able to put into words my research interest, probably because it is so personal: the experiences and needs of novice Dominican principals. Since I have encountered training, experiential, managerial, mentoring, and support needs in my career, I wondered if and how others have experienced these feelings.

Towards the end of the program, I did a field test for my study, where I interviewed three novice principals. It was interesting to see how they described their time as principals, how they began their careers, and what they found out about themselves in their work leading their schools. As I conducted my interviews, I found that there are far more categories of needs than I anticipated. In this pre-dissertation field study, I completed for a qualitative research class, I was not able to force-fit what I learned into categories such as professional training, professional experience, academic background, or aspirations. I found that some of the needs principals discussed were much more personal. They had to do with the need for community,

support, and mentoring. Oh, how I related to their stories! Some of them I would have described verbatim, as, for others, those needs were very different from mine.

I learned valuable lessons in my field test, both as a principal and as a researcher. Particularly, how passionate I am about this topic, and how I love listening to principals' stories of how they became principals. Their stories are as important as the needs they express. Telling their stories illustrates the Dominican Educational System, our context, and portrays a part of our culture.

Having taken on the principalship in two very different periods of my life, with different needs related to training, background, and experience, I felt like a novice principal twice when I started 12 years ago as compared to when I took back the principal role four years ago. The second time around, I was very aware of my training, managerial, and personal needs probably because of all of the readings I was doing for my classes and my engagement in constant reflection.

As an experienced principal in the DR, I have endured additional strains and pressures in my role as principal due to the current climate of change and educational reform. Based on my experience, Brown's (2006) concern for how principals experience the pressures and expectations that accompany changes in education policy and reform initiatives ring true to me and increases my interest in conducting research that provides a clear picture of how novice principals in the DR are weathering these same challenges. I am not new on the job, and I have certainly felt the increased pressures.

I hoped to find commonalities between my experience and my needs, as well as learn from the experiences of public-school novice principals. I wondered if other principals have experienced the lack of training in other areas, as I have. I believe that my past experiences as a

teacher, as a principal, as a teacher training coordinator, and then as principal again have shaped how I carry out my principalship, my relationship with teachers, my understanding of learning processes, and my practice as a leader. I was motivated to conduct this study to understand better how principals begin their principalship, portray and reflect on their first years on the job, and reveal and describe their needs. Also, as in my case, was there a story behind these needs? Answering this question and many more questions that I have is my motivation to conduct this study.

Summary

This study explored novice (one to five years) Dominican public-school principals' early career experiences and how they identify their needs entering the principalship. Additionally, through portraiture, this study aimed to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. This study employed a basic interpretive qualitative methodology to make meaning of principals' descriptions of their first years' experiences, their pathway to the principalship, and their needs entering their new role.

Chapter One provided an overview of the study, the background, and rationale as well as the research questions that guided the research process. In the second chapter, I present the literature review for this study, considering the existing research on novice principals and their needs. The third chapter outlines the methods for this study, population, sampling strategies, and data analysis. Chapter Four presents principals' portraits and Chapter Five highlights the results of the study. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the findings and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to explore Dominican public-school novice principals' early career experiences and how they identified their needs entering the principalship. Through the use of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), this study aimed to document principals' life stories, backgrounds, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. The first section of this chapter presents the conceptual framework used for the study, the Principal and Building Leader Framework (Reeves & McNeill, 2017), as a means to understand the role of the principal and later to compare and contrast the role of the Dominican principal based on this existing framework. Next, the second section presents a literature review of the most common leadership approaches principals adopt as well as common profiles and backgrounds for this role. Since this study aimed to better understand novice principals' needs, the third section of this chapter presents an overview of the current literature on novice principals.

Finally, because research on principal leadership must be contextualized, and this study took place in the Dominican Republic (DR), the last section presents an overview of the educational system in the DR, the current educational context, a comparison of the DR's principal role, and explains the Principal and Building Leader Framework proposed by Reeves and McNeill (2017) mentioned above. This last section of the literature review aims to provide as much detail as possible to frame and contextualize the study.

Conceptual Framework: The Principal and Building Leader Framework

Being an efficient manager used to be enough for principals (Keith, 2011). Over time, the role of the principal has evolved, and today it comprises different facets, such as instructional,

strategic, organizational, and political. Principals "are expected to resolve society's social and educational inequities in a market-based environment" (Kafka, 2009, p. 328). More recently, principals are considered personnel managers, student managers, community influencers, school resource advocates, and financial managers (Lynch, 2012). As such, the role of the principal has increased in complexity over the last decades (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2017). Part of the complexity of this role entails principals portraying "effective and inspired leadership," which is as necessary as ever (Waters et al., 2005, p. 123). Being an effective principal is essential to take on the major responsibilities of this role in schools concerning safety, management, efficacy, and overall school organization (Tubbs, Heard, & Epps, 2011).

Since the body of research on the principal's role is so broad and the nature of the principalship so diverse and complex, it is useful to identify research-supported frameworks that represent significant elements of how researchers have come to understand the principalship. One such framework is the School ADvance Performance Assessment and Development framework developed by two American researchers, Reeves and McNeill (2017). To develop this framework, the authors synthesized research findings on principal roles and responsibilities within U.S. primary and secondary educational settings (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). Other frameworks, such as the Balanced Leadership Framework (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), provide a similar lens for understanding and interpreting the work of school principals. However, the Reeves-McNeill (2017) framework takes into consideration student results, emphasizing the importance of the role that principals play in the student success profile of a school. Because the Reeves-McNeill framework includes students' learning outcomes, I find it is more complete for the purpose of this study. Using this framework is a

useful tool to organize an exploration of how the literature provides a general approach to discuss the various roles and responsibilities currently associated with the principalship.

Reeves' and McNeill's (2017) framework describes the role of the principal through five domains. These five domains pertain to principals' activities including: (a) results, (b) leadership, (c) systems, (d) processes, and (e) capacity. The first domain, results, refers to student learning outcomes. The latter refer to the practice of principals.

Results

The Principal and Building Leader Framework (Reeves & McNeill, 2017) offers a results-based domain through which principals can assess how they are moving their schools forward in relation to targets for student growth and performance. These targets are based on both mandatory state academic measures and locally identified student success measures. This domain accounts for local student learning objectives and psychological, emotional, and social growth targets. Additionally, the domain includes part of the principals' responsibilities. This results domain refers to a principal's accountability related to meeting certain desired outcomes.

Consistent with Reeves and McNeill (2017), current literature highlights principal accountability in student learning outcomes. As such, Bush (2011) posits schools are driven by results. Principals are described as decisive and accountable for student learning outcomes (Gurr et al., 2005; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Rammer, 2007; Shue et al., 2012). Principals can have either a positive or a negative influence on the quality of education as measured by student outcomes (Gurr et al., 2005).

Governments hold principals accountable for school improvement and student test results (Starr, 2011). The community also expects principals to deliver results and has high

expectations for student achievement (Keith, 2011). Consequently, accountability issues, particularly related to student achievement, impact principal performance (Hvidston et al., 2015). Farver and Holt (2015) present an interesting perspective on the growing demands principals face by explaining that "the growing issues faced by principals to meet 21st-century education standards of accountability for student achievement have continued to spiral with demands for greater productivity" (p. 68).

Some of the demands for greater productivity impact how principals carry out their role and the competencies expected from them. These expectations on test results increase the stress on the principal's workload (Keith, 2011). Moreover, accountability issues have led to redefining the principal's role and the tasks they have to complete (Newton, Tuninson, & Viczko, 2010). According to Newton et al. (2010), principals are required to have baseline skills for understanding results from standardized tests and large-scale assessments, an understanding of various assessments, ability to engage teachers in the process, educate staff in interpreting results, and sensitivity in reporting these results.

To summarize the results domain, principals are responsible for student learning outcomes (Shue et al., 2012) and the community expects principals to deliver these results (Keith, 2011). The role of the principal increases in complexity as accountability rises. Hence, the demands of the role increase as well (Keith, 2011).

Leadership

For Reeves and McNeill (2017), the leadership domain has to do with principals establishing a mission and vision for the school that supports the success of all students, aligned with the district's mission and vision. The authors explain leadership has to do with establishing goals and expectations of success for all students while engaging stakeholders and

fostering commitment. Moreover, they state principal leadership should establish a culture of learning and respect and one that honors diversity while celebrating history and traditions. According to Reeves and McNeill, principals should be informed and make evidence-based decisions, establish shared leadership, and think systemically. Some of the characteristics principals should embody are: fair, legal, honest, ethical, adaptive, and resilient.

Reeves' and McNeill's (2017) discussion of principal leadership coincides with what Hallinger (2005) proposed. Hallinger states that, as leaders, principals not only lead but also manage and effectively align school activities and strategies with the school's mission. To do so, principals develop a shared vision in their schools (Senge, 2006). For Senge (2006), a shared vision fosters a commitment long-term, connects and binds people together in pursuit of a common goal, and focuses on team energy. Furthermore, promoting the ideal of collaboration and a shared vision takes time and commitment (Senge, 2012).

Part of the shared vision principals develop, involves building a school climate that responds to the complex adaptive challenges of society (Drago-Severson, 2012). According to Lemoine, McCormack, and Richardson (2014), and corresponding with Reeves and McNeill (2017), the effective principal: (a) sets a direction and establishes a vision for the school, (b) has high expectations for teachers and students, (c) as instructional leaders work with curriculum and teacher professional development, (d) builds relationship with teachers, (e) establishes a safe environment, (f) and manages time wisely. Overall, the leadership domain entails principals setting a direction for the school and acting on it.

In a study conducted by Cohen (2015), the author highlighted how leadership influences school life. The author assessed principals' and teachers' attitudes towards inclusion with a sample of 15 principals and 81 teachers. Cohen concluded that successful principals sustain

daily interactions with teachers, share their vision, and encourage change. This study utilized the MLQ questionnaire developed by Bass and Avolio (1997). The findings from this study suggested that principals who portray effective leadership foster positive attitudes toward inclusion. Cohen explains that a principal's leadership approach is relevant for school improvement and student learning outcomes.

Systems

The systems domain pertains to high quality and reliable instructional programs that are coherent with the established curriculum and are understood by all (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). Instruction is evidence-based, and programs are differentiated to meet all students' needs. Principals under the systems domain utilize standards-based assessment and provide feedback. These principals undertake safe, effective, and efficient school operations that are consistent with districts' laws, policies, regulations, resource allocation, and management. Looking at the diversity of tasks that Reeves and McNeill (2017) propose, one can conclude that principals are managers and instructional leaders (Willer, 2011), as their role entails both academic and non-academic activities (Flowers et al., 2014).

Processes

Principals undertake many processes in school life, some of which have to do with building community through establishing relationships, inclusion, and communications (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). Some of the processes that Reeves and McNeill (2017) present have to do with evidence-based improvement. The authors suggest a collaborative inquiry to question, challenge and develop evidence-based strategies for school improvement through the systematic use of multiple sources of data to support their decisions. Another characteristic that involves processes is data collection, use, storage, analysis, and interpretation.

Principals' processes include two crucial areas of the principalship: community building and improvement based on evidence. With the intensification of accountability systems, the need to make data-driven decisions has become paramount (Marsh & Farrell, 2014). Consequently, it is essential to understand what the current body of research suggests related to this area. As for community building, effective principals regard this task as highly significant (Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014).

Evidence-based decision-making. Keith (2011) posits that principals need to make informed decisions to prioritize their daily activities and demands. In the education field, making decisions based on investigations started with programs and interventions that were financed by federal funds as the No Child Left Behind Act (Haecker, Lane, & Zientek, 2017). As such, there is an increased emphasis on working and participating in evidence-based programs (Sheard & Sharples, 2016). Sheard and Sharples (2016) explain there are significant trials in connecting findings from research (evidence) to practice, as well as determining what is essential. Moreover, they posit that the major challenge is to maximize initiatives with the use of research. Sheard and Sharples suggest that understanding the complex relationship between data and decisions may lead to "better research use, better practitioner and research learning, and better outcomes for pupils" (p. 685).

Principals' collegial relationships. Hattie (2002) emphasized that principals should foster positive home-school relations. Baruti Kafele (2015) wrote the book *The Principal 50* as a result of his experience as a principal. He describes himself as a practitioner, not a researcher. Based on his experience as a public-school principal for many years, Kafele (2015) posited that building collegial relationships has to do with the principal working together with staff to attain school goals, such as improving student achievement. Some of the actions towards building

collegial relationships involve empowering staff by encouraging autonomy and participation, fostering teams, and conveying the meaning and purpose of their work. Kafele goes on to explain parental and community engagement develops a sense of belonging and has to do with having parents on the school side as allies, under the premise that "a satisfied and engaged parental and community support base can only help your school to soar higher" (p. 73).

Capacity

Principals need to be productive and competent (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). According to Reeves and McNeill (2017), the capacity domain has to do with human development both of the staff and of the leader. The authors also suggest performance evaluation aims towards performance improvement and personal ownership in the evaluation process. Evaluation can lead to learning from experience, implementing change strategies, self-reflection and questioning, team learning, and promoting thinking (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). Principals require feedback from meaningful assessment processes to support high-performing schools (Hvidston et al., 2015).

"Capacity is often thought of as the ability to do something" (Huggins, Klar, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2017, p. 3). Leaders are accountable for fostering and building capacity in individuals, teams, and organizations (Hirsh & Killion, 2007). Leaders who inspire others to learn are leaders who themselves are in a continuously learning and know how positive learning can be for everyone since it creates mechanisms and opportunities for individual learning and team learning (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008). Hence, a school principal that is continuously learning will be more likely to promote learning among staff.

Principals are accountable for teachers' professional development (Drago-Severson, 2007) and are crucial in achieving and sustaining these development efforts (Gustafson,

Reimer, Burgin-Hartshorn, & Ridlehoover, 2014). As Routman (2012) suggests, "the effective teacher depends foremost on an effective principal" (p. 57). Sustainability is not only for teacher learning, but it is also for principals as well and is achieved through proper assessment and feedback. This capacity building occurs when principals get to know their staff (Huggins et al., 2017). Principals' dedication to fostering leadership capacity is proportional to the time and effort they are willing to invest in others (Huggins et al., 2017).

In conclusion, part of a leader's commitment is to build capacity in their teams (Hirsh & Killion, 2009). Hence, schools require a principal whose leadership focuses on improving student and staff learning (DuFour, 2002). These assertations coincide with Reeves' and McNeill's (2017) framework in that principals are responsible of building a culture of learning and respect.

Principal Leadership Approaches

Principal leadership has been a topic of study and discussion among scholars and is considered a critical factor in school improvement (Wildy, Clarke, Styles, & Beycioglu, 2010). The inconsistencies in leadership approach for principals have to do with the myriad and diversity of tasks and roles principals undertake (Oplatka, 2017). There are discrepancies as to what leadership approach educational leaders must adopt (Bush, 2011). In this section, I will discuss instructional leadership, transformational leadership, managerial leadership, and shared leadership, as they are the most common approaches I found in the literature.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a critical part of the principalship (Hallinger, 2005; Hattie, 2002; Lynch, 2012; Marks & Printy, 2003) because principals are the instructional leaders of their schools (DuFour, 2002). Instructional leaders are strong, directive leaders, culture

builders, goal-oriented, and people who lead from a combination of expertise and charisma (Hallinger, 2005). They represent a role model for others because they are "learning-centered leaders" (Bush, 2011, p. 17). In conclusion, principals who are instructional leaders prioritize learning in their schools (Terosky, 2014), which in the Principal and Building Leader Framework by Reeves and McNeill (2017) falls under the systems domain. Instructional leadership and the systems domain both aim towards high-quality, reliable instruction.

There are differences among principals' instructional behavior due to the environment they work in, particularly considering school size, socioeconomic status, special program management, and district office relationship (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hallinger (2003) posits that instructional leaders must contextualize their role to their school's context (needs, opportunities, and constraints). The contextual nature of how effective principals carry out their various roles makes the job even more layered and complex.

DuFour's (2002) approach to instructional leadership is focused on student learning outcomes rather than on teaching teachers. He proposes a system of interventions that promotes learning instead of sending teachers to a professional development seminar. DuFour's three-part process of applying instructional leadership led him to be "a good student of good teaching and to help teachers become more reflective and insightful about their instruction" (p. 12). So we can conclude DuFour believes that principals should be in constant learning. These three stages are: (a) the pre-observation conference, meeting with teacher and discussing what the class should be like; (b) the actual classroom observation, where he wrote all the details about the class; and (c) the post-observation, where they discussed the class, relived each moment, and reflected on which aspects to improve and to which aspects to maintain.

Hallinger's (2003) literature review on instructional leadership focused and summarized it under three dimensions: (a) defining the school's mission; (b) managing the instructional programs; and (c) promoting a positive school-learning climate. In a 2005 research publication, Hallinger revised these dimensions and presented seven distinct areas the principal should focus on, such as (a) creating a shared sense of purpose in the school; (b) fostering continuous improvement; (c) developing a climate of high expectations; (d) coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student learning outcomes; (e) shaping a reward structure that reflects the school's mission; (f) staff improvement; and (g) being a visible presence in the school (Hallinger, 2005). In conclusion, the effective principal sets a direction and establishes a vision for the school and has high expectations for teachers and student (Hallinger, 2005; Lemoine, et al., 2014). As instructional leaders, principals work with curriculum and teacher professional development, build relationship with teachers, establishes a safe environment, and manages time wisely (Hallinger, 2005; Lemoine, et al., 2014).

Fenwick and Collins-Pierce (2001) explain that some of the tasks under the umbrella of instructional leadership are among the most time-consuming activities principals undertake (Fenwick & Collins-Pierce, 2001). Instructional leaders visit classrooms, work closely with teachers, and foster professional development (Rallis & Highsmith, 1986). Broadly described, instructional leaders supervise instruction, curriculum development, and discipline (Fenwick & Collins-Pierce, 2001). Principals instruct staff and monitor both teachers' and students' progress (Hattie, 2002). Instructional leadership entails coordinating, supervising, and developing curriculum and instruction (Hallinger, 2003). Principals who are instructional leaders, foster dialogue, and collaboration (Bush, 2011) and provide teachers with feedback (Bendikson et al., 2012).

Further highlighting the importance of instructional leadership for principals, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in its report of Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (2015) stated that instructional leadership was interpreted as observing classrooms, coaching, providing feedback, and evaluating teachers. However, they add on to these duties, by saying that instructional leaders: (a) model learning for others; (b) confront equity issues regarding students' learning; (c) develop staff capacity; (d) make decisions towards student learning; (e) understand how all systems affect student success; and (f) share and distribute responsibilities for student learning.

In conclusion, instructional leadership is a critical aspect of the principalship. Kafele (2015) explains that instructional leaders convey an educational philosophy and promote a progressive educational environment that is conducive to learning. For Kafele, instruction should be the number one priority of principals. It is the principal's responsibility to ensure that instruction is at optimal levels in their school.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2013). Waters et al. (2005) propose that transformational leadership in education involves principals looking at problems in new ways while providing a behavior model and communicating high expectations for teachers. This leadership approach focuses on the engagement, commitments, and capacities of the organization's members (Bush, 2011). Moreover, transformational leaders use inspiration to create a climate of trust, respect, and engagement (Bolman & Deal, 2013), have a clear vision for their organizations (Northouse, 2013), and staff shares this vision, values, and interests (Bush, 2011). Sharing a vision fosters commitment and a sense of belonging (Senge,

2006), which is consistent with the leadership domain from Reeves and McNeill (2017) that proposes the promotion of inclusion and engagement in schools.

One of the main characteristics of transformational leadership is to be alert of collaborators' career development and direct them to work together towards a common goal (Durdagi, 2013). As mentioned, one of the roles of the principal is to promote teacher professional development (Drago-Severson, 2007; Reeves & McNeill, 2017) and inspire change by empowering them (Wahab, Fuad, Ismail, & Majid, 2014). Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) affirm this by stating that transformational leaders foster capacity development and commitment to organizational goals. In a study conducted in Temerloh, Malaysia with 240 teachers in 10 primary schools, Wahab et al. (2014) found a significant relationship between principal's transformational leadership and teacher work commitment, concluding that this leadership approach is appropriate for primary school leaders.

Managerial Leadership

Managerial leadership, sometimes referred to as organizational leadership, is necessary to organize the day-to-day duties, even if instructional leadership is principals' primary focus (Hvidston et al., 2015). Bush (2011) describes managerial leadership focuses on managing activities and operations rather than on setting a vision for the school. Managerial leadership is regarded as limited although crucial to the principalship since it channels the implementation of the vision (Bush, 2011). The purpose of managing is for organizations to work efficiently and successfully (Northouse, 2013). These assertions about management coincide with what Reeves and McNeill propose that principals do in schools, such as aligning the school with the district's policies and laws.

Principals are expected to manage schools effectively (Wildy et al., 2010). In order to do so, principals are responsible for forming, interpreting, and sorting of school resources (Brotherson et al., 2001). Management behaviors have to do with maintaining stability, order, and efficiency, as for leadership has to do with conveying a vision and inspiring others (Willer, 2011). For Kafele (2015), based on his experience, planning, organization, and time management involve prioritizing actions that lead to school success, developing a plan and taking matters into effect, as well as promoting staff engagement in decisions.

Shared Leadership

"Leaders cannot lead alone" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 109). Drago-Severson states that by sharing leadership, principals build capacity, promote growth, encourage collaborators to share their knowledge and expertise, and reinforce relationships. Participative leadership may provide teachers with the possibility of getting involved in decision-making processes, which may increase commitment among teachers (Bush, 2011). Bush (2011) argues that this model may represent challenges for principals, as they are the ones accountable for the school's outcomes and processes. Even so, principals who work with small teams can be more effective and may feel that they have more influence on the outcome (Goff, Guthrie, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014). Principals, particularly novice, fear that distributing leadership is giving up control; however, the issue is more profound than that (Spillane, Harris, Jones, & Mertz, 2015). Distributing leadership issues have to do with the school's context and its particularities, rather than solely with control issues.

By distributing leadership, principals prepare teammates for future leadership positions (Bush, 2011). Distributed leadership occurs via interactions with others (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). These leaders are devoted to the school's goals and foster an environment

where staff can use their abilities and capacities as necessary (Northouse, 2013). As such, Senge (2006) posits that, "the intelligence of the team exceeds the intelligence of the individuals in the team, and where teams develop extraordinary capacities for coordinated action" (p. 10). Thus, we can infer Senge proposes a collaborative environment in schools.

Collaboration takes time and commitment (Senge, 2012). Nevertheless, it is needed to reach transformation and adaptive change (Senge, Linchtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007). Collaboration entails the team staying focused on their tasks, sharing ideas, and compensating for each other (Northouse, 2013). "Collaboration among educators builds shared responsibility and improves student learning" (Hirsh, & Killion, 2009, p. 469). However, when the leader conveys a lack of clarity on the goal and purpose, collaboration becomes problematic (Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2014). For them, principals who foster collaboration encourage teacher efficacy and motivation. Principals in high-achieving schools promote collaboration in teachers, where they plan and strategize together and acknowledge their competencies (Kafele, 2015). Effective leaders encourage secure communication and reward collaboration (Northouse, 2013).

Principal Profile and Background

It is necessary to consider the requirements for becoming principal to understand the principal preparation programs and principals' needs better (Gurr & Drysdale, 2015). Understanding the requirements for the job and the influence professional experience has on the principal's performance, as well as what preparation programs to address is necessary to better understand the principal's profile. Oplatka (2017) suggests that preparation programs consider how principals deal with the workload and how they properly manage time when fulfilling the different tasks of their role. Hence, it becomes even more necessary to articulate

the requirements, principals' experience, and preparation programs as a means to better understand the principalship.

Requirements for Becoming Principal

Gurr and Drysdale (2015) posit that understanding the requirements for becoming a principal may influence leadership preparation and development in all career stages. The requirements for becoming principal vary in each country according to context. As such, Gurr and Drysdale suggest that preparation programs address these requirements.

Principals are required to have the knowledge and skills to effectively manage their school facility and the functional operation of their building (Tubbs et al., 2011). Walker and Kwan (2009) argue that there is a need for managerial skills in principals' hiring criteria. Other studies also highlight the importance of managerial experience, more so for assistant principals (Flowers et al., 2014; Tubbs et al., 2011).

Kwan (2012) examined the criteria used for recruiting potential candidates for the principalship in Hong Kong. The findings from this study confirmed four criteria used to assess and evaluate candidates for the principal position, listed in order of importance: generic managerial skills, communication and presentation skills, knowledge and experience, and religious and value orientation. Kwan stresses that of the four criteria, knowledge and experience are the only criteria that can be assessed objectively since it is directly related to teaching and learning.

Mullooly and Palmer (2015) suggest studying merit-based experiences more when hiring principals. "Subjective selection procedures and hiring cultures which breed inequity may lead school districts to select less-qualified principals at a critical time when the highest order of leadership is needed to raise and sustain student achievement within public-schools" (p. 26).

Mullooly and Palmer emphasize the importance of principal selection as one of the factors that may lead to the most qualified principals on the job since there is a strong correlation between the principal's work and student achievement. Galdames, Montecinos, Campos, Ahumada, and Leiva (2018) further add to the requirements by suggesting educational policy should consider appointing the right principal in specific contexts, so that they can address the school's needs.

Professional Experience

Chitpin (2014) suggests that principals rely on their previous experience to make critical decisions. Hence, principals with more years of experience enact a more assertive leadership style (Cohen, 2015). Even so, there are disagreements as to what professional experience is a better predictor of a successful principalship. As instructional leaders, principals need to spend more time in the classroom, yet the managerial tasks of the principalship do not allow it (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Principals had to fulfill both roles (administrative managers and instructional leaders) but were chosen and rewarded based on management (Lemoine et al., 2014).

Historically, the discrepancy between instruction and management has been an issue. Much of the research on effective principals stresses the importance of instructional leadership (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Lynch, 2012). Other studies highlight the significance of management abilities (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Lynch, 2012). Principals who have no training or experience in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, or other aspects of instructional leadership may have a different approach to the job of the principal as well as different needs compared to those who do (Rallis & Highsmith, 1986; Terosky, 2014; Tubbs et al., 2011). From a different perspective, principals with more background experience in managerial roles may bring a more developed orientation towards management issues than

their counterparts who come into the principalship straight out of teaching roles, mainly if they had little or no opportunity to conduct themselves as instructional leaders in their teaching role.

Although written 30 years ago, Thomson (1989) highlighted the importance of teaching experience for principals as instructional leaders, while suggesting that management skills can be learned through a certification program. For Thomson, the skills learned in the classroom are directly applied to the principalship and that "anyone attempting to be a principal without teaching experience would be severely handicapped" (p. 15). Thomson stated that principals rely on their teaching experience, for activities such as (a) hiring teachers, (b) following-up on instruction, (c) leading teachers, (d) understanding students' needs and working with them, and (e) discussing with parents.

Consistent with Thomson's (1989) views, Kwan and Walker (2009) posit that principals are customarily trained in their field of expertise, academia, and involved with instruction in schools. However, they present that some potential principals may not be ready or willing to assume the managerial duties of the role. Kwan and Walker's study looks at the Hong Kong context. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the expectations of hiring agencies and applicants for principal positions in Hong Kong. The sample consisted of 164 aspiring principals and 39 newly appointed principals, who completed a questionnaire. The findings from this study suggest a shift in the principal role, from an educational leader to an administrative manager. Hence, these findings highlight managerial experience, as work from US researchers, shifts the importance to instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005).

More recently, a study conducted by Bradley (2013) on 122 school administrators in Tennessee and North Carolina addresses the issue between managerial and instructional experience. Bradley found that years of teaching background and or administrative experience

had no significant effect on respect among collaborators and school community, principals'
stress level, professional development, student outcomes, and evaluation. However, Bradley's
study does not address the principal's needs, school climate, or other aspects of the
principalship.

Another study about principal's previous professional experience (Mehdinezhad &
Sardarzahi, 2015) presents the leadership behaviors that principals report they have and that
teachers observe; and how they relate to management experience. The study sample consisted
of 46 principals and 129 teachers of the Dashtiari District, Iran, who completed the Leadership
Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ). The results were analyzed by different statistical
tests (independent t-test, correlation coefficient, chi-square). Teachers reported the observed
behaviors as good while principals reported them as very good. The findings from the study
show that "leadership behaviors of both experienced and inexperienced principals are relatively
the same and generally acceptable" (p. 51). Mehdinezhad and Sardarzahi suggest that there are
no significant differences in how teachers perceive principals with and without prior
managerial experience.

Although teachers' perceptions are not influenced by principals' professional experience,
research shows that principals' professional experience is determinant in their job. Another
study that confirms how principals rely on their professional experience is presented by
Rodriguez-Campos, Rincones–Gomez, and Shen (2005). They conducted a twofold study; the
first purpose was to describe the characteristics of secondary principals in the US public-
schools by analyzing surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics
(NCES) and the second purpose was to inquire if the trend characteristics of secondary
principals are being realized. The findings from this study suggest that principals have

increased "their years of teaching experience before obtaining the principalship, have a stronger background in instructional leadership, and have been striving to enhance their professional skills and knowledge base" (p. 310). The fewest years of teaching experience they found is around seven. The findings also suggest that secondary principals are stronger in instructional leadership.

Principal Preparation Programs

Principal preparation programs are designed to fulfill principals' training needs and requirements for the role (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). According to Oplatka (2009), one of the most significant weaknesses of these programs is when they are more focused towards theory rather than practical knowledge. Hence, principal preparation programs should be experiential and practical (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Brauckman and Pashiardis (2012) claim that more research in regards to principal preparation is needed. As such, principal preparation programs are a subject of international research (Webber, Mentz, Scott, Mola Okoko, & Scott, 2015; Wildy et al., 2010). For example, the International School Principal Project (ISPP) advises preparation programs (Webber et al., 2015), by studying the pre-appointment training experiences principals had, exploring "how principals are prepared in different contexts, and how well their preparation fulfills their needs" (Wildy et al., 2010, p. 308).

Chitpin (2014) states the importance of ongoing training and preparation for principals. Waters and colleagues (2005) state the importance of these programs being specific to the needs and context of schools. Likewise, principal preparation programs should address the adaptive challenges that schools and principals face today (Bridges & Hallinger, 1997; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014).

Brauckman and Pashiardis (2012) explain that leadership training for principals should begin before being appointed and suggest that adequate preparation may ease the transition. Policymakers face the crucial challenge of developing effective and pertinent preparation programs for principals (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2017), which should be a priority in the educational agenda of every country (Aravena, 2016). Furthermore, Webber et al. (2015) suggest that preparation programs should undergo constant revision to fulfill the continuous changes and needs of society.

More than a decade ago, Brown (2006) proposed changes to principal training programs, which she believed would help develop leaders capable of undergoing school challenges. The recommendations that Brown presented were: (a) raising admissions requirements for leadership programs; (b) rethink coursework in terms of connecting them to the demands and reality that principals face, which should also include field experiences; (c) establish appropriate standards for preparation programs, which should ensure that accomplished and qualified professionals move into the principalship; and (d) broaden the learning experience for leaders, going outside the education scenarios and promoting immersion in business environments.

Brown's (2006) analysis explained how educational reforms, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, put more pressure on principals and suggest that principals should be trained to undertake these challenges. Walker and Kwan (2009) highlight that educational reform stresses changes in principals' role and increases accountability. Consequently, principal preparation programs should address the shifting education environment so they can be more capable of their jobs (Walker & Kwan, 2009). As such, requirements and demands on principals rise in order to address these changes (Shoho & Barnett, 2010) and, we can infer, so do their needs.

In that regard, principal preparation programs should establish a collaboration between universities and school districts, to ensure that there is appropriate collaboration and that these programs respond to principals' needs (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Chitpin (2014) suggests that powerful leadership does not take place in these programs, instead, it is an ongoing development as principals continue to learn. Lochmiller (2014) indicates that preparation programs consider support for their participants, particularly in the early stages of their career. Accordingly, principal preparation programs should address strategies for distributing leadership since many researchers rely on socialization instead of formal training to allocate tasks and foster development among staff (Huggins et al., 2017).

After an analysis of five universities in the US exemplary programs, Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012) present some of the critical features of effective leadership and principal preparation programs, such as: (a) clear focus and values about leadership; (b) standards-based curriculum, emphasizing instructional leadership; (c) internships; (d) cohort groups that create opportunities; (e) recruitment and selection of personnel; and (f) strong partnership with schools and districts. Webber et al. (2015), and consistent with Brown's (2006) statements add on to these characteristics by suggesting principal preparation programs address the challenges principals face.

Due to these challenges, preparation programs should focus on developing effective instructional leaders with up-to-date information of what works (Salazar, 2007). Drago-Severson (2012) suggests addressing these challenges through professional development programs that reduce isolation, encourage renewal, and improve leadership. Pierson (2014) adds on to the conversation by suggesting preparation programs emphasize experiences associated with success: track the information principals provide on their resume, provide

attendants with the opportunity to supervise other adults, acknowledge the differences in levels (elementary, middle, and high school), and preparation programs should consider community and family.

Countries, such as Australia, that do not have a mandatory principal certification rely on principals' identifying their needs and shaping their pathway (Gurr & Drysdale, 2015). These principals have the necessary support through system, universities, and organization programs, as well as from colleagues and senior leaders in schools. Australia's model represents an unusual take on principals becoming self-directed learners since adults can diagnose and assess their learning needs (Brookfield, 1984). Caffarella (1993) argues a self-directed learning experience consists of the process of learning what the learner needs to learn instead of being content-oriented.

After conducting a comparison of Australia, United Kingdom, and US's approach to principal training, Aravena (2016) arrived at the following suggestions for principal preparation programs for the Chilean educational system: (a) training should be a long-term systemic process, (b) aligning professional standards to a framework of good leadership, (c) support and mentoring, (d) strategically designed, and (e) as Lynch (2012) suggested, based on practical experiences. Aravena's contextualized these suggestions to fit Chile's context. These suggestions are consistent with the literature on principal preparation programs.

The Novice Principal

The body of research on novice principals is extensive (Fourtenbary, 2008). Researchers regard this time as critical because principals face the reality of their responsibilities (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Novice principals face the tensions when they start the principalship, not only regarding the transition process, but that is inherent to the role itself (Spillane et al., 2015).

Hvidston et al. (2015) suggest that understanding the career stages of principals is essential since it may inform planning professional preparation programs accordingly.

A case study conducted by Oplatka (2009), with six principals, aimed to gain a better perception of a principal preparation program considering the career stage perspective. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Principals reported that preparation programs that focused on career stage and that were field-based were far more beneficial, than those dedicated to general, broad knowledge. Thus, understanding novice principals' general needs, feelings, mentoring, and training needs may inform preparation programs and also provide a better understanding of this stage of principals' career.

Novice Principals' General Needs

Novice principals face significant challenges in their schools, regarding their training, feelings, and the diversity of their role (Petzko, 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Willer, 2011). Some of these needs refer to the pressures that principals endure concerning the diversity of roles they undertake, the little time or the little authority they have (Gilman & Lanman-Givens, 2001). Norton (2003) addresses other challenges of the principalship, noting studies that suggest principal attrition is increasing due to the high demands of the job and. Moreover, Norton states it should be a national priority to address principals' needs to keep them in schools.

For Eller (2010), referring to the principal's role, the "high level of complexity can make it difficult for new principals to successfully acclimate into the job" (p. 957). According to Willer (2011), the challenging role of a principal is distinctive because few new principals receive training on the job or go through a formal induction process when starting their role, which stresses the importance of taking into consideration principals' training, background, and

needs when they come into the principalship. Therefore, principals have to learn about their school's context and challenges in order to prioritize how to address them (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2016).

Willer (2011) identified the perceived needs of new principals three years on the job concerning management, leadership, and the support they need, strongly emphasizing the distinction between management and leadership in principals. In this regard, we can conclude principals come into the principalship with the need for administrative, organizational, and leadership skills. Brauckmann and Pashiardis (2012) describe three areas of interest regarding principals' needs, which are: (a) community engagement, particularly regarding trust and collaboration; (b) motivating instructional leadership and human resource growth; and (c) school improvement pertaining to managerial aspects of the school, such as handling the budget and the provisions. Novice principals show concern regarding the necessary leadership for school improvement, addressing issues like collaborative approaches, listening and presentation skills, using the power of persuasion, team building relationship skills, and diversity skills (Flowers et al., 2014; Hyat et al., 2015). Hyat et al. (2015) posit that ignoring these needs is impossible if schools are to improve.

Oplatka and Lapidot (2017) conducted a study with 12 newly appointed principals in Israel and found these principals reported having added pressures because they had to perform tasks they had not performed before, particularly regarding managerial work. These principals also expressed that they wished they had more time in the transition process between the previous principal and them (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2017). The findings suggest that novice principals have training needs although some of the issues and challenges they face are not necessarily a consequence of poor or inadequate training, but instead of the transition process.

As such, successful principals should serve as guides and trainers for their successors, transferring effective practices (Garza et al., 2014).

Training Needs

Principals' training has been a subject of study for many decades now. In 1986, Rallis and Highsmith stated that principals required different training for leading and managing and that most principals are trained to be administrators. An analysis by Cooperman (1989) presents the dichotomy between needs for managerial skills versus teaching experience. Hallinger and Lu (2013) addressed this dichotomy by suggesting that principal preparation programs consider alternative approaches that contemplate the changing needs of schools and school leaders.

Hyat et al. (2015) suggest that evaluating principals' needs for professional development affords principals with knowledge, attitude, and competencies necessary to successfully lead schools which help to fulfill educational goals. They state that principals are assigned to their jobs without adequate training. Consequently, principals are in need of ongoing professional training, particularly regarding organizing resources, understanding evaluation, problem-solving, and student development.

In this regard, Drago-Severson (2007) suggested that a learning-oriented model of school leadership centers learning as a development process, by implementing four pillar practices, which are: teaming, providing opportunities for leadership roles, engaging inquiry, and mentoring. Olson (2007) also highlights the need for practice and supervision before taking up the principalship. Training for principals should be practical, rather than solely theoretical (Lynch, 2012; Oplatka, 2009), yet grounded in theory (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

In a study by Duncan, Range, and Scherz (2011) with 106 Wyoming principals with an average of 11 years in the principalship, conclusions pointed to internships and practical experiences as valuable in preparation programs. Through surveys, Duncan and colleagues intended to understand principals' perceptions of the strengths and deficits of their preparation programs and their needs when entering the principalship. Findings suggested that, aside from experience, principals in the study felt they lacked training in communication, relationship building, and conflict resolution.

In a study with a similar purpose, Brauckmann and Pashiardis (2012) aimed to find school leaders' training needs. This study utilized a mixed methods approach, through a questionnaire of 46 statements, gap analysis for the questionnaire, and on-site visits. The findings suggested three areas of interest in leadership improvement and training: (a) trust building and collaboration, including parent and community engagement; (b) encouraging instructional leadership and human resource development; and (c) school improvement, concerning budgeting program needs, provision and so forth. Gustafson et al.'s (2014) ideas add on to this list, by suggesting that addressing the gap in technology between principals and students is a critical training need for principals and Gilman and Lanman-Givens (2001) suggest focusing on the practical aspect of technology rather than theoretical.

Novice principals regard knowledge in human relations, curriculum, and educational leadership as highly valuable for their role (Petzko, 2008). Accordingly, in a multiple case study with four principals, Nelson, de la Colina, and Boone (2008) found that principals felt ill-prepared in curriculum, policies, and technical aspects of school leadership. Novice principals also find instructional leader behaviors essential element of their principalship (Hvidston et al., 2015), but according to Nelson et al., they find it challenging. We may conclude then that

principals face the challenge of understanding the curriculum (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Shoho and Barnett (2010) suggest principals be involved and work with curriculum development in their preparation programs as a means to overcome this need.

Keith (2011) found principals expressed desires to understand and learn about the processes that their school is undergoing to guide teachers properly. Principals need better preparation regarding students with disabilities (Lynch, 2012) and special education policies (Nelson et al., 2008). Lynch (2012) suggests that preparation programs address special education policy and prepare principals to handle special education programs. Accordingly, Shoho and Barnett (2010) conducted an empirical qualitative study with 62 new principals (within the first three years of their principalship) and concluded that principals felt ill-prepared for special education. Inclusion in schools depends on the principals' leadership style, but that there is a necessity to offer more insight into special education (Cohen, 2015). Cohen's (2015) findings suggest principal preparation programs address inclusion as 80% of the principals that participated in the study reported no training in special education.

In a study conducted by Wildy et al. (2010) comparing Australian and Turkish novice principals' needs, participants reported managing the school's budget as a significant challenge. Fifty Australian and 60 Turkish principals participated in the study, reporting that the aspects in which they felt least prepared represented the greatest challenges. Some of the issues are understanding the system and its policies. These findings are consistent with Shoho and Barnett's (2010) conclusion that principals manifest a need for training in managing the budget, finance, and personnel policy.

Novice Principals' Feelings

Many novice principals feel overwhelmed by the workload and the amount of information that their new role entails, as well as by balancing professional and personal demands (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). The adjustment to this new role represents a challenge since principals have to let go of the comfort and confidence of a familiar setting (Wildy et al., 2010). Spillane et al. (2015) argue that these tensions are inherent to the demands of the role. For Oplatka and Lapidot (2017), early career feelings for principals have to do with the lack of understanding of what the role entails and by the multiple tasks they undertake.

Regarding principals' feelings, new principals have to adapt to their new and different status, as well as to being treated according to their new position by peers who had the same position as them before they started the principalship (Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). Spillane and Lee (2014) posit that beginning principals find staff is being guarded and distant towards them. Newly appointed principals face constant comparisons to the previous principal (Spillane & Lee, 2014). They experience conflict and tensions with personnel and ultimately describe dealing with adults as the less satisfying aspect of their job (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). In contrast, principals find job satisfaction in student-oriented issues, particularly struggling students (Shoho & Barnett, 2010) and a "sense of fulfillment" from effective instructional decisions (Bauer & Silver, 2018, p. 317).

Novice principals tend to find challenging the tasks and aspects of the principalship where they think they are less prepared for (Wildy et al., 2010). Hvidston et al. (2015) posited that principals' confidence leads to principal enthusiasm and desire to grow. This may suggest that negative feelings may impact the quality of their work life and their effectiveness (Bauer & Silver, 2018).

Due to all the feelings novice principals experience, they tend to be isolated in their work (Cairns & Mulen, 2001). Lochmiller (2014) states that novice principals "experience intense feelings of anxiety, isolation, and frustration as they become familiarized with the expectations of them as principals" (p. 62). A possible cause of isolation is the principal's responsibility for school outcomes and decision-making processes (Bauer & Silver, 2018). Thus, Chitpin (2014) posits that principals need a network and it should be a formal method of support (Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). These networks may result in a possibility for principals to learn from each other and encourage growth (Drago-Severson, 2012).

Mentoring for Novice Principals

Due to feeling isolated, anxious, and overwhelmed, research studies suggest mentoring as a means to adapt to the new role (Lochmiller, 2014). Mentoring is a way of easing and sustaining professional development (Alsburry & Hackman, 2006). Mentoring is beneficial for both mentors and mentees; mentors recharge their interest in their profession and mentees become more comfortable in their role (Scott, 2010). Oplatka and Lapidot (2017) conclude that mentoring can facilitate principals' transition to their new role.

Almost two decades ago, Cairns and Mullen (2001) suggested that principal preparation programs include internships and mentoring. Petzko (2008) proposes that these internships or field experiences be well-planned and that mentors be highly-qualified. Mentors may alleviate principals' need for networking with other principals and of a formal induction process (Willer, 2011).

To further corroborate the need for mentoring in novice principals, Fourtenbary (2008) found that principals require support through mentoring and district workshops. This study surveyed superintendents and principals in North Carolina. Accordingly, in a study conducted

by Sciarappa and Mason (2014), 54 new principals who participated in a US-based national principal mentor training program reported that mentoring was crucial to their adaptation and accomplishments during their first year. Buckey's (2014) study on the lived experiences of three new high school principals validates these findings, concluding that mentoring was essential for their adjustment as novice principals.

Retelle (2010) proposes that mentoring can foster leadership development. According to Retelle, mentoring involves assistance, support on the role, tasks, and responsibilities, and providing feedback on leadership and practices; it can be both formal and informal. In her study, assistant principals expressed the need for mentoring and more interaction with their principals. Furthermore, studies show that novice principals require this type of support to become effective instructional leaders (Lochmiller, 2014). Correspondingly, Goff et al. (2014) postulated that principals that engage in processes of mentoring are more likely to transform their own practice because they by providing feedback they are able to make sense of their own practice.

The feedback that mentors provide should spark a reflective conversation and encourage personal reflection (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). Drago-Severson (2012) explains that, "engaging in reflective practice has been identified as a tool for individual and organizational learning" (p. 9), which is necessary to build the capacities required to face the adaptive challenges principals face. Accordingly, a study conducted by Lochmiller (2014) proposes that these mentors receive adequate training to meet the needs of support novice principals present, by promoting reflection to identify challenges and possible solutions to address them. Lochmiller's study revealed that mentors modified their approach and strategies to fulfill novice principals' needs.

In its report Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (CCSSO, 2015), the organization stated that many districts are not prepared to provide the mentoring time that principals need. However, these principal supervisors are held to the standard of supporting principals to "engage in effective professional learning strategies to help principals grow as instructional leaders" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 16). Therefore, we can conclude that the CCSSO values mentoring for novice principals.

Educational System in the Dominican Republic

Because research on principal leadership should be contextualized (Bellibas, et al., 2016; Bendikson et al., 2012), framing the current Dominican educational context is important. In a case study conducted by Noman, Hashim, and Shaik-Addullah (2017) in a Malaysian school, they presented the importance of principals taking context into account in order to be successful. Noman et al. explained that principals should possess the practices and behaviors to enact their role in their context, according to the needs of their setting. Northouse (2013) posited that a leader's effectiveness depends on how they adapt to their context. Thus, understanding the educational scene in the DR will allow a better understanding of the principals' role, their experiences, and reflections on their needs entering the principalship.

The Constitution of the Dominican Republic states that education is a human right, mandatory for children according to the fourth article of the *Ley Orgánica de Educación* 66-97 [Organic Law of Education 66-97]. This article states that education in the DR is non-discriminatory, respectful of life, human rights, and democracy. Education in the DR is centralized and ruled by the Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic, MINERD, which is governed by a minister and several vice-ministers.

The educational system in the DR has two sectors: private and public. Seventy percent of the population is enrolled in public-schools (Weinstein et al., 2014). The *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013) regulates public-schools in the DR and the *Ordinance 4'2000* [Ordinance 4'2000] regulates private schools. The Dominican educational system is divided into 18 educational regions and 109 districts (*Relación de Regionales y Distritos Educativos* [Relation of Regionals and School Districts], n.d.). Each region contains from four to seven districts under its jurisdiction. Each of these 18 educational regions has a regional director, and each of the 109 districts has a district director.

The educational system in the DR has three levels for both sectors (*Ley Orgánica de Educación 66-97*): (a) preschool, (b) primary or elementary, and (c) secondary or high school. Different from the US context, the DR does not have middle school. The requirements for principals are similar for primary and secondary levels, which is not the case for preschool.

The following overview of DR's educational system serves as a basis for understanding the current educational system, which is undergoing change and reform. Hence it becomes even more critical to understand the existing context, as well as what it entails for public-school principals because educational reform results in added pressures for principals (Brown, 2006). Starr (2011) posited that principals face issues regarding the change in schools such as resistance, slowness in these changes and states that usually, initiatives are short-lived.

Current Educational Context in the DR

Both, MINERD's ten-year plan 2008-2018 and strategic plan 2017 to 2020, prioritize thriving to achieve excellence in its educational system (IDEICE, 2014; MINERD, 2017). Accordingly, it contains the interventions necessary to achieve this goal, which are aligned with DR's Constitution, the National Development Strategy and the National Pact for Educational

Reform. In 2013, following the General Law of Education 66-97, the Dominican government destined the 4% of the gross domestic product to the educational sector and, with that, the educational transformation in the DR began (MINERD, 2017).

MINERD's strategic plan (2017) contains 10 goals from 2017 to 2020. Given the time of educational reform in DR and the added pressures it puts on principals (Brown, 2006), it is necessary to know and understand MINERD's strategic plan's goals. The plan describes its goals in detail and states the actions necessary to complete them and also the benchmarks to assess them. These goals are: (a) guarantee and promote primary and secondary education for all children; (a) guarantee the necessary attention to early childhood, ages zero to five; (c) develop technical education in secondary public-schools; (d) support vulnerable populations to reduce the opportunity gap; (e) overcome illiteracy in adults; (f) ensure curricular development; (g) develop more sustainable and inclusive schools; (h) increase teacher professional development; (i) reform and modernize MINERD's processes; and (j) develop and strengthen technological competencies for teachers, students, management teams, and families.

Competencies-based curriculum. One of the initiatives the DR is undergoing and that responds to the strategic plan's goal is implementing a new curriculum based on competencies (*Ante un nuevo diseño curricular en la educación dominicana* [In front of a new curricular design in the Dominican Republic], 2013). Principals are essential in the process of curriculum change (Fullan & Newton, 1988) and are vital in the institution and integration of any change or school reform as the most important change agent (Cohen, 2015). Since 2012, MINERD started the process of revising and updating the curriculum, adopting a competencies-based curriculum (MINERD, 2017). The competencies-based curriculum seeks to shape and educate students to act autonomously in different contexts and situations (MINERD, 2016). The

curricular reform impacts how teachers plan, teach and evaluate. As such, school leadership, particularly principals and academic coordinators have had to follow through the implementation of the new strategies and regulations proposed by the new curriculum.

Large-scale assessments. Following the curricular reform, in 2017 MINERD conducted a large-scale assessment (LSA) with a diagnostic evaluation of third-grade students nationally, from both private and public-schools, that considered the perspectives of students, families, teachers, and school principals (*Dirección de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación* [Direction of Assessment of the Quality of Education], 2017). According to the Direction of Assessment of the Quality of Education (2017), the results from this LSA showed that only a 12% of Dominican third grade students read in a satisfactory level, as for Math skills, only a 27% are in a satisfactory level. In 2018, MINERD also administered another large-scale assessment to sixth-grade students nationally as a diagnostic evaluation (*La enseñanza primaria culminará en sexto grado* [Elementary education will conclude in sixth grade], 2016). In May 2019, a year after the assessments, MINERD presented the evaluation results. Only 4% of the students are in a satisfactory level in Math, while 32% are in an acceptable level, and 64% is in a basic level. As for Language, the students did better with a 19% satisfactory, 53% acceptable, and 27% basic. The results in Social Studies and Science are similar (*Estudiantes de sexto grado "achicharrados" en las metas de aprendizaje* [Sixth-Grade students fail learning goals], 2019).

The purpose of these large-scale assessments was to evaluate students' outcomes under the curricular reform and establish improvement policies for the quality of instruction (Furment, 2018). These are the first assessments of their kind and with this purpose in the DR

(Furment, 2018). Results from both the third and sixth grade were presented by MINERD nationally.

An example of the need of understanding LSAs' results and principal accountability in student learning outcomes is the study by Newton et al. (2010). Newton and colleagues conducted an interpretive study with 25 elementary principals in Canada on their knowledge of LSAs. They found that these assessments put more pressure on principals because of their accountability in students' results. Newton et al. suggest that preparation programs address these in LSAs to properly train principals for them. Given that the DR's current educational system is incorporating national assessments in other grades, not only in 12th grade as had been done up to date (*Educación convoca a estudiantes para las Pruebas Nacionales* 2018 [Education convokes for National Assessment 2018], 2018), Newton et al.'s findings propose ways to deal with the added stress that principals endure due to LSAs.

Region and district director recruitment. Up to this educational reform, region and district directors were appointed by higher authorities (the Minister or Vice-ministers). As a result of the Dominican educational reform, region and district directors are elected based on their professional merits (MINERD, 2017). By the *Ordenanza 24-2017* [Ordinance 24-2017], the MINERD started recruiting educational region and district directors through triples based on their professional and academic background (*Andrés Navarro abre proceso para designación de directores regionals y distritales por méritos profesionales* [Andrés Navarro opens process for designating regional and district directors based on professional merits], 2017). Therefore, starting in 2017, director recruitment was based on an assessment of their professional profile and their competencies, aptitudes, and their professional and academic background, (*Andrés Navarro abre proceso para designación de directores regionales y*

distritales por méritos profesionales [Andrés Navarro opens process for designating regional and district directors based on professional merits], 2017).

Performance assessment. In this time of change, MINERD also increased the salaries of teachers, coordinators, vice-principals, and principals (MINERD, 2017). Additionally, in 2017, a public-school teacher, coordinator, vice principal, and principal performance evaluation took place for all public-school teachers, an assessment that had not been done in nine years in the DR (*Educación presenta resultados primer informe evaluación docente 2017* [Education presents results of the first report of teacher evaluation 2017], 2018). The first report of this assessment was presented early 2018 (*Educación presenta resultados primer informe evaluación docente 2017*, 2018). The final results of the teacher evaluation were presented in July 2018. Results from this evaluation show that 2.9% of Dominican teachers are excellent, 23.9% are very good, 35.1% are good, and 38.1% need improvement (*Educación y ADP presentan los resulados finales del desempeño de más de 60 mil docents* [Education and ADP present final results of performance evaluation of more than 60,000 teachers], 2018). Results from principals, vice-principal, and coordinators' evaluations are not available. These assessment initiatives suggest a time of change in DR schools and in the MINERD where the concept of accountability is growing.

Extended-day schools. Another initiative that has put added pressures on principals is the creation of the extended-day schools. The extended-day school started in the 2011-2012 school year with 8,969 students. This number reached 33, 772 in 2013, 198,685 in 2014, and 527,771 in 1,350 schools by 2015 *(La Jornada Escolar Extendida es Asumida como Política de Estado* [Extended-Day Schooling is Taken as a Public Policy], 2016). The extension of the school day is presented as a support for the family budget, since students are provided with

breakfast, snack, and lunch, aside from giving parents more time to engage in the labor market (*Jornada Escolar Extendida,* [Extended Day School], 2018). Extended-day schools have had a positive impact in the educational system, by decreasing the rate of school dropout and repetition of students (*La jornada escolar extendida se aplicará en todas las escuelas* [Extended-day will be applied in all schools], 2016).

The National Education Council (CNE, acronym in Spanish) took in the extended-day school as a public policy, as a means to improve education both in quantity of time and quality of instruction. Extended-day school's operate for eight hours. One of its purposes is to promote child and adolescent protection. This has been a progressive strategy, as schools are integrated into the extended-day format continuously and systematically, prioritizing more vulnerable areas *(La jornada escolar extendida es asumida como política de estado* [Extended-day schooling is taken as a public policy], 2016).

Public-School Principals in the DR

According to Weinstein et al.'s (2014) report on school leadership for UNESCO, more than 10,000 principals serve in Dominican public-schools, with an age mean of 50. The role of the principal is explained in the Organic Law of Education 66-97 and described as the highest authority of a school, responsible for schools' functioning and their direction. The general law also states that principals are in charge of foreseeing that the Ministry's dispositions are met.

Principals in the DR come into the principalship from diverse academic backgrounds (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013). Dominican public-school principals are required to have a minimum of two years of experience as teachers or in related

areas; a Bachelor's Degree in Education or similar fields; and a Master's Degree in Education or similar fields (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013). Moreover, they need to satisfactorily pass the public contest for becoming public-school principal according to the *Ordenanza No. 4'99* [Ordinance 4'99]. This contest is specifically held for principals and vice-principals. The requirement for professional experience was later revised and increased to five years (Weinstein et al., 2014).

The public contest for the position consists of a test that assesses the aspiring principals' management and instructional competencies. To enter these contests, aspiring principals' profile, academic background, continuing education, professional experience, and intellectual production are considered and must meet the Ministry's standards (Weinstein et al., 2014). Other conditions, such as leadership qualities (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013), having a moral and ethical nature, and being in good health are included in the eligibility criteria for principals (Weinstein et al., 2014).

MINERD has promoted management teams in schools, which with share the school leadership with the principal. The creation of management teams is an emergent strategy in DR's educational system (Weinstein et al., 2014). The management teams are composed of the principal, vice-principal (if there is one), academic coordinator, and school psychologist. In addition to the management team, parent associations in schools in the DR support schools and principals in school improvement and development initiatives as stated in the Ordinance 9'2000. Parent associations have decision-making opportunities within the school.

Along with the management teams and parent associations, School Boards participate in school's decision-making processes. According to the *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013), each public-school should have a School Board. This manual

defines School Board as a decentralized association of management and participation, in charge of creating the links between the community, the school, and its members. According to the *Ordenanza 1'2003* [Ordinance 1'2003] and article 125 of the *Ley Orgánica de Educación 66-97*, these boards are integrated by the principal of the school, who presides it; two members of the school (teachers or staff); two members of the parent association; one educator, appointed by the parent association; two representatives of society; and a student from the student council. As such, even if the *Ley Orgánica de Educación 66-97* holds principals accountable for school processes and student learning outcomes, principals share their leadership with management teams, parent associations, and school boards.

Requirements for becoming public-school principals in the DR. Gottfredson and Hybl (1987) explained that what principals do and how they do it may depend on the kind of school they work in (public or private) and the level in that they work in (elementary, middle or high school). As such, the quality of actions is contingent on school type, emphasizing the importance of considering school levels and differences (Galdames et al., 2018). Likewise, in the DR, there are distinctions on the specifications for principals regarding the levels they oversee (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013). The *Ley Orgánica de Educación 66-97* and the *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013) states the requirements for becoming principal.

As stated, above principals in the DR are required to have a Bachelor's Degree in Education related areas and a Master's Degree in Education or similar fields (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013), pass the public contests satisfactorily and meet the academic background, continuing education, professional experience, and intellectual production expectations (*Ordenanza* No. 4'99). Leadership qualities (*Manual Operativo de*

Centros Educativos Públicos, 2013), having a moral and ethical nature are included in the eligibility criteria for principals (Weinstein et al., 2014).

Principal preparation programs in the DR. *La Escuela de Directores para la Calidad Educativa* (EDCE, Acronym in Spanish) was created in September 2011 ascribed to *the Instituto Superior de Formación Docente Salomé* Ureña (ISFODOSU, acronym in Spanish) (Weinstein et al., 2014). The primary purpose of the EDCE is to train and prepare school leaders for quality education in schools in the different levels of education. Accordingly, the EDCE seeks to define and develop improvement plans and diverse strategies for continuing education. Instruction at EDCE is both virtual and face-to-face and developed in modules. Weinstein et al. (2014) summarize the work of the EDCE as seeking to develop the following areas:

1. Educational diagnostic tool to create improvement plans, curricular development, and serve as a reference for educational practice.

2. Strategies for monitoring, supervising, accompanying, and assess the school's activities.

3. Educational leadership focused on results management.

4. Participation, decentralization, and institutional and community development.

5. Education centered on values.

6. Using evidence and assessment results for continuous improvement.

7. The technology of information and communication applied to school management.

8. Resource management.

9. Knowledge of legislation and its application.

In their review of school leadership preparation and development in Australia, Gurr and Drysdale (2015) found that Australian principals relied mostly on self-identification of their needs and their career pathway. Consistent with these conclusions, Aravena (2016) found that "school administrator development is unproductive when the administrators themselves are not given the power to make decisions such as selecting teaching staff and managing finances" (p. 343). Thus, principal preparation programs must be contextualized and based on the needs principals identify are lacking in their preparation.

In 2018, the Minister of education relaunched the School of Directors and took into account the changes in the curriculum. The new EDCE will be competencies-based (*Educación lanza nuevo programa de formación de directores de escuelas* [Education launches new program in principal training] (2019). In April of 2019 a new cohort of principals with the updated program began their training (*Isfodosu inicia módulo de capacitación del Programa de Formación de Directores* [Education starts new module in the Principal training program], 2019).

The Principal and Building Leader Framework Applied to the DR Context

The Principal and Building Leader Framework developed by Reeves and McNeill (2017) served as a lens to better understand the principals' role. Hence, since there is no such framework for the DR context, contrasting what the literature suggests to Dominican public-school principals might initiate the process of describing in detail the principalship in the DR. Principals' role in the DR will be examined through the five domains of this framework: (a) results, (b) leadership, (c) systems, (d) processes, and (e) capacity.

Principals' role in student results. González (2006) developed a profile of the competencies Dominican principals should embody based on the documents provided by

MINERD and research on this topic. Gonzalez presents principals in the DR as required to lead the processes in which schools educate students to become creative, free, and critic individuals. According to Gonzalez, principals in the DR are responsible for ensuring the quality of education of their students.

In 2014, the Dominican Institute of Evaluation and Investigation of Quality Education (IDEICE, acronym in Spanish) developed the standards for teaching performance for both teachers and principals. These standards respond to MINERD's ten-year plan 2008-2018's fourth policy, which is the assessment of educational quality. The standards can be used for self-assessment and to supervise and support teacher development. Principals' standards are organized to respond to principals' core role: administering teaching and learning processes. Principals standards according to IDEICE (2014) are:

1. Promoting a plan and a vision for the school focused on learning and involving the whole educational community.

2. Managing, organizing, supervising, and accompanying the process of teaching and learning for continuous improvement.

3. Promoting an environment conducive to learning.

4. Supporting teacher professional development.

5. Encouraging school and parental participation.

6. Engaging in professional development.

These standards do not suggest principals' accountability in student learning outcomes, rather they respond to other aspects of principals' role. IDEICE's standards coincide with the description of the principal's role provided by the Reeves and McNeill (2017) framework. However, the Reeves-McNeill framework emphasizes the principals' accountability.

Although principals in the DR are responsible for quality instruction, there is no systematic accountability process that links principals to students' results on LSAs. The *Ordenanza 1-2016* [Ordinance 1-2016] explains and regulates these assessments in the DR, both the diagnostic evaluations and the 12th-grade national evaluation. Diagnostic assessments do not have consequences for students whether they pass or fail. Third grade was evaluated in 2017, sixth grade in 2018, and ninth grade in 2019. Meanwhile achieving a passing grade in the national evaluation in 12th-grade is necessary for obtaining the high school certification.

The *Ordenanza 1-2016* states that these assessments are aimed to improve the quality of education and that one of its objectives is creating improvement plans in schools. The principals' role is not mentioned in this ordinance, nor is it connected to students' results. Principals' responsibility is implied in including student results in the school's improvement plan.

Principal leadership. The DR's educational system is nondiscriminatory of race, creed, sex, or socioeconomic status (*Ley Orgánica de Educación* 66-97). Hence, Dominican principals should promote such unprejudiced environment. For Reeves and McNeill (2017), principals should be fair, legal, honest, ethical, adaptive, and resilient. In the DR, the principal's role description requires them to have moral and ethical standards (Weinstein et al., 2014).

In a study conducted by Garza et al. (2014) comparing successful principals from the ISPP, the authors found "a clear consensus that school leadership matters" (p. 808). Consistent with Reeves and McNeill (cite), Garza and colleagues posited that the principals that participate in this study possessed exceptional affective and personal dispositions, were driven by social justice and were ethical, responsible, and courageous. These characteristics coincide

with the expected traits Dominican principals should embody.

It is part of principals' responsibilities to develop the Educational Project for the School (PEC, acronym in Spanish). The PEC establishes a link between the administrative and pedagogical processes. In its development, school members participate in creating or revising the mission and vision statements, values, objectives, innovation models, process descriptions, and different profiles of school members (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013). The process of creating the PEC for each school promotes a shared vision and the alignment of school initiatives since everybody should participate in its creation.

Principals' role in systems. Gonzalez (2006) posits that in the DR, principals are required to ensure quality education; thus, their role should be oriented towards instruction rather than management. The *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013) states that principals are responsible for the pedagogical and administrative processes of the center and for these processes to be carried out as established by MINERD, without prioritizing one over the other. In their report, Weinstein et al.'s (2014) summarized Dominican principals' tasks, which fall under both categories: management and instruction. The conclusions from this report suggest that principals should guarantee those technical and pedagogical aspects of the school function adequately.

The *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013) states that principals are responsible for managing school resources. The budget assigned to each school will be used on the items stipulated by the institutional policy and current authority. The school boards must report the use of expenses and the execution of activities quarterly and annually.

Principals' processes. In the DR context, there is little evidence or research to support decision-making processes. According to Weinstein et al.'s (2014) report for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), there is little to no research or even statistics on principals to support decisions. In this report, they state that in the DR and the other countries that participated in the report initiatives are decontextualized, thus, probably not pertinent to their reality.

The current educational system in the DR and the different LSAs that MINERD administers suggest a shift in how Dominican principals make and should make decisions. For example, the *Ordenanza 1-2016* indicates the use of the diagnostic evaluation results to develop school improvement plans. Another example of this shift is how MINERD will use the results from the national teacher evaluation to develop improvement plans and offer salary incentives to teachers nationwide (*Educación y ADP presentan los resulados finales del desempeño de más de 60 mil docents* [Education and ADP present final results of performance evaluation of more than 60,000 teachers], 2018).

Ordinance 9'2000 establishes the rules for the Association of Fathers, Mothers, Tutors, and Friends of the School (APMAE, acronym in Spanish). The *Ley Orgánica de Educación* 66'97 in the DR considers schools as areas of harmonious climate and states that parents' participation is essential. The APMAEs in the DR do not respond to any political party, are non-profit, and serve as an auxiliary for teaching and learning processes in schools. APMAEs were created to serve as support for the school's leadership, as the principal or management teams. APMAEs have several purposes, such as strengthening institutional development by contributing to the school's management. They also promote parent participation in school

processes as well as with the community. This participation aims to foster solidarity and cooperation.

Principals' capacity. In the DR, principals should take on the responsibility for teacher professional development (Gonzalez, 2006). As stated in the *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013), interpersonal relationships with students, peers and the community are an aspect of singular importance and as such are part of the evaluation of teacher performance. The DR has engaged in an assessment process for teachers, coordinators, principals, and vice principals (*Educación y ADP presentan los resulados finales del desempeño de más de 60 mil docentes*, 2018). The purpose of this evaluation is to move towards an era where feedback promotes continuous improvement among staff, as well as foster accountability in the DR.

Principals' First Year Development and Support in the DR

The EDCE responds to a contextualized principal preparation program need. The EDCE's main purpose is to promote principals to lead the transformation processes that Dominican education demands. However, although many new principals attend the EDCE, this is not exclusive of early career or novice principals.

I could not find any documents regarding principals' support in the first years as principals. School districts are divided into networks, which come as a result of a division that the district technicians developed in order to supervise and accompany schools (M. Taveras personal communication, May 20, 2019). Principals from these networks sometimes get together and socialize, as a form of a support group, but this is not an official disposition.

Summary

The review of the literature established the importance of contextualizing research on principals. The current Dominican educational context is thriving for educational excellence according to the MINERD's Strategic Plan. More than 10,000 principals serve in Dominican public-schools, described as the highest authority of a school, responsible for its functioning and direction.

In the Dominican context, there is little evidence or research to support decision-making processes. According to Weinstein et al.'s (2014) report for UNESCO, there is little to no research or even statistics on principals to support decisions. Hence, to understand the role of the principal the Reeves-McNeill (2017) framework was used to organize what the literature provides a way to discuss the various roles and responsibilities currently associated with the principalship. This framework describes the principalship according to five domains. These five domains pertain to principals' activities, such as (a) results, (b) leadership, (c) systems, (d) processes, and (e) capacity.

The literature suggests that understanding principals' academic background and professional experience are necessary to better understand the principal preparation programs and principals' needs (Gurr & Drysdale, 2015). Principals are required to have knowledge and skills to effectively manage their school facility and the functional operation of their building (Tubbs et al., 2011), as well as instructional leadership skills (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Lynch, 2012). To respond to these contextualized principal preparation programs, the DR, according to the *Resolución 0667-2011*, created the EDCE to train and qualify school principals to lead the transformation processes that Dominican education demands.

Understanding principals' career stages is important to help them fulfill their role as school leaders (Hvidston et al., 2015). The body of research on novice principals is extensive (Fourtenbary, 2008) since research regards this time as critical (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Novice principals face significant and diverse challenges once they start the principalship (Petzko, 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Willer, 2011). Mentoring (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2017), acknowledging their needs and addressing these needs in training programs (Hyat et al., 2015), and an adequate transition process (Garza et al., 2014) may help principals during these first years on the job. Chapter Three provides the methodology used in this study, including data collection methods and analysis process. Chapter Four presents principals' portraits and Chapter Five presents the results of the study. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the findings and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

"All qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense out of their lives and their worlds. The primary goals of basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings."

(Merriam, 2002, p. 38)

Novice principals often face principalship tasks and duties without proper training or support, consequently presenting diverse needs in their early years on the job (Lochmiller, 2014). More research regarding principal preparation in the DR is needed to better prepare and support them for their role as school leaders (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012) in a manner that aligns with the current role expectations and conditions in the Dominican context. This is an area that had not been systematically researched in the Dominican K-12 education system. The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to explore Dominican public-school novice principals' early career experiences and how they identified their needs entering the principalship. Additionally, through portraiture, this study aimed to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals.

This chapter presents the methodology for the proposed study. In the first section, I present the research design, the approach, and the rationale for the study. Next, I present the selected population, sampling procedure, and the data collection protocols to conduct the study. I also explain data collection and analysis procedures for this study, as well as how I ensured trustworthiness. Lastly, I describe the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Research Design, Approach, and Rationale

This study employed a basic interpretive qualitative research methodology, which seeks to make meaning of novice principals' experiences in the early years on the job and how they describe their needs starting their principalship. For this study, I also used portraiture as a

method. The addition of portraiture provided additional detail on the lives of the principals in this study and allowed me to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. Combining a basic interpretive qualitative research approach with portraiture, as a means for presenting study findings and important context, resulted in a thicker, more thorough description of how novice principals experience their first years on the job in the DR and reflect on the challenges and needs they encountered as novice principals.

Basic Interpretive Qualitative Research

Many approaches to qualitative research are based on the construction of meaning, as such basic interpretive qualitative research seeks to understand how people make meaning of their experiences with a specific phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Since the focus of this study was to explore a very specific contextually grounded phenomenon (i.e., novice principals' description of their early career experiences and needs coming into the principalship) a basic interpretive methodology was a good match for building on the current scholarship on this topic.

This study employed a basic interpretative qualitative methodology by exploring a number of aspects of a phenomenon as outlined by Merriam (2002): (1) how novice principals describe their first years' experiences and reflect on their challenges and needs, (2) how they construct their perceptions and understandings of these experiences and needs, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences as novice principals. As such, the purpose of utilizing a basic interpretive qualitative methodology in this study was to understand how novice principals in the DR make sense of their experiences starting and carrying out their first years in their role as principals. A basic interpretive qualitative study intends to find similarities of experience through recurring patterns or themes. I looked for these patterns while attending

to individual variation, in ways that can be meaningfully applied to individual cases and are pertinent to practice. With this study, I wished to understand better how novice principals reflect upon their experiences and through them describe their needs coming into the principalship and their first years on the job.

Portraiture

One specific method utilized in this study was portraiture, which entails narrating an individual's life stories (English, 2000). Portraiture is a method for both discovering and representing findings in qualitative research that draws from other qualitative methodologies such as ethnography, case study, and narrative research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This method was developed as a result of Lawrence-Lightfoot's attempt to document the culture of schools and its participants, placing herself as a participant and providing rich, thick descriptions (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In qualitative research, thick description refers to paying attention to details of context by observing and interpreting social meaning (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010).

Portraiture demands the researcher be assertive and interactive in questioning, looking to portray a full picture of what is called the narrative (English, 2000). Portraiture seeks "to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people researchers are studying, documenting their voices and their visions" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). As such, portraiture is a means of capturing the complexity and subtlety of the human experience, in this case, novice principals' experiences.

Telling the stories of the principals in my study allowed for a deeper understanding of how their professional training, academic background, and other relevant personal and professional experiences have influenced how they approach and experience the principalship

and understand the challenges and needs they encounter as they undertake that role. The primary purpose of portraying the stories (or portraits) of these principals was to record and present their experience in context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Through the stories that principals shared, I could vividly describe their background, which is "an important tool in the interpretation of meaning" (Brooks, 2017, p. 2234). According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), it is important to consider the historical, personal and internal context of participants. Principals' portraits were presented through narrative descriptions of their stories, emphasizing principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. Secondary analysis of these narrative portraits allowed me to also cross-analyze the individual stories of these principals to isolate both common and unique elements to each and reveal essential thematic elements that emanate across those stories.

Field Test

I conducted a pre-dissertation field test for this study by interviewing three novice principals during a qualitative research course I completed as part of my Ph.D. program. The principals I interviewed all worked in public-schools in Santo Domingo, DR and had one to five years on the job. This experience shaped the current study in several ways. First, from the conceptualization of the study, I could not fit these principals' needs into the categories that I had anticipated. Rather, I found that principals' needs and their stories were very diverse and that exploring their experiences within those first years would reveal their needs. The second influence of the learnings from the field test for this study had to do with the data collection process, particularly the interview protocol. From the field test, I had to rethink the interview protocol to make it more of a conversational guide, as well as probe participants to think and reflect on the questions I presented. This way the story to be told would flow as naturally as

possible. Also, I developed a participant profiling guide as a means to gather principal and school demographics, which I learned to be more useful after the field study. The profiling guide would also serve in the development of the portraits presented in this study. The field test was an important part of this dissertation, as it confirmed my interest in the research topic, shaped me as a researcher, afforded me the opportunity to pilot the study and the data collection methods, and made me rethink the current study's ultimate research questions.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Human Subjects Institutional Review Board</h2>

Before conducting the study, I obtained approval from Western Michigan University's HSIRB to proceed with the research. There is no requirement from the school districts or individual schools in the DR, which served as the research sites, for HSIRB approval. A consent form signed by participants was sufficient for these institutions. See Appendix A for HSIRB approval letter.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Population, Sample and/or Setting</h2>

Study Site

The Dominican educational system is divided into 18 educational regions and 109 districts (*Relación de Regionales y Distritos Educativos*, n.d.) [Relation of Regionals and School Districts, n.d], with four to seven districts under its jurisdiction, depending on the size of the region. Each of these 18 educational regions has a regional director, and each of the 109 districts has a district director. This study recruited participants from primary and secondary public-schools in region 15 and its six districts within the capital, Santo Domingo, DR. These districts are 15-01 Los Alcarrizos, 15-02 Santo Domingo Center, 15-03 Santo Domingo South Central, 15-04 Santo Domingo Northwest, 15-05 Santo Domingo West, and 15-06 Pedro Brand. Educational region 15 was proposed as the focus of this study because its school

districts are in the center of Santo Domingo, which is the largest urban area in the country. Due to their location, these districts have a larger population from which to sample. Another important reason for choosing this educational region is that it has six districts, which may present a larger population of novice principals. Lastly, this educational region was accessible to me as the researcher, since I have professional connections to some of these districts.

Population and Sample

I selected a criterion sample of principals from region 15 schools. A criterion sample is when all participants meet a specific criterion (Creswell, 2013). I selected principals from this region based on the following inclusion criteria:

1) Participants were principals of public primary and secondary schools in Educational Region 15 in Santo Domingo, DR since these schools and their principals are governed by the Operations Manual of Public-Schools (2013). As private school principals operate under different policies that are not standardized, I did not consider including private school principals in this study. Adhering to this criterion ensured that the participants in this study reflect the reality of the Dominican public-school principalship under current government education policy.

2) Participants were novice principals who had one to five of experience in the role. For the purpose of this study, principals who met the one-to-five-year experience requirement were defined as novices. Many studies on novice principals have focused on the first three years on the job (Bauer & Silver, 2018; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2017; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Willer, 2011), yet for saturation purposes, I considered principals from one to five years in the role.

I recruited 10 novice principals to complete the study, using the criterion sampling approach described above (Creswell, 2007). Given the large population of educational region 15, ensuring 10 participants was feasible. I also used snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2002), by asking initial participants who met my sampling criteria to suggest other participants who met the criteria as well. The rationale for choosing principals from primary and secondary schools in the DR is that *Ordenanza No. 4'99* [Ordinance No. 4'99] presents similar requirements for these levels. Principals of early childhood and adult education public institutions were be considered for the study since their requirements are different from those of principals in primary and secondary schools in the DR.

Access and Recruitment

The process to access and recruit participants required visiting the school districts in educational region 15 and providing information concerning the study to the district directors. I asked them to send out a flyer and the recruitment information for the study through email to school principals and to post a flyer with information on the study on the district's bulletin boards. Both the flyer and the email invited principals who fit the criteria to participate in the study, explained the purpose of the study and how to contact the researcher if they wish to participate (via email or phone call). Appendix B includes the flyers for both the school districts and schools, both in English (Appendix B1) and Spanish (Appendix B2). Appendix C includes the recruitment email principals received from their districts, both in English (Appendix C1) and Spanish (Appendix C2).

Once I was contacted by principals who expressed interest in participating in the study, I answered any questions they had before inquiring if they were interested in participating in the study. For this study, the first 10 principals who met the study criteria and completed the

informed consent process were placed in the participant pool. The consent form (Appendix D) stated the purpose of the study and the procedures for data collection along with an assurance that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. Once I recruited a sample of 10 participants, any respondents beyond the initial 10 were thanked and notified that I may contact them about additional opportunities to participate in the study if further participants were needed. I maintained information on this alternate pool of participants for the purposes of addressing saturation or attrition, with the former meaning compiling enough information to develop important themes from the study and when additional participants do not add new perspectives to the study (Creswell, 2013) and the latter addressing possible participant withdrawal from the initial group of 10 participants.

In addition to relying on direct recruitment through the distribution of the email through the district directors as gatekeepers, I also used snowball sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this case, I carried out the snowball sampling by encouraging principals who had already been accepted into the study and who maintain networks with other novice principals to serve as informants who may refer other novice principals to me to inquire about participation in the study. This process helped ensure that I secured the number of participants needed to achieve saturation and could complete my study even if one or more initial participants withdrew or did not complete all aspects of the study. However, none of the participants in this study resulted from snowball sampling.

Data Collection Procedures

As a basic interpretive qualitative study seeking to describe how principals make meaning of their first years' experiences and needs when they start the principalship and their first years on the job, the first data collection procedure for this study involved interviews

(Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012). Interviews were individual in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face (see Appendix E for interview protocol) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2002). The interview protocol was guided by the research questions for the study and designed to elicit thick descriptions of participants' experiences as novice principals and their reflections on significant events that provide insight into their challenges and needs, both entering into and carrying out their day-to-day responsibilities on the job. The interview protocol was designed to elicit the central story and the details of these principals' lives (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and to engage participants in the conversation. I used probing questions to follow up on additional insights that emerged from the conversation beyond the initial semi-structured interview questions in order to capture the full essence of each principal's story.

To develop portraits of each participant to accompany the interview data, I developed a participant profiling guide (Appendix F), both in English (Appendix F1) and Spanish (Appendix F2), to capture information regarding each participant's professional preparation for the principalship, academic and professional background, years of experience in the principalship and previous roles, and school size, grade configuration, and student demographics. I used these profiles to establish a means for consumers of my research to determine the transferability of findings to other schools and school principals in the Dominican context and beyond.

Interviews were conducted in Spanish and recorded, as stated in the consent form (see Appendix D), both in English (Appendix D1) and Spanish (Appendix D2), on a recording device suitable for this purpose. Interviews were conducted in the principal's schools in their office. In addition to recording the interviews, I took notes regarding any significant observations I made during the interview. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, to capture

the full essence of the conversation. I assigned a pseudonym to each participant and any direct references to specific persons or places, in order to protect participant confidentiality and avoid revealing their identity.

The second form of data collection for this study was observation. Interviews "are often interwoven with observation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 137). I did school walk-throughs with the principals or the school secretary to gather information on the context of these schools. Observing the school context for each principal in the study served as the basis for each principal's portrait, as observational data from these walk-throughs illustrated some features of that context. I had anticipated an hour to walk around the school; however, most of the observations lasted thirty minutes. The longest observation did take an hour.

Lastly, I used document analysis as a means of understanding the Dominican educational context, particularly the Dominican Ministry of Education's (MINERD) laws, ordinances, manuals, and reports. Consequently, I analyzed the existing documents on Dominican principals' job description, requirements, and school policies. "Since the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering data, he or she relies on skills and intuition to find and interpret data from documents" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 175).

Confidentiality of Data

Several steps were undertaken to assure confidentiality of data, such as: keeping backup copies of computer files, developing a list of all gathered data, and protecting the confidentiality of participants by assigning codes to each and maintaining this list of codes separate from any participant identifying data. Any hard copies of data were kept in a locked storage cabinet that no one but the researcher had access to. Electronic data was maintained in a password protected electronic storage device (pen drive) that I kept in a locked file whenever

not actively using the material. Finally, once the study was concluded, I gathered all the data and working papers and submit them to the university archive to be kept for five years and destroyed after that.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

Basic interpretive qualitative research followed an inductive analytic method (Guest et al., 2012). To begin this process, I transcribed the interviews verbatim, which is when the data analysis began. I was able to catch subtleties and nuances of participants' responses that I believe were influential by listening carefully to the interviews and transcribing them. I later read through each transcript looking for recurring patterns in the data following an emergent inductive process, which involved thinking inductively to develop categories from raw data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam (2002), "findings are a mix of recurring patterns supported by the data from which they are derived" (p. 38). Consistent with this type of analysis, portraiture suggests that constructing a narrative should be an "iterative and generative process" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185).

Qualitative research stresses the importance of paying close attention to language and "deep reflection on the emergent patterns and meanings of human experience" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 10). For this study, I followed Saldaña's (2013) First and Second Cycle coding processes. This approach to data analysis is consistent with basic interpretive qualitative research and portraiture because it permits a thorough and emergent analysis process (Saldaña, 2013).

Analysis Steps

To initiate the analysis process, I employed the First Cycle coding method proposed by Saldaña (2013). The first step to carry out this data analysis was to read through the interview transcripts, field notes from school observations, and participants' profile guides to look for

salient points and recurring patterns (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2002). In this process data was coded; "to codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 9). Since I transcribed the interviews myself, I was familiar with the data. Interviews were transcirbed in Spanish.

The First Cycle Coding was done in Spanish. During this first stage, I preferred to work with the data in Spanish I used In Vivo coding, which is suitable for familiarizing with the participants' language and perspectives, as well as to honor their voice (Saldaña, 2013). Since this study took place in the DR, In Vivo coding allowed particular terminology of the culture to emerge and be recognized. Concurrently, with In Vivo coding, I used descriptive coding to analyze the data. Saldaña (2013) suggests that this type of coding is appropriate for field notes and document analysis and fitting for social environments; such is the case for school walk-throughs and the policy documents I gathered, including the principal job descriptions. Such emergent analysis afforded me the opportunity to describe the experiences of the principals who participate in this study as well as the context in which they work. The descriptive codes served as the basis for the portraits presented in Chapter Four. In this case, I used documents to provide context to the portraits, not as a data source. Reading through Dominican education laws, ordinances, policies, news, and manuals afforded me the possibility of understanding principals' stories in order to write their portraits.

After completing the First Cycle coding process, I then moved forward with Second Cycle coding. According to Saldaña (2013), "the primary goal during Second Cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of First Cycle codes" (p. 207). Saldaña suggests pattern coding is appropriate for this stage, which entails the development of themes or constructs, as well as meaning and

explanations in the data for that organization. Through this type of coding, I was able to search for patterns in principals' stories, their definitions of the principal role, their experiences during their first years as principals, and so forth. During the Second Cycle Process, I started translating themes and narratives from participants in order to write the portraits and present the themes and subthemes.

Narrative coding was appropriate for this Second Cycle process as well, as it explores personal participant's experiences and aims to understand them through narrative. This coding strategy closely fit my approach of using portraiture as a method because it presented the participants' perspective and experiences holistically (Saldaña, 2013). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) present the analogy of the threads weaving the tapestry, where the threads represent the emergent themes, and the result is the tapestry, which, in this case, are principals' portraits. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis explain that these tapestries or portraits, attend to four dimensions: (a) the conception of the overarching story; (b) the structure and sequencing of emergent themes that scaffold the story; (c) the form of the story; and (d) the cohesion of the piece. Narrative coding suited this process since it allowed principals' stories to unfold and attend to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' four dimensions. Translations were challenging as to preserve and honor participants' voices and the nuances and subtleties of their responses. As such, I explained the idioms used in Dominican culture in participants' portraits.

Findings are the researcher's general interpretation of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2002). In this case, the structure and content of themes regarding novice principals' reflection and description of their experiences and needs (Guest & et al., 2012). The intention was to use findings from this study to portray principals' life stories, background, feelings, and

pathways to becoming principal, which contributed to a better understanding of principals' role in the DR context.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to conducting an investigation in an ethical manner, which is particularly important in applied fields "because practitioners intervene in people's lives" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss four aspects of trustworthiness including credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Keeping in mind these four aspects of trustworthiness, I considered various strategies throughout the conceptualization of the study and in the implementation of methodological procedures. To ensure trustworthiness for this study, I developed an audit trail, engaged in member-checking, peer debriefing, reflexivity, triangulation, and thick description.

Credibility. For credibility, confidence in the truth of the findings (Lincoln and Guba's Evaluation Criteria, n.d.), I utilized member checking. To ensure that principals' experiences and descriptions of their needs were as accurate as possible, member checking was completed by emailing participants the transcripts of their interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which was discussed in the consent form (Appendix D). I also emailed participants the emergent themes and codes from my analysis. I asked them if they wanted to receive the portrait that was written from the transcripts of our interview since it was written in English. Out of 10 participants, six responded. One of the participants found that reading through her transcript made her engage in a reflective process.

For the purpose of this study, I preferred to engage in a formal member check, not through informal conversation. In these emails, I gave respondents the opportunity to develop their answers further if they wished to as well as to correct or validate the transcript I sent. To

enhance the creation of the full portrait of each participant, I encouraged participants to review the transcript carefully. During their review, I asked them to fill in the gaps of any details of their story they find important or as they occur to them. By engaging in this conversation, I hope to gather any additional ideas participants may have. The six principals who responded confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and the interpretations I sent them, which will aid in establishing credibility in this study. None of the participants asked for a copy of their portrait.

Triangulation is another method for ensuring credibility. One form of triangulation consists of using different sources of data for better understanding (Lincoln and Guba's Evaluation Criteria, n.d.). I used the participants' profiling guide, individual interviews, my observations, and document analysis to create a more holistic understanding of each participant's story through the data, as well as the context of the DR's educational system.

Dependability. As a means to establish dependability, I engaged in peer debriefing. Dependability means that the findings can be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), peer debriefing means talking to peers about the research process, possible bias, and my stance in the study. Talking about my study was valuable because it allowed me to further think about the details of the study since I need to explain to them and account for the decisions that I make. Peer debriefing was particularly useful for the translation process, in order to convey the meaning that participants presented in context. Engaging in conversations and asking for revisions on idioms and phrases used by participants allowed for a more accurate narrative and presentation of Dominican context for the reader.

Confirmability. Confirmability intends to ensure neutrality in the study (Lincoln and Guba's Evaluation Criteria, n.d.). Objectivity in quantitative research is the traditional parallel of confirmability in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To establish the

confirmability of my study, I used reflexivity through analytic memos and the development of an audit trail (Richards, 2010).

By acknowledging my background, I bracketed my ideas and beliefs through reflexivity, which Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also label as "the researcher's position" (p. 249). I presented these reflections on my identity in Chapter One and in my portrait in Chapter Four. As a means of reflexivity and defining my stance as the researcher, I wrote my personal portrait. By developing my own portrait, I could tell my story, my pathway to the principalship, and my experiences as a novice principal. This process allowed me to further understand the importance of context and thick description in this type of research. Merriam and Tisdell continue to explain that through reflexivity, I could present my dispositions and assumptions regarding this topic, which I did by presenting my interest in the topic and my previous experience as a novice principal myself.

The process of reflexivity began with memo writing. Through the process of memoing, not only did I acknowledge my stance, but as I am the means of data collection, writing down my ideas and thoughts continuously allowed me to work with the data more efficiently. My memos served both as a reflexive journal and also recorded the research process, which informed the audit trail. I also incorporated my memos as part of the data collection and analysis process since I recorded impressions and observations as soon as I finished the interviews. These memos helped in the creation of principal portraits as well.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), an audit trail is a description of the methods, decisions, and procedures carried out throughout the study. The audit trail allowed me to keep track of the research process and how the study evolved. The process informed the research design regarding the data collection process, particularly the interview protocol to better suit

the purpose of the study. For example, by writing memos I acknowledged the importance and value of the last question on my interview protocol, which entailed asking participants if there was anything else they wanted to share. Since I wrote about the importance of that question on my memos, from then on, I made sure to ask in subsequent interviews it without a time constraint. The audit trail provided a history of the decisions made throughout the study.

Transferability. In qualitative research, transferability refers to the possibility of findings being applied to other contexts, which is done through thick description (Lincoln and Guba's Evaluation Criteria, n.d.). For transferability purposes, I presented an in-depth narrative of the time, place, context, and culture where the study is taking place, both in Chapter One, Chapter Two, and in Chapter Four with principals' portraits. For this purpose, I used document analysis to provide context and afford thick description of the educational system and current educational improvements in the DR.

Through portraiture, I captured principals' perspectives and experiences in complex and subtle ways (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Through these principals' stories, it is easier to understand their historical, cultural, and educational context in the DR. Studies suggest that research on principals should consider the context (Bellibas et al., 2016; Bendikson et al., 2012). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest "providing enough description to contextualize the study such as the readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context, and, hence, whether the findings can be transferred" (p. 259) as a strategy to provide thick description. I believe that providing thick description of context, particularly the current educational system in DR, might inform future research on principal leadership in the country.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of this study is the sample size, which may not be a representative of the larger population of Dominican principals in the country. Also, since all principals come from the same educational region, the sample selected for the study may not exemplify novice principals' critical needs from other educational regions or outside the capital. However, the goal of this study was to explore principals' early career experiences and tell their stories and pathways to the principalship as a means to better understand their needs coming into the principalship and how these experiences shape how they enact their role as principals.

As for the delimitations of this study, I recruited a sample of 10 novice primary or secondary public-school principals from educational region 15 and its six districts in Santo Domingo, DR. Principals were either male or female and had one to five years' experience in primary or secondary school levels in public-schools of Santo Domingo, DR. Principals of early childhood institutions and adult education public institutions were not considered for the study.

Summary and Conclusion

This study explored how Dominican public-school novice principals' early career experiences and how they identified their needs entering the principalship. This study utilized a basic interpretative qualitative research approach. In addition, portraiture was used as a method to narrate principals' stories.

Criterion and snowball sampling were used for participant selection, focusing on public-school principals with one to five years on the job. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data was analyzed through an emergent inductive

process using various First and Second cycle coding approaches. HSIRB approval, confidentiality considerations, and trustworthiness were considered throughout the study.

Chapter Four will present the principals' portraits. Chapter Five will highlight the findings of the study. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER IV

PRINCIPALS' PORTRAITS

*"Lawrence-Lightfoot, a sociologist, ethnographer, and biographer, invented portraiture
as described here and has used it to document the culture of schools, the life stories of
individuals, and the relationships among families, communities, and schools."*
(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvi)

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to explore Dominican public-school novice principals' early career experiences and how they identified their needs entering the principalship. In addition, through the use of portraiture, my goal was to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. Portraiture is a method that allows the reader to experience the narrative with more profound understanding of participants' stories, their background, the context, and the setting (Hackman, 2002).

I used first person to tell principals' stories of their pathways to the principalship and first years' experiences. By offering the stories of the principals in my study in first person, I feel it was easier to honor their voices and use direct quotes from the data. There are contradicting opinions as to whether using first person is an overuse of power by researchers since they control the information, which might interfere with ethical considerations (Hackman, 2002). However, for this study, I believe it provided authenticity and captured the positive aspects of principals' stories (Brooks, 2017). Hackman (2002) explains that, "portraiture not only recognizes but also exploits the fact that the investigator's physical presence unalterably changes the cultural dynamics of the research environment" (pp. 53-54). Hackman continues to explain that it is expected that this interaction forms an intimate relationship between the researcher and the participant, which was the case for this study.

In each portrait, I acknowledged every principal's background, their struggles, their triumphs, and their strengths, by using the transcripts from the interviews, my field notes, and analytic memos I developed throughout the research process. I also relied on document analysis of various Ministry of Education's laws, ordinances, news, and manuals to complement the portraits and present the context of the Dominican Republic and the country's educational system. For purposes of clarity, in some cases, I completed and supported the portraits by presenting facts that I feel help the reader to better understand any elements context or culture referenced in the portraits. I decided to put these comments in brackets, as a means to respect the authenticity of the portrait and the participants' stories. The result is the tapestry that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) refer to; a tapestry weaved with every detail of the stories.

This chapter presents my portraits of the ten principals who participated in this study, their "experiences in context" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11), their stories, and the subtle details of their experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I used pseudonyms for each principal and what I thought better resembled their story to name each portrait. Assigning pseudonyms was stated in the consent form to ensure confidentiality. I finish this chapter by presenting my own portrait, acknowledging my background, presenting my experiences in my first years as principal, and telling my story.

Principal One: "Linda: The Vice-Principal Who Became Principal"

"What are schools for? For children to learn."

Probably coming from her intuition, since my mother was not a formally educated woman, she told me I would be a teacher. Like many women in the DR, who come from low socio-economic status, she was an uneducated housewife, yet she raised me to work and fight

for what I wanted. From a young age, I used to teach my younger brother. Somehow, I knew I wanted to be an educator.

I went to public-school. In my senior year, as a means to promote teaching, a group of people came into my school and offered scholarships for a teacher training program. They offered me the possibility to study in an "*Escuela Normal*" translated loosely as a Normal School for teachers. [*Escuelas Normales* were founded by a group of educators in the late 1800s, Normal Schools strived for better teacher preparation (Suero, 2008)].

The teachers that graduated from the *Escuelas Normales* graduated with a teaching certificate, instead of a bachelor's degree. Their preparation was excellent, but I did not take it. I could not because it was a pity scholarship. I will never forget how I did not consider that scholarship out of shame. I did not want my classmates to know that I needed that type of economic help or that I wanted to pursue a career in education. The education sector was at a low point at that time in the DR.

So, two years later, I enrolled in a university, and I paid for my career. I always felt that attending the *Escuela Normal* would have been a great training experience; but instead, I went for my Bachelor's Degree in School Administration and Supervision, from a small university in Santo Domingo. I took on that program not necessarily because I wanted to become a principal; it was a friend who motivated me. She told me that if I took that approach, administration and supervision, I could both be an administrator and teach. Sadly, this was not the case, since my degree was in administration, I could not enter the public system and teach. So, in its place, I went to the private sector and taught in private schools. I was in various classrooms for 10 years from early childhood, to elementary and high school. I felt that I needed to know what it was that I was going to manage and administer. Hence, I required classroom experience.

During that time, I had a preschool in my house for about three to four years, which I felt gave me a little experience in management. After those 10 years as a private school teacher, I applied for a vice-principal position in the public sector by entering a Ministry of Education public contest. I won the contest and served as vice-principal for eight years. My beginnings as a vice-principal were a difficult time; I had a hard time putting theory into practice because I had no experience in management. And also, I was young, very young. I was in my early twenties and gaining the respect of my workmates was challenging. I had to be strategic.

As a vice-principal, I also experienced the incredible challenge of the emergence of the pedagogical coordinators. The Ministry trained qualified teachers to become pedagogical coordinators in the schools. Because of this disposition, to create the position of pedagogical coordinators in schools, the roles of the vice-principals and the coordinators became confused. The integration of the pedagogical coordinators was so frustrating for me and so disappointing that I went to the Ministry demanding an explanation. I am a bit of a rebel in that way, I need to understand things for myself. Where did my functions start and where did the coordinator's end? There was not a straightforward answer to that, and there still is not.

In my years as principal and vice-principal, I have always been more inclined towards instruction than management. Schools are for children to learn, that is their primary purpose. I know there should be a balance, but I prioritize instruction. For me, instruction is a sacred part of my job; I emphasize observing teachers' classes and giving them feedback. I criticize the fact that principals are not required to have teaching experience. I feel that there is a limitation in principals or vice-principals that do not have teaching experience. In my case, my limitation was management, even if my bachelor's degree was in that area, I felt unprepared. So, I decided to pursue a Master's Degree in Educational Administration.

I finished my Master's right before I entered the principalship. What great timing! I learned about many issues that pertain to both principals and vice-principals. My master's degree taught me directly about administering a school in the DR, particularly the regulations statutes, and norms that rule the Dominican educational system and leadership strategies. It gave me a chance to put my learnings into practice.

I work as a high school principal in an extended-day religious public-school in the center of Santo Domingo. Three hundred fifty-five students in high school begin their day at 7:30 am in the morning and end it at 4:00 pm in the afternoon. The school is run by a Catholic sisterhood, which is very strict in its rules and beliefs. They entrusted me this position because I feel they trust me to respect and preserve the values of the school.

This school is in high demand because of our location and our prestige. Our students come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, but the school gives priority to children who come from lower socioeconomic conditions. In comparison to other schools, we have supportive families and a great APMAE, which is the parent association. It is good to have them on my side, supporting the educational process of their children. With their help, we maintain the school and keep it clean, organized and working because the APMAE is the one that approves the use of the school funds.

In my very first year as principal, I had one of my most challenging experiences yet, having to contest the school's rules and culture. The sisters had a rule that any student who got into a fight in school would be expelled. However, in my master's I learned about the laws that rule the education system, particularly Law 136-03 which is against expelling children (*Ley 136-03, Código para el Sistema de Protección y los Derechos Fundamentales de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes* [Law, 136-03, Code for the Protection System of the Fundamental Rights of

Children and Adolescent], 2003*).* One of my students got into a fight, and of course, he was to be expelled because of the school's policies. Yet, I knew this law; I knew we could not expel him. So, I took on the battle, both out of knowledge of the country's education laws and my teacher intuition. Having to go against everybody in the school was rough, lonely, and demanding. However, I had to do what was right. I won this battle, our student stayed in school, and graduated. It was not a whim, I fought for what was right.

I should add that I was not planning on becoming principal of this school; however, the sisters asked me to. I have been the interim principal for three years and have not been officially named principal by the Ministry of Education. This is because there have not been any public contests for this position. Since then I gained the respect of my workmates and the sisters through my work as vice-principal, I had that advantage when I became the interim principal. This "gained respect" is not to say that I did not have difficult times in the beginning; I felt lonely and isolated. Now I am not as lonely, not so much.

I am an open-door leader. I enjoy being an educator. I love when kids come in and greet me. I think that support, dialogue, companionship, and affectionate relationships with my workmates are the most important assets of my principalship. I work on it this every day. I believe in education, both out of conviction and vocation.

Principal Two: "Karl: The Police Officer Who Became Principal"

"They see an example in me as principal. And as an added value, I tell them it is possible, it is always possible. I believe in that, but also always giving an example with my actions."

Being static has never resulted in anything. I embody that in my life, my training, my career choices, and my education. I preach about the importance of being flexible and adapting, and I am an example of it. I started my principalship five years ago, but much happened before

that. I never thought of the possibility of becoming the principal of a high school. I am a police officer in the DR, not an educator. I am actually a colonel. It was life's circumstances that led me to this position.

As I was growing up, I learned to respect others and, consequently, gain their respect. In my teenage years, I studied abroad in a large military school. From that time, I took the value and importance of teamwork. It was an eye-opening experience for me studying abroad. I know that experience gave me a different perspective on things. I learned to listen and to find common ground, and, somehow, listening would become one of my best traits as a leader.

I have been a police officer for most of my life, for about 30 years. However, I managed to earn two bachelor's degrees, one in modern languages and one in law while serving the police. So yes, I am a colonel, a lawyer, and a linguist. I never thought I would work in education, until, that is, I did. I began my career in education as a vice-principal in a center for police officer training, and I liked it. It was then that I decided to get a teaching certificate. Little did I know that this training and this job were going to be life-changing for me.

Few people know that there are schools in the DR that are ruled by the Ministry but follow the police's, army's, or air force's philosophy. And it just so happened that this school, which is grounded in the police's philosophy, needed a principal; someone who had some training in education and was an active member of the police force. I am a police officer and I had some training in education. There I was, and here I am.

I am pretty sure that I came into the principalship with 10% of what I needed to know. I felt challenged. During that time, I relied on the school's teachers for guidance. The teachers I found here were welcoming, helpful, honest, and engaged. However, I still showed my true colors on the first day, I was very clear on my position and what I wanted to accomplish with

them. I told them: "We all get on this boat and set sail. Those of you who want to stay, you may stay. But I will set sail." A good and honest relationship with the teachers was a win-win situation. They would help me work from an education mindset and share their knowledge of the school's processes and I would promote a culture of teamwork, flexibility, and embracing change.

Even though I had their help, I decided to train and study what I needed to know about the education system and what it takes to be a good principal. I went to the School of Directors and also earned a Master's Degree in Educational Administration. Studying at the School of Directors was a tremendous opportunity. Before it, I was a director; now, I am a school leader. In that program, you learn about Dominican public-school life in detail and you begin to understand how to put theory into practice. I had the opportunity to talk to other principals and learn from their experiences. It helped me, it grounded me, and it for sure gave me the tools I needed to lead a school that moves forward. In my master's degree, I learned leadership strategies and theories and how to refine some of my abilities.

I experienced a profound transformation these last five years as principal. I came from working with adults to working with adolescents. I came from military institution training to a high school. I came from giving orders to listening. I am different. I still have the cop training in me, but I shy away from it. There is more to the role of an educator. I take an hour a week with each of the senior classes; I call it: "An hour with the principal." This school is an extended-day school, so at lunchtime, I usually eat lunch with my students. They like talking to me, and I, I like to listen.

Sometimes these students come from realities that put them in very vulnerable positions. The school staff becomes their family, so we pay attention. We have to listen to them. We work

with adolescents and we have to see their strengths, their weaknesses. And most importantly, we need to be tolerant. They make mistakes. We have to deal with it.

You may ask yourself what happened with the other 90% that I needed to know to be a good principal? I learned it here, with my experiences, my studies, and the relationships I sustain with my staff and my students. My greatest strength is being open and approachable; I am never in my office and, when I am, my door is always open. The teachers know it. And more importantly, my students know it.

Principal Three: "Ellen: The Psychologist Who Became Principal"

"I want things to work out. Now that I am here, I want things to work out."

I dreamt of being a ballerina, never a principal. If you asked me what my dream was, it was being a ballerina but, that does not mean I pursued that dream though. Dreams are funny that way; they sometimes become a distant memory.

I entered a Catholic religious congregation, where I belong. I am a clinical psychologist with training in family therapy. I never thought I would work with children nor in schools. Hence, I am a clinical psychologist, not a school psychologist. My congregation knows that this is not my world. The sisters know schools are not my world, but I took a vow of obedience and here I am. And now that I am here, I must say I imagined something else, honestly, something else. This position is more about managing, than working with people, which makes it more difficult for me. I find the time though, I do. I find the time to work directly with teachers and students.

But why would they ask me to do this? I wonder. They say it is because I fit the principal profile and that I have excellent people skills. I think my people skills come from my psychology background. I have no formal training in school administration, nor previous

experience in schools. The knowledge and training that I have in educational administration comes from the congregation and my last job. In my congregation, we have our educational training program and I meet with other principals and there I learn what goes on in schools. The little knowledge that I have in management comes from working as the coordinator for the church 's nation-wide health initiative; without that I would be lost entirely. I wish the Ministry would offer me a master's or training of some sort in this area, but I have not had the luck yet. I wish I could have attended the School of Directors, that would have been very helpful. But no. I was not selected.

However, in the past 13 months that I have been here, I have managed to do my job, and I think I am doing it well. This school's previous principal did a good job and I cannot do it differently. I knew her before she retired when I volunteered here. I always admired the excellent climate that she fostered. The staff seemed at ease in the school and they responded to this positive working environment. I try to take care of her legacy in maintaining a good school climate.

I wake up really early in the morning to be here on time. We begin our first period at 7:30 am. I am here before that, even though I live exceptionally far away. I usually leave at 5:30 pm, after the last student leaves. Parents in this community are tardy in picking up their children, but I stay until the last student leaves. I am accountable for them; besides we do not even have a doorman. How could I go home leaving children behind? When I do get home, I cannot look at my cell phone and return my messages. I don't have the energy. So yes, you can say I work a lot.

I feel a great responsibility towards my students. This is a very dangerous neighborhood, and the students here are an extremely vulnerable population. They wake up and go to bed

listening to fights and obscene words. Many of our students are exposed to all kinds of abuse. And then they come here and we treat them differently. Part of my congregation's approach is to teach the *Pedagogy of Love*. They see the school as an oasis. The bell rings and they do not want to go home. They want to stay here.

There are many drug dealers that live around here, but we are safe from that. Most of the drug dealers and consumers are the parents of the school and they take care of us. They do not want their children exposed to that and that works to our benefit. We do not have a night guard and nothing has ever happened to the school. So, having these parents on our side is a significant advantage for our students. Believe it or not, it is an advantage.

This school, unlike many others, is not extended-day. We serve two shifts of elementary children for a grand total of 640 students. Three hundred and twenty come in the morning and 320 arrive in the afternoon. Many of them have emotional needs, behavioral problems, or learning disabilities and we want to help them. We are not always successful. I feel impotent. I wish I could help them more, especially, because I know that with the proper guidance, they can overcome many of the issues that they face. And their parents do not cooperate with our suggestions. Why do they not cooperate? I wish I knew. Maybe they think that keeping us safe from drug dealers is enough, maybe they believe it is our job, or they simply do not know how to cooperate. Either way, they do not cooperate with our suggestions.

The community appreciates the fact that a religious congregation is running the school. Regardless of their background, they understand it. The parents know that schooling is different; it is centered in values and has higher academic standards than other public-schools in the area. [Even the Ministry acknowledges that schools run by religious congregations are focused both in academics and values (Báez, 2017).] For example, in the diagnostic evaluations

that the Ministry administered to third graders across the country, we did better than similar schools around here. We did not get the best of grades, to be honest. But we did better. After learning about the results, we integrated strategies to improve instruction and increase our scores into the school's improvement plan.

Even if I did not come into the principalship with the academic background to support my work, I took the challenge. I have grown here. I am more flexible; I still have a long way to go. But my dream is not to stay here for long. I cannot complain, it has been good. I just do not see myself here for long. I told my congregation five years; however, I know five can turn to six, to seven, to eight, to ten. I know we would discuss it, but I genuinely hope for five. I took a vow of obedience, but I wish I could practice psychology.

Principal Four: "Irma: The Poet Who Became Principal"

"To be indifferent to people's needs is to kill without weapons the hope of the community."

I was going to be a lawyer. My aunt was going to pay for my career as she did for my brother. But my boyfriend at the time, now my husband, told me: "When you finish high school, learn to sew, so that way you can help me." He made purses, Bible holders, and other things. So, I did, I learned to sew and helped him. And with the money we made, we bought a piece of land and built our house. Seventeen years after I graduated high school, I continued my academic training and went to college.

I studied education in a small evangelical university in Santo Domingo. I got a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and worked as a preschool teacher for five years. In the beginning, I had one shift; when I contested for the second shift and won, I worked for the Ministry for free, because it was not made official. Then, I decided to participate in the public

contest to be vice-principal. I did not think of being a principal as an option. One day at the district's office, I ran into a friend and she told me that both contests' exams were the same. I was surprised, what I had to study to be vice-principal was the same as to become principal. So, I aimed for the highest position.

I won the contest to be principal but remained a teacher until there was a vacant position. Two years after, a job opened in this school, and I took it. I even had to move to be closer to this school, because I lived far away. In October it will be five years since I became principal.

Some of the strategies that I use as principal, I learned as president of a foundation that works with children. I started that foundation you know. It all happened one day long ago, about 13 years, I was getting my hair done at the salon, and I overheard people talking about children who were stealing metals from constructions sites, assaulting pedestrians, and robbing continuously in the community. When I heard that… I prayed: "Please Lord, let me do something about this." So, I went home with that in the back of my mind. As I was making dinner, I asked my daughter to write something down for me, my hands were dirty, and I did not want to forget. It was a profound thought: "To be indifferent to people's needs is to kill without weapons the hope of the community." I asked her to read that back to me, and I thought to myself how could I just cross my arms after that thought.

I knew that if I did not do anything, I could be the next person they rob. So, I started small, quiet, and timid. I worked with the boys from the corner of my house. But we grew; the foundation grew. We participated in the community's carnivals and won medals in different events. We have a Christmas dinner every year and Bible school every week. I am proud of our work and our accomplishments. Lord knows I put effort into this. There were many that I

would to stay up late at night preparing their presentations. I keep on working hard, even after moving. I live far away from that community now, but that foundation is dear to my heart.

I am a writer; I would say I am a poet. But I did not study to become a poet, it comes naturally to me. I am an empirical poet I guess. I created a poetry group here because it helps children calm down. When I got here, I asked teachers to pull out little groups of children every day. I would spend a half hour with them reading poetry and it works. They enjoy it. Poetry is a big part of my principalship. Next week for Independence Day, two students will be representing one of my poems and the whole school will learn another poem I wrote for the DR, my homeland. You know when I read it, I thought to myself that I did not even know that I was so patriotic. I read it aloud and said the glory be to God.

I did not have the opportunity to go to the School of Directors, I wish I had. I did my master's degree while being a principal. I learned that principals have many roles and that they have to show ethics, passion, and transparency. Also, principals have to work for, promote, and foster a school culture of peace and harmony. There is a good school climate here. There are few conflicts, but when there are it is usually between the janitors. I talk to each one separately and then together; that works for me. We address these issues.

When I first got here, I found a school in extremely poor conditions. Desks, materials, walls, everything was damaged. Children had fights over the "good" desks. School police came in daily because of the fights. The fights over desks have diminished because we have new desks. But if kids are learning to be more assertive in how they handle conflict or is it just that there are better desks? This a question that remains unanswered. We are part of a university's program that is mentoring us to improve our practices and our mentor congratulated us on how

we are handling the school. I say "we" because I do not work alone; I work with my management team always. I promote teamwork and, to do that, I have to set the example.

In my first couple of years as principal, I encountered many difficult situations. Some teachers were advocating for me to fire others. And I said no, that they deserved a chance. Because what happens when you are wrong and everybody turns their back on you, you would be lost. I am a Christian and I know I fail God constantly. What would happen if God treated me the way they want me to treat the teachers that were making mistakes? I would not exist.

One of my most significant assets as a principal is that I promote solidarity. Just this week we have an activity for Valentine's Day to raise funds for our doorman. He was in an accident and has a fractured leg. He does not have enough money to pay for all his medical bills, so we are trying to help him. I went to visit him in his town. It is a bit far, about a four-hour drive, but I went. I am very close to my staff. We support each other.

I want to share a poem with you. It is only six lines. I hope you like it.

"Transparencia inerte
De color sereno
Que la ansiedad apaciguas
Contemplarte quiero infinto
Tan solo mirar tu sin par belleza
Inspiras en un instante mi pluma
Y puedo estar sin igual certeza
Que fue un Dios noble
Que ideó tu belleza"

["Inert transparency
Of serene color
That anxiety appeases
To contemplate you I want infinite
Just to look at your unparalleled beauty
You inspire my pen in an instant
And I can be without equal certainty
That it was a noble God
Who designed your beauty"]

Principal Five: "Beth: The Student Who Became Principal"

> *"Wherever you are what counts is that you do the job.*
> *And that you do it with love."*

Since I was very young, I knew I wanted to be a teacher and work in education. My eighth-grade teacher and I were very close and she motivated me to become a teacher. I smile when I think of her. When I graduated from high school, I immediately started my Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education. Currently, I am completing a Master's Degree in History.

I was a teacher in public-schools for 11 years and for 20 years in the private schools. For some of that time, I taught in a private school in the morning and a public-school in the afternoon. My teaching experience has a significant impact on how I am as a principal. There are things I am sure I would not understand if I had not taught before. Some situations come up in schools that without teaching experience you cannot find the alternatives or strategies to face them assertively.

How I became a principal is a funny story. I was working at a public-school, whose principal was going to retire. She wanted somebody from within the school to become principal, somebody who was already in tune with the school's needs and knew the community. My workmates motivated me to participate in the Ministry's public contest. And I did. And I passed. But I was sent to a different school, this one. Someone else took on the position of principal of my previous school. I program things in my life; being the principal of this school was not in my program. Never did I imagine that I was going to be the principal of this school. I graduated from here. I was scared and intimidated at first, but now I am proud to be the principal in my school. There is a sense of belonging that I cannot explain.

I like what you can accomplish as principal, not necessarily the title, but the things you can get done from this position. There is more power as a principal, than as a teacher. But I cannot hide it; my passion is teaching. I feel nostalgic and, sometimes, I want to go back to the classroom.

One of the reasons I want to go back is that people treat you differently when you are the principal. They steer clear from you. I have been the principal for one year, fourteen months to be more specific. I knew most of the teachers here because we worked together in other schools in this area and it is like I am somebody else. I have to remind them that I am the same person. They address me differently. It is kind of strange and kind of lonely.

I find it troubling that this school is in such bad conditions because the construction is extremely old. One of my most significant challenges as the principal is maintenance. Five different schools operate in this space. There are two night schools, one for adults and one high school. On Saturdays and Sundays, there are two different adult schools, which have different principals and then there is us. I am the principal of this two-shift, 1,338 student, public elementary school, on a very busy street, with old construction, old desks, and old materials. For me, children cannot learn like this.

But children cannot learn coming from such vulnerable realities as the ones they come from either. The school's families are from a lower socioeconomic status. There is violence, drugs, and all sorts of vices in this community. We try to make the school a different environment for them, to let them know that there is something else. But that is what our children see every day.

For the community and families to participate and engage with the school and their children's academic life is a great challenge. Most of the parents from my school start their

workday at four or five in the morning and get home at ten at night, maybe even midnight. I have students who are seven or eight years old that come to school carrying the key to their house, so they can get in when they get home from school. They come to school by themselves and they go home by themselves to an empty house. Most of them walk here. The school's street is dangerous; many cars pass by at high speed. Just the other day, one of our students got ran over by a car. Thankfully he is well, but it was a horrible scare. That is mortifying for me.

For us in the school, dealing with parents who work all day is hard. Sometimes you need the parents of a student to come into the school and they cannot. They say that they might lose their jobs. So, we have to deal with kids ourselves. As principal, I put a lot of emphasis on telling our students that even though this is their reality right now, it does not have to be forever. That they are not trapped. As an example, I talk to them about how many Dominican baseball players have become famous and that most of them came from realities similar to theirs. I guess that is my intent to show them that they have possibilities, that they can have dreams.

Being the principal can be lonely, I find support in our principal network. A lot of schools complain that their principal network does not meet regularly, but I am thankful mine does. We support each other and learn from each other. We share our good practices and our not so good ones. I am happy to learn from them. I know that I have a lot to learn still, particularly in administration and leadership. I am on the list for the School of Directors. I hope I can get in because I know I need it.

So, I guess that even if my passion is teaching, I am doing my job. And I am doing it with love. I am the first one here and the last one to leave. And those are my best traits as principal: I

am open, I am positive, and I am a hard worker. That is what being a principal is all about: working hard for what you want to accomplish.

Principal Six: "Maria: The Teacher Who Was Ready to Retire and Became Principal"

"A teacher has to be a little bit of everything."

I have been in education for 30 years. I am tired. I hope to retire soon. Thirty years is a long time. But in the meantime, I am the principal of this high school and I have been here for eight months. After 30 years, I was more than ready to go home, but I participated in the public contest and I won. So, the Ministry assigned me to this school.

I graduated from a *Politécnico* [polytechnic], [which are high schools that train students either to go on to college or for the labor market in technical careers (*Politécnicos capacitan a 44 mil alumnos en 34 especialidades* [Polytechnics train 44 thousand students in 34 specialties], 2015).] *Politécnicos* are a big deal in the DR because you graduate with skills to get a job right out of high school, which happened to me. When I graduated, I started substituting in my *Politécnico.* And you know that once you get into education, you can never leave.

Surprisingly, without a bachelor's degree or teacher certification, I got a permanent job as a home education teacher. My education in the *Politécnico* trained me in this area; so, it was quite easy for me. Since I started earning money, I could pay for my career. I wanted to study psychology and started to do so, but the schedule made me change to education. I am an educator, but if you think about it, I am a psychologist as well. And I am good at it, I advise parents, students, and even teachers. So, I guess I am a little bit of both.

I got my bachelor's degree in elementary education from a large public university in Santo Domingo. I taught for 22 years, from early childhood education through high school.

When I was teaching, I was assigned all the problematic students. I thought to myself, I am the teacher and there is not anything that I cannot do. I was successful with these students. From that experience, I learned that there is not anything that I cannot accomplish with my students… and I guess now as principal I try with my teachers. Teachers are a tougher population though.

Then, in my 22nd year as a teacher, I was offered a new position: pedagogical coordinator. [The pedagogical coordinators' main objective is to guide teachers in elaborating and applying their class (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* [Operations Manual for Public-Schools], 2013). They are also part of the school's management team.] I was part of the first group that the Ministry of Education was recruiting. At that time, there were no contests for the position of coordinators; the management team picked you. I was offered the job in the middle of the school year, but I could not leave my students. Leaving my kids in the middle of the year is terrible for them; it confuses them. Besides, I had started a job that I wanted to finish.

Since I was part of the first group of coordinators, we were lucky to get specialized training. That was an advantage for me because for the eight years that I was the coordinator I was the principal's right hand and I learned a lot about the principalship. I am grateful for it; it was a perfect foundation. Even though I loved teaching, I enjoyed being a coordinator. I shared my knowledge with teachers, observed their work, and gave them feedback. In the beginning, it was a bit stressful, because teachers saw me as a supervisor, but once they realized I was there to help, they let their guards down.

During that time I applied for a scholarship to do a master's degree in educational administration. It took a long time for me to get an answer on the status of the scholarship, and

since I could not waste any time, I started a certificate in teacher mentoring. When I had done a semester, my scholarship came through. So I worked as a teacher, did my certificate, and my master's all at the same time. That was a tough, stressful time. I felt burnt out. I no longer want to study again. I read, I look up things on the internet, and try to stay up to date, but not studying. No. That experience was enough.

Doing that master's is what got me here, but I did not do it to become a principal. I did it to learn and for the experience and because it was a scholarship. I cannot deny that I thought about being principal, but my 30 years were coming up. In the DR, after being 30 years in the public education system, you can retire. And I wanted to. But my former principal motivated me to contest for this position, and I did. And I got it. Why I participated when I was ready to retire, I do not know.

So, eight months ago, I started working here. I was in shock those first days. I came from a school where everybody got along, that was organized, and where people planned together. And then, I came here. Teachers do not even know what their tasks are. I am trying, but I am not getting a lot of help from the people here. The thing is that others wanted this position, so it has been a very lonely eight months. Every day is a struggle because I want this to work out. I do get help from the district, but it is not enough. I need to change my management team.

I seem to understand all the processes that go on here, probably as a result of all the years as teacher and coordinator. But I am struggling with organizing the school and some procedures though. I have 714 students that depend on me. Three hundred forty-seven come in the morning and 367 in the afternoon. So, I need my teachers to be here because there are a lot of students and a lot of work. Before I came here, teachers were always late; they left in the middle of the morning, never came back; it was a disaster. They were resistant at first because

once I took on the principalship, they had to be on time, stay in the school, and leave at the end of the school day.

I am proud of the school culture that I am promoting. It will take time; these things take time. For example, the janitors no longer feel invisible in the school. They told me that and I felt proud. I am even teaching one janitor to write his name. I believe in fostering a culture of learning. Just the other day I talked to a janitor that works here who is young and has all the possibilities to learn and grow and make something of herself. Hence, I encouraged her. I told her that she can hope for a better future, that she should study, that her life does not end here. She does not have to be a janitor forever. The salary for school janitors is very low, I know she can do better, she still has time.

I know I have said I am tired. And I am. But I like my job because I am an educator and I love to teach. I value being around people and, most importantly, I love that people feel that there is hope for the future. We have to work for that. It is our responsibility. There is not anything that we cannot accomplish.

Principal Seven: "Ana: The Principal's Daughter Who Became Principal"

"And I thought to myself, under my mother's wings, I will never grow.
I needed independence."

When I graduated high school, I immediately went to college. I did a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. During that time, my mother started a school of her own. She had not finished school yet, so she needed my help. I was in charge of the managerial aspect of the school, and she dealt with instruction. Anyways, I had to do everything and deal with everything. In a school what is most important is getting things done.

After some time with my mother, I had to leave. I needed to prove to myself I could do it, that I could make it on my own. Besides, under her wing, I could not be myself. At least that is how I felt. I needed independence, to become a real woman. I did not think that I was growing, because I relied on her for everything. I follow her advice still, but it is different when you are on your own, by yourself. I would always go back to her when we were working together. So no, I had to do it on my own. I felt stalled.

That was a hectic time; there was so much going on in my life, family, and church activities. So much, I could not keep up. I felt too much pressure. Too much. Since that time, I have to take pills for high blood pressure, even at this young age. I think back at that time, and I still feel tired. It was then when I participated in the public contest to become a public-school teacher, and I won. Then, a new journey began.

I started at a public-school as a first-grade teacher. I had a sore throat constantly. You see public-schools are very different. I believe that in private schools parents have a better education, hence so do their children. But that is my perception. I felt exposed and threatened in this new position. For me, parents were aggressive and demanding. I thought of leaving in the very first year.

I remember this one difficult student. I tried everything I learned in school to get her to improve, positive reinforcement, having her as my assistant, everything. Nothing worked. I told her that I was going to call her mother. She said to me that she wished a car ran over me when I left school and that her mother was going to come in with a machete. She was six years old and came into school with a knife. I could not believe it; I was shocked. Did she know what it was for? I am pretty sure she did. What were these children learning in their homes?

My second year as a teacher was better. I will never know if it was because I was a better teacher, or because I was less scared, or because society magically improved. But something happened and I did better. I participated in a contest again for a second shift and I won. I spent six years as a teacher in that school. Then I was promoted to pedagogical coordinator. For two years, I helped teachers, observed their classes, and gave them feedback.

Being a principal was not "the plan." But I push myself, I set goals for myself. I cannot be stagnant; I need to move forward. I am tough, tough on my husband, tough on my kids, tough on myself in my work, in church, everywhere. So I went to the contest for a principal position. I won and 13 months ago, I started as principal in this school. I am committed to leaving my mark on everything I do; I do it with pride. For example, I do not believe in the type of teachers that dress up as old ladies and that do not dignify their position. I think in playing your part, educators have to look nice and show manners. I am different than the others in that way.

I was recommended to this school by the previous principal. She wanted to retire, so she brought me here. I was lucky to able to talk to her and clarify some issues of the school. Also, the vice principal has been here for 23 years, which eased my transition to the principalship. You see I needed all the help I could get; I was pregnant. My morning sickness was more like "all day sickness" and my hormones, my hormones were like a tornado. So I guess that eased my transition as well, or better yet, the teachers' acceptance. Maybe they felt sorry for me, but I was grateful because everything flowed.

I did a master's degree in educational administration. I feel it was excellent theoretical training. But practice is much different, much different. Things have changed since I did it anyway. But what impacted me as principal is the School of Directors. When you get there, it is

like they open your eyes. I was used to other types of training, where you sit just listening. This training was different. In this program you face reality; they make you face it. The teachers are from within the public-schools, vice-ministers of education, and Ministry of Education directors. The teachers they picked were people who know what is going on. I learned about every detail that goes on in schools, what they do, how they do it, and why they do it. I learned to promote my leadership style, how and what to delegate, and to trust my instinct.

I feel that the School of Directors teaches you about the prestige of the principalship. It shows you to respect the job, never to minimize it. Even if it is a small school, never think less of your career. You are a principal. You are the same as the president of a bank, the CEO of a big company…you run that school and that is important.

Even if I think of it as prestigious, being a principal is not easy. There are 422 students in this school, 225 in the morning, and 197 in the afternoon shift. I get constant calls from the educational district for meetings and to go pick up things once or twice a week. The office is far away, and I have to pay for gas, I wish they called me in less. But I cannot complain, they are supporting me.

I have two weekly meetings with my management team; one on Mondays where we plan for the week and also on Fridays when we evaluate what we did during the week. For example this week we have an activity to raise funds to paint the school and fix that wall back there. Ideas like that come up in those meetings. I do not like to impose myself; that is why I work with my management team.

Just last month we did an evaluation with the teachers. They were evaluating specifically the management team. This evaluation was my idea; I needed to know what they were thinking. The assessment was anonymous and it focused on the administrative aspect of my

principalship. The results were comforting because I felt that my work was making a difference to these teachers. They felt different, respected somehow, because even though I call their attention, I am respectful. Teachers notice it, and they respond to that.

But what has been the hardest for me is the reality our children are facing. I was shocked to see what the community goes through: full houses, a whole family sleeping on a single bed, pregnant teenagers. I had heard about those things but had never seen them up close. And yes, they are not solely on the news. They happen in my school. And these children, they become family, I see them as family. I go to their houses to find out how they are; I get involved… as I said they are my family.

Many of the children in the school do not have official documents. Their parents do not take them to get their birth certificate. I researched why that happens. Simple. The parents do not have their birth certificate either, nor do the grandparents. It is a chain. I try to help them by asking a couple of parents who are lawyers to intervene. Those processes in the DR are tedious and long.

Getting the parents on my side is an everyday challenge. To get them to come in on time, for the children to come with the proper haircut, to be respectful of school premises, are all part of my daily struggles. They are starting to accept the rules. But I need to be firm because if not things go back to the way they were.

It has been a tough year. I had a pregnant 14-year old student because her father raped her. I never got around to understand if it was her father or stepfather. But honestly, how do I come back from that? Parents are supposed to protect their children. And I, I have to deal with that. I try to preserve her integrity, to protect her from the bullying. The bullying of her peers, because they do not understand. Bullying from the parents because they do not want their

children close to this girl. Harassment from the teachers that want me to kick her out and send her to night school. That is what is done. Girls get kicked out and sent to night education. How can I possibly kick her out? Besides the Ministry is against that. Situations like this are not about whether children are learning how to read and write; they are about saving lives. Whether children, parents, or teachers like it or not. She is staying in school. That is the least we can do in this situation. The society that put her in this position now wants to punish her. I do not think it is fair that we punish her; I think she is going through enough.

Children in my school are very vulnerable. Families are verbally abusive and, sometimes, even physically abusive. They come in threatening their kids that they are going to smack them, beat them up. I tell them hitting is not the solution. My advice goes in one ear and out the other. We are working on a school for parents and having talks with psychologists. But this school is too small, parents do not fit, and it is too hot. So, when they come in and when they leave I try to be available and give them advice. A little piece of advice everyday might make a difference.

Being a principal is a lot of responsibility. Everything that goes on here is on me. As a principal, I go into the classrooms as much as I can. That is one of my strengths that I am not an office principal. I am accountable for this school and what happens here pains me. Besides, if something goes wrong, people are not going to say this teacher or that teacher. No. They are going to say in that school with that principal this happened. So, I need to be on top of things. Because as I said, everything that goes on here is on me.

Principal Eight: "Irene: The Educator's Daughter Who Became Principal"

> *"I told my father I am not going to spend a lot of years doing this.*
> *I will pursue my other career. And here I am."*

I have ten brothers and sisters. Six of us are educators. My siblings became educators by vocation, not me. I did not want to be an educator. My father forced me into education because he was an educator. He spent 43 years in education, he even became regional director for the Ministry of Education. At the beginning of my career, I told him that this was not what I wanted to do. Anyways, I had to study education.

I got my initial training in an *Escuela Normal*, in my hometown far away from Santo Domingo. After graduating from the *Escuela Normal*, I went into the public sector as a teacher. I thought I was not going to be in education for a long time; I even told my father that. So, I started studying marketing, and guess what? Thirty years have passed, and I am still here. I did not begin by vocation, but now I just love what I do.

After the *Escuela Normal*, I did my bachelor's degree in education. I spent 22 years as a teacher. I began as an elementary teacher and then as an English teacher. All those years in the classroom gave me the best basis to be a coordinator, understanding the Dominican curriculum. During that time, I did my master's degree in educational administration. I got both my bachelor's and my master's from very prestigious schools in the DR, I feel that made a difference.

I was promoted to pedagogical coordinator and for eight years I was the teacher mentor for the school. In that time, curricular reforms took place; this was a significant advantage for me as principal because I participated in the change process. This is my second year as

principal. Being a principal was not in my plans, yet a friend motivated me to participate in the public contest. I won; he lost. I told him that he left me alone in this. This contest was four years ago, but I had to wait two years because there were not any schools available for me to start as principal that were convenient for me. I was scared on those first few days. I had some experience, but it is not the same when you are the one who is in charge. I felt lonely; leaving my previous school after 22 years was hard.

This school is a new extended-day school. Many students and teachers migrated to this school from a previous one. Starting this school along with beginning my principalship was a great opportunity — a clean slate. I had the chance to create a leadership style, a mission, and a vision for the school. But starting from scratch was also tricky; I was scared.

Over the last two years, I went to the School of Directors. Their training is a plus for my principalship; each module is an incredible learning experience. The leadership module was extremely useful for me. I learned leadership strategies that I put into practice every day. After that, I have a close relationship with my workmates; I try to find consensus; and I meet with my management team and the teachers.

My greatest challenge these past two years is getting teachers to engage and connect to their purpose; for them to do their job, not just for the sake of doing it, instead to work for our students. There is much more to our work than completing the Ministry's documents or complying with the school's schedule. It is about the children; our work is about the children.

Even if fostering a culture of commitment among teachers has been hard, I believe I have made significant progress. For example, I started as principal in November and I asked the pedagogical coordinator if we could repeat the diagnostic evaluation that they gave in August. I needed my own data, my baseline. We found that from the 545 students that we have in this

school, 93 children did not know how to read and write. So, I came up with a plan. Since our school was extended-day and still did not have the lunch assigned, we were only working a half day. Yet, our teachers were on the extended-day payroll.

Consequently, I asked them to stay three times a week with these kids, to help them catch up. And they accepted. The children's parents signed an agreement to bring lunch for their children and pick them up as if it were extended-day. Our plan worked. They learned to read and write before we expected. As a result of this strategy, our percentage of students who fail and repeat grades has lessened significantly.

Even if some parents cooperate, as they did by bringing them lunch every day, there is a long way to go in our society. Most of the students live with their grandparents or uncles. Another significant challenge that I experienced in these two years is punctuality. I dreamt of a school that started sharp at eight in the morning and, with great sacrifice and struggle, I made my dream come true in this school. I still have to make parents understand that extended day is not synonymous with babysitting and that the school is not daycare. They think that when children leave school, they have do not have any more schoolwork, no studying and no homework. I will get there, with hard work and patience, they will realize what an extended-day school entails.

There are things I want to accomplish as principal, but I do not have a lot of time. My 30 years in the education system are coming up, and I want to retire after that. It will be a total of six years as principal. I want to do other things outside the public sector of education in DR. Maybe I could teach in a university, who knows? All I do know is that I want to leave on a high note, still wishing to teach and do things. I do not want to go burnt out; besides, we need to leave space for a newer younger generation.

Principal Nine: "Carmen: The Small-School Principal Who Became

Extended-Day Principal"

"In seven years, I will retire from the educational system.
I will be fifty by then. I will still be young for the labor market."

I am starting my fifth year as principal. My first three years were in a small elementary school of 345 students. But now, I am the principal of a new extended-day 725 student school. Most of the students and teachers from the small school migrated with me to this new one. This school is much bigger, has more students, more teachers, more work hours. It is significantly more challenging for me.

It has been a long road to becoming a principal, but it was my next natural move. I did not always want to be a principal, but I knew that I could do much more from that position. I was a teacher for both the private and public sectors of education. Having been a teacher helps me be a better principal. I know what teachers go through; I can help them because I went through the same issues.

I served as a regional technician for the Ministry of Education for two years. Regional technicians work with teachers as mentors, helping them improve their practices. Since part of my experience as a teacher was in early childhood education, I worked with these teachers in different public-schools of my educational region. After that, I was a pedagogical coordinator for a year, which came naturally to me since it was very similar to being a regional technician. That was a great learning experience. My principal at that time delegated a lot of tasks to me and took me to all the Ministry of Education's meetings and training. So I took it as an internship. I could say that it served as a transition or even an induction process into the principalship.

I studied at an *Escuela Normal* a long time ago and became a teacher. After that training, I went for my Bachelor's Degree in Literature and Philosophy at a private university in Santo Domingo. I did a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics from a prestigious university here. I took all continuing education opportunities offered. I also went to the School of Directors and finished in December. From all of my studies, the School of Directors is by far my best asset. They do exceptional training; it is like they take the principalship of public-schools in the DR and put it into the classroom. They explain everything, all the required documents, all the leadership approaches for dealing with teachers, and all the management strategies as are necessary for leading a public-school in DR.

I am also a lawyer. I studied law in a blended learning university. I became a lawyer because I like to defend people's rights. Besides, my 30 years in the educational system are coming up. I have been doing this for 23 years so far. In seven years, I will retire from the educational system. I will be fifty by then. I will still be young for the labor market, and I want to be ready. I do not practice law though, aside from a couple of real estate contracts. Maybe when I retire, but for now I need to be here in my school, and that takes up a lot of time.

In the past five years, I faced significant challenges as principal. At the beginning of the school year helping the teachers adapt to the extended-day was almost impossible. The extended-day is very demanding both for teachers and for me as principal. Since this is a new school, we did not have a school-code to get the lunch from the Ministry of Education for all the students. Teachers were complaining that the Ministry of Education had yet to change their salary from one shift to an extended-day wage. It was a chaotic situation. When I got the code and consequently the students' lunch, I could not turn it down because I did not have teachers or vice versa. The thing is that I prayed, I prayed hard, and the very same day that I signed the

contract for the school lunch, I got a call from the district that teachers' salaries were adjusted. So, everything worked out. But you can only imagine my stress.

Another challenge that I face daily is tardiness and absences. Every day from the 727 students enrolled at least 100 are absent for different reasons. The main reason is that some children live far away and do not have money for bus fare. Many children are late. But I must say, that one of my significant accomplishments is that tardiness has diminished. Every day from 30 to 50 students miss the morning flag ceremony. I try to be at the door to talk to parents and be aware of what is going on. Sometimes the older students said goodbye to their parents or whoever is bringing them to school and skipped school. That is why I like to be outside watching out. The street that leads to the school is quite dangerous. Last week, one of my students got hit by a car. Thankfully he is ok; it was a great scare though. So, I am on the watch and cannot lead the flag ceremony as much as I would like to because of this. I need to be at the school door vigilant of what happens.

There is delinquency and drugs in this neighborhood, but not as much as in other areas. Our main concern is that there is a lot of witchcraft in this area though. I do not believe in that, because I am a Christian. However, there were a couple of students, brother and sister, who had an altar in their house and got possessed from time to time. The girl fell on the floor and trembled and the boy had rage attacks. If we had a special activity, like a color day for example, we asked the parents if they could stay home because those activities triggered such behaviors.

Also, one of the school janitors performed a "job" on us. That is how spells are called around here "a job." She got mad because we did not allow her to sell things in school. It is against the law, so why would we? For a month the whole staff, who usually gets along, was

fighting, gossiping, and bickering. It was an awful school climate, very different from our general mood. It took her a month to confess that she had done some spell where she put all our names in the freezer. I still do not understand what happened, but last year for a whole month this was a battlefield. She took the names out of the freezer. We prayed together and did a forgiveness exercise. I had to let her go and called the district to report this situation. It was a strange time to say the least.

I do not like firing people; we call it giving them back to the district. I had to report and give back a teacher to the district, just as I did with the janitor. This teacher had a lot of issues, no school nor principal wanted to work with him, yet he had gotten his teaching shift because he had political connections. Oh, how I worked with that man, the time I invested, the effort I put into him becoming a better teacher, I even bought him *chacabanas* [the traditional Dominican shirt], for a uniform. I also got a call from the school district congratulating me because of how much that teacher had improved. However, he did not handle discipline well, and students got the best of him. But one day he lost it, he got physical with one student, and was very angry. It was dangerous to have him in the school, so I reported him to the school district, and he had to leave our school even after all he had accomplished. It was sad to see him go.

My past five years have lights and shadows; triumphs and struggles; but a constant determination to get things done. I am open, I am flexible, but mostly I am a hard worker. Being a principal is a stressful job; I try to do it with grace. Nonetheless, until you have been principal of an extended- day public-school and experienced what I go through every day, even before 8:00 am, you will not know this kind of stress. But what can I say? I love what I do.

Principal Ten: "Crystal: The Teacher Who Became Principal of a

School Without a Staff"

"A psychologist and I inaugurated this school. Not a single teacher."

I started as a teacher when I was 22 years old in a private school. I was there for eight years until I participated in a public contest to get a teaching position at a public-school and I got it. Then, I contested for a second shift and got it as well. You may say I am lucky because I got both my shifts. But that is not the reason. I am fortunate because the principal I had in that school was an excellent leader. I learned so much from her. That is what made me lucky, how much I learned.

I admired her. I was in awe of her leadership, her capacity, and her knowledge. You may think I was star struck, but no. I have endless experiences that validate her, uncountable learnings. She trained us; she made our training her business. For me, continuous education and training are the bases for any profession. Any professional that is not in tune with the changes going on will be outdated, particularly education with the changes in the curriculum.

Going back to my principal, she understood the importance of reflection instead of imposition. For her, it was vital that we understood changes and the possible advantages that may come with them. For example, with the curricular reform in the DR, there came a lot of resistance from teachers to take in the changes. I was part of this resistance. She guided us step by step, with persistence and motivation. With her dedication, I learned the importance of making this new "competencies-based curriculum" my own.

She is not a principal anymore; she is the district's vice-director. She could not stay as principal; she had to move on. Things evolve; I believe in that. Staying static, that "once a

teacher always a teacher" motto is not something that I can accept, or even relate to. If I stop to think about it, she may have had something to do with how I push myself nowadays.

I became vice-principal after the eight years I spent as a teacher. I completed three years in that position. Then I contested for the principal seat and won. I got an offer to be principal of a night school with adults but I turned it down. I was not trained to work with adults; I was trained to work with children. I do not understand how some people take jobs without being trained for them. Anyway, I waited and was then assigned to this school just shy of a week before the school year began on a Friday to be exact, and school started on Monday. I was excited.

I inaugurated this school with the psychologist, just us two. Four hundred eighty-two students enrolled in this brand new extended-day school and not a single teacher. Can you imagine that first day of school? Kids were excited about having a school with a new campus. Parents were eager for their kids to start school, and even more so in an extended-day program. I had nothing to offer them.

You might ask yourself, what did I do? Well, I faced reality. That first day most of the parents came into the school, and I met with them in the lunchroom and told them what was happening. I congratulated them for coming on the first day and bringing their children, not many parents send their kids to school on the first day.

I started my principalship three years ago with an impossible challenge: a new school, 482 students, mad parents, and no staff. I lost ten pounds that first month, because I was under so much stress. I came in early in the morning and left at eight or ten at night; everybody in the community knew me. But what could I do?

All the students' parents were extremely upset, demanding, and awaiting the school year to start. They needed their children to get their lunch with being an extended-day school. The school did not have a school-code, so we could not get the children's lunch. Things work like that in the Ministry of Education. The school needs to have a code to get materials, food, and everything we needed. So, the first day of school there I was, no teachers, no code, no lunch… nothing.

I tell you I think back at that time and I do not know how I made it. I came up with an idea of asking the parents to help. Some parents would help take care of the children until ten in the morning and others would clean the school. We spent a month like that. Then the School District started appointing teachers, first one, then three, and so forth. I assigned the first teachers to the most vulnerable population: the youngest. It was a chaotic school year, to say the least.

In the middle of this madness, I was finishing my Masters' Degree's thesis in educational leadership and management. I guess I was doing two theses at the same time because I had to put everything I knew into practice here. I remember a teacher in my master's saying that "principals need to get things done, if not then they are not principals." So, the school never closed because I needed to get things done. But it cost me. It was a rough period in my life.

I think I am tougher now. I look back and wish I had somebody to accompany me in that process, a mentor maybe. I do think that working with my first principal was a great advantage. She helped me to toughen up. I remember one student who was much older than his grade peers and he offered to slap me. When I went to my principal to tell her what happened, she answered this: "better not let him hit you". And I just said "this is it".

My Portrait: "Mary Francis: The Acting Principal Who Became a

Real Principal While Doing a Ph.D."

"So, I came back. I was a new principal all over again. Except this time around, I had
more confidence, more self-worth, and an ace under my sleeve… I was doing a Ph. D."

I always dreamed of being a teacher. I started teaching in a small English program at age 14. So I guess from early on, I knew education was my thing. I got my bachelor's degree in early childhood education while I worked as an English teacher in a Montessori school. After 11 years as a teacher and the completion of Master's degree in Educational Psychology that I did abroad, I started my first principalship. Later on I received my Master's Degree in Educational Administration from a local University here in Santo Domingo, DR.

My dream was not to become a principal, not at all. My idea was to emulate the bookstore in the movie *You've Got Mail* and develop reading programs for children. But one thing led to another, and I never got around to fulfilling that dream. And there I was, and here I am. I worked in a private school owned and directed by a Montessori teacher who later became my mother in law. She became ill and I took on the job as principal as a means to help her and the business. Being principal with somebody guiding your every step and watching your every move was not rewarding, nor challenging. Better yet, it was oppressive and sad. But I managed to do it, and for the next eight years, I was a pseudo principal or just somebody who took orders. I was an acting principal, not a real a principal.

After eight years, I decided I needed a change. So, I got a job working for a government funded project working with public-school teachers where I was in charge of coordinating teacher training. This was the time when the curricular reforms in the DR were set into motion. I was scared; I did not know anything about that. But I learned. I learned about statutes, laws,

and ordinances that rule Dominican education. I learned about the Dominican curriculum and why it is competencies-based. It was a whole new world. Funny it was so new since I was already a principal and principals are supposed to know these things.

While working on this project, I applied for a Ph.D. program and got accepted. I started studying about leadership, strategies, systems, organizations, and transitions. It felt great. A year into my new job, I went back to being principal. My husband needed me in the school because my mother in law retired. So, I was on my own, a principal for the first time, nobody to give me orders or tell me what to do. Also, I was completely accountable for everything that happened in the school… quite a new feeling for me.

To become a principal in a private school in the DR, you do not have to pass a contest as in the public sector, you just have to have the qualifications, which I did both academically and from my professional experiences. I came back eager for change and enthusiastic about applying all the knowledge from my classes. Besides, I had some confidence in what I had learned about the Dominican education system on that year on my job. I felt I could do it, most of the time.

Four years ago, I began my journey as principal, my real mission, my real principalship. It was a lonely time at the beginning, charged with emotion and anticipation. There was so much I wanted to do; however, I knew I had to respect the transition process. Coincidentally, I was reading a book on transitions for a class in my Ph. D. program. Slowly but surely, I started applying everything I learned about leadership in my work. This process helped me establish my own leadership style, redefine the school culture, develop better communication processes, and start empowering teachers.

Along with the curricular reform came a lot of resistance from teachers. Change can be scary. In my school, things were done the way they were done for the past 30 years. This stability gave teachers security, but this could not hold up anymore. Things needed to change and adjust to what the Ministry of Education was demanding. I would say that has been the greatest challenge in the past four years encouraging teachers to be flexible and lower their guard. It took time, but we are improving.

I remember a time when a district technician who was in charge of the district's private schools came into our school for a training session. We all felt like she came in to supervise and ready for the kill. She was supposed to explain how the new evaluation system worked; instead, she started asking all the teachers questions and putting them on the spot. The teachers became paralyzed. I intervened and eased the situation, yet it was a tense moment. Not only did we not learn anything with her visit, teachers were now even more confused and resistant. I knew I had to do something, so I approached it systemically. I took apart the ordinances and the parts of the curriculum that they needed to know, and I taught. Yes, I did. I developed what one might call a diploma in Dominican curriculum reform. Everybody learned, understood, reflected, and even thanked me.

I work with a privileged population, not necessarily because they go to a private school. Many private schools in the DR also work with vulnerable populations, either with families from low socioeconomic status or those who live dangerous areas. That is not my case. The families that attend my school are from a higher socioeconomic status, so children do not face issues such as paying for bus fare, having to walk to school through dangerous streets, going home alone, or eagerly awaiting a school lunch. My students are privileged, and I let them know that. My work with the public-schools through this research has shown me the reality

most children in the DR face. Thus, I try to instill a culture of gratitude and appreciation among my students; there is nothing worse than taking things for granted.

I think my most significant assets as principal are three. First, my teaching experience I was in the classroom for more than 11 years and I know what goes on there. Besides, from time to time, I go back and teach a class with each group of students in my school and that helps me stay grounded. Second, is that being a Ph.D. student while beginning my more recent years as a principal helped me understand leadership approaches, transitions, organizational strategies, and, most importantly, kept me in a constant process of reflection. Finally, the third asset, which I think is the most significant, is that I love what I do. I love the feeling of being in a school, working with teachers, with students, and even with parents.

I know that I am privileged to be a principal. I think any position from where you can lead and make a difference is a privilege. You might think it is funny, however I constantly tell myself what Uncle Ben told Peter Parker in *Spider-Man*: "With great power comes great responsibility." I know being a principal is a lot of responsibility, I know I am accountable, but I love what I do, and I work hard. That is my trick.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presented the portraits of the principals who participated in the study. Through portraiture, I documented principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. I used first person to tell principals' stories of their pathways to the principalship and first years' experiences as a means to honor their voices and use direct quotes from the data. These portraits present every principal's background, their struggles, their triumphs, and their strengths. I conclude the chapter by presenting my portrait.

The principals' portraits in this chapter provide context for the reader as a means to better understand the next chapters. Chapter Five will highlight the findings of the study. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

"I felt isolated; now, not so much. It was difficult in the beginning. I did not have support. A very difficult situation; it was like swimming against the current. I was left alone. Earning their respect was difficult. It took a lot of strategies."
(Linda, Principal One)

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to explore Dominican public-school novice principals' early career experiences and how they identified their needs entering the principalship. Data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and school observations. This chapter presents my findings after analyzing the data collected, which serve to answer the study's research questions:

The overarching research question for this study was: *How do Dominican public-school principals describe their early career experiences?*

To further understand novice principals' experiences and needs, this study sought to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What do Dominican principals early career experiences reveal about their needs in preparing for and carrying out their early years in the principal role?

2. How do novice principals describe their pathway to the principalship and their first experiences in the role?

3. How do novice principals describe their role as a K-12 public-school principal?

Data were coded following Saldaña's (2013) First and Second Cycle Coding as it allowed for a thorough and emergent analysis process. Through First and Second Cycle Coding, I was able to search for explanations and evidence of principals' experiences and needs entering the

principalship from the data collected. I sent participants their interview's transcript, the

emergent codes, and themes of the analysis for member-checking.

In the first section of this chapter, I present a review of participants' context, participant

demographics, and school demographics. I presented participants' profiles in Chapter Four

through detailed portraits; hence this chapter does not include vignettes or additional

descriptions of study participants. The portraits in Chapter Four allowed me to document

principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals.

The second section of this chapter presents the themes and sub-themes of my analysis.

Table 1 presents the themes, subthemes, and categories that emerged from the data. The first

main theme, *Involved in Everything*, includes two subthemes: (a) *Sharing Opinions:

Management Teams* and (b) *Finding Balance: Instruction and management*.

The second main theme, *Swimming Against the Current,* is divided into three categories

the individual, the collective, and the system. The first category, the individual, consists of two

sub-themes: (a) *My Experiences Impacted Me* and (b) *Tough Times.* The second category, the

collective, includes two themes: (a) *Becoming Family* and (b) *A Time of Resistance*. The third,

and last, category, the system, includes two subthemes: (a) *A Transition* and (b) *From Principal

to Principal*.

Table 1

Themes, Categories, and Subthemes

Themes	Category	Subthemes
Involved in Everything		Sharing Opinions: Management Teams Finding Balance: Instruction and Management
Swimming Against the Current	The Individual	My Experiences Impacted Me Tough Times
	The Collective	Becoming Family A Time of Resistance

| The System | A Transition |
| | From Principal to Principal |

Review of Participants' Context

In previous chapters, I present Dominican educational context and current educational scenario; however, in this section I provide a brief review to better understand the findings. The Dominican educational system is divided into 18 educational regions and 109 districts (*Relación de Regionales y Distritos Educativos*, n.d.) [Relation of Regionals and School Districts, n.d.]. This study recruited participants from primary and secondary public-schools in educational region 15 and its six districts within the capital, Santo Domingo, DR. Educational region 15 was proposed as the focus of this study because its school districts are in the center of Santo Domingo which is the largest urban area in the country.

Ten principals of public primary and secondary schools in Educational Region 15 with one to five years on the job participated in the study. Table 2 presents demographic information for principals in the study. There is a variation in principals' academic background, as well as in their levels of attainment (bachelor's and master's degrees). Principals also present differences in whether they attended the School of Directors or not. Half of the principals worked in the educational system for 20 years or more. Pseudonyms were assigned to ensure participants' confidentiality.

Table 2:

Principal Demagraphics

Sex	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Attended School of Directors	Years in Education	Years as Principal

Linda	F	School Administration and Supervision	School Administration	No	20	3
Karl	M	Modern Languages / Law	School Administration	Yes	5	5
Ellen	F	Psychology	Family Therapy	No	1	1
Irma	F	Education	School Administration	No	10	5
Beth	F	Education	In process: History	No	20	1
Maria	F	Education	School Administration	No	30	8 months
Ana	F	Education	School Administration	Yes	8	1
Irene	F	Education	School Planning and Management	Yes	26	2
Carmen	F	Education / Law	Applied Linguistics	Yes	23	5
Crystal	F	Education	School Administration and Leadership	No	14	3

The extended-day school in the DR started in the 2011-2012 *(La Jornada Escolar Extendida es Asumida como Política de Estado* [Extended-Day Schooling is Taken as a Public Policy], 2016). The intention for this initiative was to aid in family budget since students have breakfast, a snack, and lunch in school. Table 3 presents demographic information of principals' schools, whether extended-day or two shift, primary or secondary, and the number of students per school.

Table 3

School Demographics

Type of School	School Level	Number of Students

Linda	Extended-day	Secondary	355
Karl	Extended-day	Secondary	545
Ellen	Two-shifts	Primary	630
Irma	Two-shifts	Primary	388
Beth	Two-shifts	Primary	1338
Maria	Two-shifts	Secondary	714
Ana	Two-shifts	Primary	422
Irene	Extended-day	Primary	545
Carmen	Extended-day	Primary	725
Crystal	Extended-day	Primary	482

Themes and Sub Themes from an Analysis of the Data

Table 4 presents each research question along with relevant themes and subthemes from the analysis. To illustrate each subtheme, I present participant evidence, which are NVivo codes from the data. Each theme and subtheme are further analyzed and discussed in this section, including key points, and the presentation of direct quotes for support.

Table 3:

Research Questions, Themes, and Subthemes associated with Participant Evidence

Research Question	Themes	Category	Sub-Themes	Participant Evidence
SQ3: How do novice principals describe their role as a K-12 public-school principal?	Involved in Everything		Sharing Opinions: Management Teams	"We (management teams) handle everything that has to do with the School"

SQ2: How do novice principals describe their pathway to the principalship and their first experiences in the role?		The Individual	Finding Balance: Instruction and Management	"You need to find a balance, because if the managerial aspect is going wrong, the pedagogical will go wrong; and if the pedagogical goes wrong, the managerial will go wrong"
			My Experiences Impacted Me	"If you do not have teaching experience, there are things in the school that you will not understand"
			Tough Times	"I went through tough times in the beginning, very rough"
RQ: How do Dominican public-school principals describe their early career experiences?	Swimming Against the Current	The Collective	Becoming Family	"One becomes like family of these children, they pain me"
			A Time of Resistance	"In the beginning, teachers showed resistance"
SQ1: What do Dominican principals early career experiences reveal about their needs in preparing for and carrying out their early years in the principal role?		The System	A Transition	"We need to have an induction process; we need direct accompanying"
			From Principal to Principal	"Spending time with principals is good for me, because you gather knowledge from them"

Theme 1: Involved in Everything

The first theme *Involved in Everything* captures how participants broadly described the role of the principal. During the interviews, principals defined their role, their tasks, the characteristics of a good principal, and some of their day to day activities. Two subthemes emerged: *Sharing Opinions: Management Teams* and *Finding Balance: Instruction and Management.*

Most principals gave a general definition of the principalship and how they embody their role. For Linda "the principal is a person who ensures the proper functioning of the school." Karl and Irma discussed how principals have to look over everything that happens in the school. Beth agreed by stating that "the principal has to be involved in everything, know everything. And what you do not know, you should investigate because you have to give answers."

Principals in the study believe they are accountable for their schools functioning properly and offered a description of the responsibilities principals take on. Ellen expressed "in the end, you are accountable for everything that happens in the school." Principals are responsible for "managing teachers, support staff (janitors), and administrative staff. See how they work, guide them, and see that everybody does their job, and look for strategies so they can do it better" (Maria). Ana adds on by discussing difficulty in finding balance between management and instruction and how principals are accountable for both.

Principals described taking care of the school climate as an important part of their role (Ellen). For Carmen, one way of fostering a positive school climate is having a short daily meeting with her staff. "Every day we do a reflection in the morning before we start our activities."

All ten principals discussed supervising instruction, walking around the school, engaging in feedback with teachers about their teaching, and conducting periodic meetings with teachers. As part of their role, principals talked about dealing with the school district's demands, working with the Ministry of Education's documents "making sure teachers implement them" (Crystal), and follow up on teachers implementing the curricular reform. Crystal explained that

one of her strengths is complying with the documents that rule the Dominican educational system.

Other principals, such as Ana, discussed working through the demands of the Ministry in handing in the solicited documents and how they are developing them. These documents refer to the Educational Project for the School (PEC, acronym in Spanish), school's improvement plan, annual operative plan, and other documents which should be developed with the community's participation (teachers, parents, and students). Ana explained that in meetings with the management team she works through the documents. For example, they are currently working on their school's PEC and she explained "we discuss and reach consensus" for its development. She did not discuss integrating teachers; however, Carmen did. "(Developing a PEC) takes time, because you have to work with teachers, directly with teachers. Because I believe that things have to be done to see the real issues, not to fulfill a requisite."

Principals in the study shared other responsibilities that they take on as principals:

a) "Monthly meetings with the staff (teachers and administrative staff) to socialize the monthly calendar" (Linda).

b) "Listen to students, to see their strengths and their weaknesses. And also know that they make mistakes, and, as the adult, you have to know how to tolerate them and find ways to help them" (Karl).

c) "Create an oasis for children" (Ellen).

d) "Take care of the infrastructure" (Irma), "the school's equipment" (Beth) and "keeping the school clean" (Beth & Carmen).

e) Encourage and motivate staff's growth. "Find the way if I see that someone can do something, support them so that they can grow" (Maria).

f) "Revise teachers' lesson plans" (Irene).

g) "Follow up on teachers being on time and follow the school's schedule" (Carmen).

h) "Work with the documents that rule the Dominican educational system, make them be effective, help teachers make them their own, and put them to practice (in their school)" (Crystal).

All principals discussed their responsibility in student learning processes. For example, Ellen talked about how she used the results from the national third-grade diagnostic evaluation to improve instruction in her school. "(After seeing the results), we immediately started with the improvement plan oriented towards literacy in the first cycle of primary education (first, second, and third grades)."

Another example of accountability in student learning processes is Irene. She explains that when she got to the school, she repeated the internal diagnostic evaluation that teachers gave at the beginning of the school year when she took on the principalship in November. "When we repeated it, we concluded that 93 students from first to third grade could not read nor write." She continued to explicate how she developed a literacy plan and used the afternoons to work with these kids. "And we (voluntary teachers and me) worked with those children until they could read and write." Irene explained that after they did that, grade repetition in her school decreased.

Some principals discussed staff evaluation processes in schools as part of their role. Ana provided an example by recounting how in her school she conducted an anonymous assessment for teachers to evaluate the school's management team, particularly her role as principal. "We prepared an evaluation where the whole management team was assessed, basically me since I am the newest one." The assessment was aimed towards the strengths that the staff foresees and

how the value the work that has been done up to date. Ana shared how she felt anxious in the beginning and relieved when she read the results.

Principals shared some of the characteristics that they believe are essential for the principalship, such as promoting teamwork (Karl); being flexible (Ellen); being punctual (Irma); being open, positive, and hardworking (Beth); being proud of your role (Ana); good interpersonal relationships (Carmen); and being a trainer (Crystal). Additionally, principals talked about working with parents, integrating with the community, and dealing with the issues that the community faces.

Sharing opinions: Management teams. During the interviews, principals discussed their management teams. Management teams are composed by the principal, vice-principal (if there is one), academic coordinator, and school psychologist (Weinstein et al., 2014). Some principals, such as Ellen, stated that management teams: "are in charge of managing everything that has to do with the school." Crystal recognizes the importance of having good relationships with their team because it impacts school climate: "Excellent (describing her relationship with the management team). You know that if the management team trembles, teachers know."

Six principals expressed that management teams are involved in decision-making processes. Linda stated: "We (management team) have a meeting where we share our opinions, I try to respect other people's ideas" and Crystal said: "I do not make any decisions without talking to my management team." Ana explained how the management team in her school works:

Every Monday and Friday, I have a meeting with my management team, where I write down here in this notebook what we talk about. Every Monday, we program what we are

going to do during the week. 'For this week we have this and that.' We write it down here on this notebook which is destined for the management team's meetings.

She continued to explain how on Fridays they assess the week's progress and the goals they set each Monday. This management team includes a vice-principal who has been in the school for 23 years. She expressed that his presence has been of great help in getting to know the community and the teachers, which served as a transition process for her.

Irma stated that her biggest asset as a principal is how she works with her management team: "Teamwork is one of our greatest strengths. And we can say that aloud because that has helped us. It has strengthened us." That is not Maria' case, who has been on the job for eight months:

I found myself with this new experience, a non-functional management team. I am trying to rebuild it. It has been a great challenge for me. I come from a school where everybody was trained, everybody was organized, everybody got along, everybody had their role clear. We shared experiences and made plans of where we wanted to get to with the teachers, all together as a team. But here, I found a team that does not even know what their role is. I had to start from scratch and give them the manuals to form a pedagogical group, and even then, they do not understand.

Principals in the study openly discussed their management teams as being helpful and having a positive influence in their principalship. In Maria's case, she recognizes the importance of these teams even if she has not had the positive experiences Ana, Linda, Karl, and Crystal have had. As principals reported, management teams are an important part of the principalship in public-schools in DR.

Finding balance: Instruction and management. Principals offered several explanations on why the balance between instruction and management is an issue for them. For example, Irene expressed: "There is an imbalance. However much I try to achieve balance, the managerial part demands more." Crystal talked about how principals complain that management is more demanding than instruction: "look, right now that (finding balance) is every principal's complain because there is more pressure on us with managerial tasks, such as money transferences" and paperwork. While Ana understands that both areas are important parts of her role: "You need to find a balance because if the managerial aspect is going wrong, the pedagogical will go wrong; and if the pedagogical goes wrong, the managerial will go wrong."

Other principals, such as Linda achieve balance, but because they have somebody (an accounting student) to help them in the management tasks:

I reach a balance between instruction and management, but I fail in what has to do with school administration. Some principals know the classrooms but have weaknesses in management. Most principals disengage from instruction. I believe that principals should not disconnect 100% from instruction. If you go to the Operations Manual from (2013), what you have to do as the principal does not involve teaching, rather management. In my case, balance is not hard, because we have somebody to help us with that.

For principals, management takes up much more time than they wished. "My tasks are more inclined to management, every day more to management. But I did not study business administration, nor am I an accountant" (Ellen). Principals struggle to prioritize instruction, such as Beth: "Instruction is more important" in referring to how to balance instruction and management. Irene expressed that to engage in instructional practices: "If I go to the classroom,

and I tell them (staff and secretaries) not to disturb me, whoever comes. If they cannot wait; they can leave. It is my only way to focus."

Theme 2: Swimming Against the Current

The second theme that emerged is *Swimming Against the Current* which reflects the experiences in the pathway to the principalship and their first years on the job. Principals' responses followed three categories. Some answers had to do with principals individually such as their experiences, their feelings, and their challenges on their way to the job and on the job. Other experiences, the collective, had to do with other groups like teachers, parents, and the community. Lastly, principals talked about experiences that had to do with the educational system in the DR, particularly support groups, induction processes, and mentoring.

The individual. Principals expressed personal experiences, personal struggles and emotions that they experienced themselves, thus revealing their personal feelings, trials, and challenges. These challenges sometimes depend on the type of school they lead, their academic background, or their professional experiences. These individual experiences show their feelings on the pathway to the principalship and as novice principals. While discussing their story, mainly their previous professional experience and academic background, principals reveal some of their needs, particularly the things they wish they would have known before entering the principalship and the support they expected.

My experiences impacted me. While talking to principals, I could sense how they regarded their past experiences and academic training as having great impact on how they play out their role. Their own principals inspired some of the principals in this study when they were teachers, such as Crystal. "I thank God for my principal, even though I spend a short time with her, she helped me when I was vice-principal. I learned a lot because she had great leadership

and a lot of training." As for Linda "one of the principals I had before being principal myself had an impact on me. I learned a great deal from that person, particularly planning and organizing."

As for teaching experience, many reported as having the most significant impact on the way they conduct themselves in the role. For most of the principals, such as Carmen, Linda, Irma, and Beth, a principal that has not been in the classrooms is not suited for the principalship. They regard their experiences in the classroom as relevant, humbling, and overall making them a better principal. Some of the reactions to their teaching experiences are:

a) "Having been a teacher has had an impact on how I am as principal because you need to know what it is you are going to lead" (Linda).

b) "It (teaching experience) helped first to understand that I have weaknesses" referring to how now she understands her own teachers (Irma).

c) "(Experiences in the classroom) have an impact on how I am as a principal. Because if you do not have the experience as a teacher, there are things that happen in schools that you will not understand. Some situations come up that if you do not have teaching experience, you will not be able to find alternatives or search for strategies" (Beth).

d) "My teaching experience helps me as a principal because I identify with teachers' needs. Also, you can help teachers when a student has difficulty because I went through them. I have the experience, and it has meant a lot" (Carmen).

e) "Having been in the classroom makes me a better principal because I am empathic with my teachers" (Crystal).

In terms of academic background, while talking about their first years on the job and what they wished they had learned, principals discussed the lack of training in leadership

strategies, management, and practical aspects of the job. Beth expressed "I need training in leadership, in leadership strategies."

Karl and Ellen discussed how they came in without training in management and leadership, and how they started learning while on the job. Ellen expressed that she would appreciate training in school administration and leadership. As for Karl, he attended the School of Directors and he talked about how this experience changed his practice. "The School of Directors was excellent for me. It was an opportunity."

Many principals attended the school of Directors (see table 2); others such as Beth is waiting for that moment. "I need training in management specifically. I want my turn for the School of Directors to come up." Some of the benefits that the principals who attended recall, are:

a) "You learn about public-schools. What you learn there, you can put into practice" (Karl).

b) "It is excellent… they (teachers in the School of Directors) make you face reality… You learn about the schools' minimum details, what they do and how they do it, which is the most important" (Ana).

c) "For me, it was a plus because I had just started as principal. I was lucky I got picked. Every module is an incredible learning experience because there are many topics that you learn and discuss that are part of the Ministry of Education, but that you just do not get… for me, the module on leadership was excellent" (Irene).

Most of the experiences the principals recalled portrayed their learnings in the School of Directors as important for their practice. In addition, how attending that preparation program early on in their principalship was even better, since they heard some of their classmates who

were principals with more time on the job saying they wished they had learned that before. Irene said that she "would recommend every principal to go to the School of Directors."

Tough times. Principals expressed different feelings starting their principalship, most of them had to do with the responsibility and the loneliness of the role. Carmen expressed that people should know that the principalship "is a very stressful job, very stressful." Principals discussed their feelings of loneliness, isolation, and rejection:

a) "I felt isolated; now, not so much. It was difficult in the beginning. I did not have support. A very difficult situation; it was like swimming against the current. I was left alone. Earning their respect (school staff) was difficult. It took a lot of strategies" (Linda).

b) "Workmates steer clear from you. They look at you differently" (Beth).

c) "They kept their distance. They did not see me as their workmate; they saw me as somebody who came in to supervise and boss around. I felt lonely" (Maria).

d) "On the first few days, I felt lonely. I think more than loneliness; it was nostalgia. Because I was leaving my place of 22 years with my workmates. Then, coming here, to start from scratch, to observe everybody, to get to know them. I came with my own fears" (Irene).

Depending on principals' personal experiences on the role, how and when they started the principalship different feelings came up. For example, Maria discussed her feelings of impotence, dealing with teachers' and her management team's resistance. "I came here and others wanted my seat. So, they have not been of much help."

Crystal talked about how she started the school year with no staff, just her, 482 students, and a psychologist: "I went through rough times in the beginning, very rough. I lost ten pounds

that first month." She continued to talk about how much stress she was going through and the different strategies she put into practice to start up the school year until she was appointed teachers. Her strategies ranged from asking parents to help out in the classrooms and with cleaning the school. She managed to maintain the school open for students those first days, but it took a toll on her. "I did not sleep. I lived here, the whole community knows me. I left at 8:00 or 10:00 at night. When I went home, I thought to myself, dear God what am I going to do?"

Other feelings arise when dealing with students' vulnerability. Ana, while referring to handling the bullying that her 14-year-old pregnant student who was raped by her father was enduring, she expressed: "it is not easy, but I have to do it." She talked about what it took for her to defend this girl's integrity and the feelings of impotence that that situation generated in her.

The collective. Principals discussed how others saw them and how that impacts their role. Most principals express that they promote openness in their relationships with their students and staff. Linda reveals that "students trust her." As for Karl believes that "teachers see me as a workmate and students as someone who can accompany them." For Irene, keeping everybody happy is the greatest challenge:

> You have to be willing to pay the price. If you get to please everyone… Of course, you
> do not work alone, you have to have the community in your favor. But rules and norms
> cannot be negotiated. Otherwise, everything becomes a disaster.

Principals talked about many experiences that include other groups. The first group is the community integrated by the school's neighbors, parents, and teachers. The second group is the teachers, which represent a challenge for principals, particularly their resistance to change.

Becoming family. While recounting their first years' experiences on the job,

principals discuss the community and the impact it has on their practice. Principals

struggle with parents, families, and neighbors. Many of the principals discussed the

vulnerability of their school's area and how it influences their students. Such issues

ranged from dangerous streets, to vices, drugs, and extreme poverty.

One of the main concerns that principals present is parents who are absent. "We here

have to be mother and father, all of the team that works here, we need to cover the weaknesses

that they have at home and that we can cover. We do that without hesitation. And that is our

day to day" (Karl). Karl discussed that mainly while working with adolescents, he needs to

listen to them since this is an awkward stage for students.

Beth talked about how dangerous the school's street is and how one of her students got

hit by a car. "He could have been killed, but nothing major happened." She discussed how the

school's surroundings are filled with drugs, violence, and vices and how most families are

dysfunctional. She believes the low socio-economic status is one of the leading causes.

My greatest challenge is the integration of the community, the inclusion of the family.

For several reasons, but the strongest is the socio-economic situation. It is hard. Parents

that leave at four or five in the morning and get home at ten or midnight. Children who

come to school, seven or eight years old, carrying the key to their house so they can get in

when they leave school.

Ana talked about how shocking it was to see the trials the community faces, particularly

her students. She regards them as family. When I spoke to her, she even said that she had to

play it safe because she parked her car outside. She said that, although she had heard about

such situations, nothing like seeing them up close.

The most significant experience that I endured as the principal is facing the reality, crashing into the reality of the community, seeing the reality of our children — pregnant girls, family crowding, where a whole family sleeps in one bed. Yes, I had heard of that, but nothing like seeing it up close. You become the family of these children; they pain me. Adapting to the reality of this sector, to the reality of these children, to the reality of their parents is the toughest challenge.

Ellen discussed how parents in her community respect the school and value that a religious congregation runs the school. Although parents respect the school, they sometimes do not cooperate with children's processes. "This is a very dangerous area, generally in these vulnerable zones, there are a lot of drugs around here. But what saves us is that the people who sell and consume drugs have their children here (attending the school). And so, they do not want their children to follow that and they protect us."

The parent associations in public-schools (APMAE, acronym in Spanish) have a lot of power in decision-making processes in schools. However, even if APMAEs work for schools, principals reported different strategies that they put into practice to integrate the community and have the APMAEs on their side.

a) "I tell parents that the doors are always open for them… The community is responding better to me. Because when I got here, I thought that they were going to go on strike" (Ana).

b) "I do a lot of activities and in each activity, I integrate the community, the school board, the parent association, and the churches. Here we have Catholic churches and protestant churches; I am open to them. The school is open for them. I cannot complain" (Carmen).

c) "I have the support of the community. I got it through having meetings with them. I ask them for things, but I make it easy on them as well… I have parents that help, excellent parents. But just like that, I have careless parents that do not want to get involved; they do not want to support. When the parents do not commit to their children's education, the burden falls on the school" (Crystal).

A time of resistance. The DR is undergoing change and reform in its educational system. Principals see this process as a challenge that has put on additional demands on their role. Linda states:

All this change has been a challenge, a big one and it still is. We have a lot to grow, a long way to go. It does not happen overnight. We still have a couple of years to work on this. As for my teachers, I handle these changes in the process of accompaniment, of dialogue, of raising awareness constantly, constantly.

Most principals express that there was resistance among teachers, but as time progresses, it diminishes. They see the curricular reform as positive, yet feel accountable for how teachers react to it, like Karl: "The education sector in DR has many changes going on. They are good. Change begins with the person leading the team." Other principals discuss how they see change:

a) "I see that teachers are working on it" (Irma).

b) "It has been a time of resistance, of change, of teacher resistance. But now thank God teachers are more aware. They have taken it in (change) as a challenge" (Maria).

c) "Resistance comes. I mean if I have been doing the same thing for ten years, it is difficult for me to make a change. My advantage is that I participated in these changes. I was part of the curricular reform, so I am familiar with it" (Irene).

d) "In the beginning, teachers showed resistance, because the grade-book was too long"

(Carmen).

Regardless of the resistance, some teachers show, principals value the new curriculum. Maria expressed that "each child will be evaluated according to their competencies because no two students are alike." She believes that this competencies-based curriculum works with students' strengths, rather than trying to make everybody fit a standard.

The system. The principals interviewed for this study work in Dominican public-schools and are ruled by the Operations Manual for Public-Schools (2013). These principals expressed many concerns about the educational system and the Ministry of Education. Maria and Crystal were called in as principals just a few days before school started. Irene and Carmen started the school year in an extended-day school without lunch for their students. As for Crystal, she started the school year without staff, just one psychologist. Ana expressed that "the school district demands a lot of things, but sometimes you feel like they are not organized… and the Ministry is not paying their share. The school needs painting, that wall is breaking, and the school has mold."

While discussing their experiences both preparing for and on the job, principals talked about what they would have liked or what they needed. Two subthemes emerged: the first, *A Transition,* and, the second, *From Principal to Principal*. Both of these subthemes have to do with the educational system in the DR.

A transition. Principals who participated in the study reported the need for a transition, an induction process and commented on how they would benefit from having a mentor. Drawing from participants' stories, some of the principals found out about their new position just a few days before school started. One of them, Maria, was given the

key to the school by the former principal, she says "an induction process would have been much better." And, Irene reports she had no transition. She continues to describe this process:

We need more follow up from the Ministry. There are moments in where I see there is more demand than follow up. They only see the results, but do not come to see where we need real help. That is why having a mentor, someone who pushes us would be good. For example, they give you a school and they leave you. We should have an induction process, accompanying from a district or regional technician. Well, she was designated, I will assign her a mentor for a month for example. I asked for it, and they told me I did not need it. That would have been important for my transition. Principals need mentors. Highly qualified mentors, not people that get their job because of politics.

When discussing what they would have wanted, an induction process came up for Ellen, Beth, Maria, Irene, and Carmen. Ellen expressed how she thought the mentoring should start before starting the principalship, drawing from her own experience and the transition process, she was able to have with the former principal of her school.

I say this because for me it was valuable that the principal who was leaving could accompany me in these first months. We discussed processes as they were. A transition, because when I talk to other principals, they have not had that.

Principals express a shared feeling of needing an induction course when they begin, such as Carmen and Crystal. Other principals express they rely on the school district for support. Ana states that she "feels accompanied by the school district" as for Maria feels that "the school district director has to support her and that she received support from them."

From principal to principal. Principals who have support groups or principal networks, as called in the DR, value them. Those who do not participate in one, such as Karl, find it valuable: "Having a network would be beneficial. It would be of great value. When I started, in the absence of knowledge, I went for the teachers' knowledge. They always shared their knowledge and showed commitment to the school."

Principals regard their networks as an opportunity to engage with other principals, "talk from principal to principal," as Ellen stated, and learn from them. These principals, who have networks, regard sharing their experiences and listening to others as beneficial for their practice.

a) "We meet from time to time as a network and so many things come up, that you see strengths and you can inquire about good practices that you did not know about" (Ellen).

b) "We have a support network. We are very close. It helps me a lot. We socialize, look for alternatives. We talk about things that have worked out for us" (Beth).

c) "Spending time with principals is good for me because I can take learnings from them" (Maria).

d) "We are doing well because there (network) we share our experiences" (Irene).

Principals value spending time with other principals. For example in the School of Directors, Ana regards that experience as valuable because she learned from other principals with more experience.

It is not only what they teach you, it is what you share. Sharing rich experiences of other school's realities that other principals talk about. Because in the School of Directors, the experiences, the coping, the day to day, because they set you up in groups of three. While talking to those principals, I have seen that reality here.

Summary

The principals who participated in the study talked openly about their experiences entering the principalship and on their first years on the job. Principals described their role, their multiple tasks, and who they share it with. In the DR there are management teams that take on the school's responsibilities along with the principal. Also, principals talked about their trials in achieving a balance between management and instruction. Although there were both differences and commonalities in their academic background, professional experience, and school context, most principals agree on the importance of their role.

As principals discussed their experiences, they expressed different situations that happened to them individually such as their feelings and their stories. Consistent with the literature, novice principals experience feelings of isolation and loneliness. As for their training and professional background, principals regard teaching experience as having an impact on their role. Moreover, they expressed a lack of training in leadership. Yet, those who attended the School of Directors, report it as a valuable learning experience and recommend it for everybody else. The principals in the study who have not attended would appreciate participating in that preparation program.

In terms of experiences that have to do with others, the collective, dealing with teachers and parents are the primary concerns. For principals, teachers taking on the curricular reform has been a challenge. Teachers showed resistance, which demanded principals to be strategical. As for the community and parents participating in school processes, principals express that it is a challenge and a daily struggle.

The community, parents and children's reality, is a challenge for principals. Even if principals come from different schools and different contexts, having parents participate is a

common problem for all of them that they face daily. As such, principals expressed their concern for how vulnerable the areas where the schools are located are.

Other experiences have to do with the system. Principals would appreciate a transition process, an induction process from the Ministry and mentors to accompany them in the first stage of their principalship. Some of the principals participate in support groups and express that they are helpful. Principals who do not have a support group, believe they would benefit from participating in them.

The purpose of this chapter was to present the study's findings along with the research questions, themes, and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. These themes and sub-themes are supported with quotes from participants' interviews. Chapter 6 presents a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

"Resistance comes. I mean if I have been doing the same thing for ten years, it is difficult
for me to make a change. My advantage is that I participated in these changes.
I was part of the curricular reform, so I am familiar with it."
(Irene, Principal Eight)

The purpose of this final chapter is to discuss the findings presented in Chapter Five,

seeing the current research on novice principals, principal leadership and the Principal and

Building Leader Framework developed by Reeves and McNeill (2017). I first present how

emergent themes related to recent research. I then examine how participants' responses answer

the research questions. Next, I present the implications for practice arising from the analysis of

my data, which I believe may inform public policy on the training and development of novice

principals in Latin America and the Caribbean. Lastly, I present some recommendations for

future research, as well as a summary of the study.

Theme 1: Involved in Everything

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis is *Involved in Everything,* a phrase

used by principals in the study to describe their role. In this section, I present the role of the

principal through the Principal and Building Leader Framework developed by Reeves and

McNeill (2017), current research on principals, the current educational context in the DR, and

the findings from the study. Then I look into the two subthemes that emerged from the

principal's role: *Sharing Opinions: Management Teams* and *Finding Balance: Instruction and*

Management.

During the interviews, principals described their role broadly, like Linda who says "the

principal is a person who ensures the proper functioning of the school" and Beth expressed that

"the principal has to be involved in everything." In the DR the principal's role is explained in the Organic Law of Education 66-97. Principals are the highest authority of a school, responsible for schools' functioning and its direction. The general law states that principals are in charge of foreseeing that the Ministry of Education's dispositions are met, which entails complying with the laws and statutes of the Dominican educational system.

The Role of the Principal through the Principal and Building Leader Framework

Research on principals describes their role as multifaceted, as described by this study's participants. Principals are considered personnel managers, student managers, community influencers, school's resources advocate, and financial manager (Lynch, 2012). The role of the principal has increased in complexity in the last decades (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2017) taking on the major responsibilities principals have in schools concerning safety, management, efficacy, and overall school organization (Tubbs et al., 2011).

The Reeves-McNeill (2017) framework is a useful way to organize the various roles and responsibilities currently associated with the principalship. Reeves and McNeill's (2017) framework describes the principalship according to five domains: (a) results, (b) leadership, (c) systems, (d) processes, and (e) capacity. Some of the tasks that fall under these categories pertain to the other themes that emerged from the data analysis, yet I will present the five domains in this section, contrasting them to the current literature, the Dominican context, and to the findings from the study. Since the Principal and Building Leader Framework (Reeves & McNeill, 2017) is grounded in US and international research, this comparison may serve as a basis to define principal leadership in the DR.

Results. The results domain accounts for local student learning objectives and psychological, emotional, and social growth targets as well as part of the principals'

responsibilities; it refers to a principal's accountability (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). Bush (2011) posits schools are driven by results and principals are accountable for these results. Principals are described as decisive and accountable for student learning outcomes (Gurr et al., 2005; Kwan & Walker, 2009; Rammer, 2007; Shue et al., 2012). According to Gonzalez (2006), in the DR principals are responsible for ensuring the quality of education of their students. Ellen expressed "in the end, you are accountable for everything that happens in the school." The conclusion is that principals are aware of their accountability and the importance of their role in their school; however, principals do not relate this accountability directly to student learning outcomes.

Governments hold principals accountable for school improvement and student test results (Starr, 2011). In the DR in 2014, the Dominican Institute of Evaluation and Investigation of Quality Education (IDEICE, acronym in Spanish) developed the standards for teaching performance for both teachers and principals. These standards respond to the Ministry of Education's (MINERD) ten-year plan 2008-2018's fourth policy, which is the assessment of educational quality. Principals' standards are organized to respond to principals' core role: administering teaching and learning processes. These standards do not suggest principals' accountability in student learning outcomes as measured in national standardized large scale assessments (LSA), rather they respond to other aspects of principals' role. IDEICE's standards coincide with the description of the principal's role provided by the Reeves and McNeill (2017) framework. However, the Reeves-McNeill framework emphasizes principals' accountability on students' results.

Although in the DR principals are responsible for quality instruction, there is no systematic accountability process that links principals to students' results on LSAs. The

Ordenanza 1-2016 [Ordinance 1-2016] explains and regulates these assessments in the DR, the principals' role is not mentioned in this ordinance, nor is it connected to students' results. Principals' responsibility is implied in including students' results in the school's improvement plan, which coincides with Keith's (2011) ideas on evidence-based decision making. For Keith, principals need to make informed decisions to prioritize their demands, which is what is suggested principals do with the results of LSAs.

Although not considered in Ordinance 1-2016, all the principals that participated in the study discussed their accountability in student learning processes. For example, Ellen discussed how she used the LSA's results from the third-grade diagnostic evaluation to improve instruction in her school. "We immediately started with the improvement plan oriented towards literacy in the first cycle of primary education (first, second, and third grades)." These principals are working towards improving mandatory academic measures, as suggested by Reeves and McNeill (2017), even if there is not systematic accountability system from the Ministry of Education.

Another example of accountability in student learning processes is Irene. She explains that when she got to the school she repeated the diagnostic evaluation that teachers give in the beginning of the school year in November when she started. "When we repeated it, we concluded that 93 teachers from first to third grade could not read nor write." She continued to explain how she developed a literacy plan and used the afternoons to work with these kids. "And we worked with those children until they could read and write." This plan is a clear example of evidence-based decision making. Sheard and Sharples (2016) suggest understanding the relationship between data and decisions has better outcomes for students. Irene's example relates more to what Reeves and McNeill suggest on developing performance

and developmental rubrics or in this case assessments. However, I believe that this action pertains more to the leadership domain, since Irene promoted strategies that involved establishing a school culture that aims towards student success.

Leadership. For Reeves and McNeill (2017), the leadership domain has to do with principals establishing a mission and vision for the school that aims towards the success of all students and is aligned with the district's mission and vision. As part of their role, principals talked about dealing with the school district's demands, working with the Ministry's documents and "making sure teachers implement them" (Crystal), and follow up on teachers implementing the curricular reform. Crystal explained that one of her strengths is complying with the documents that rule the Dominican educational system.

Principal leadership should establish a culture of learning, respect, that honors diversity, and celebrates history and traditions (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). According to the *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013), some of the characteristics principals should embody are: fair, legal, honest, ethical, adaptive, and resilient. The DR's educational system is nondiscriminatory race, creed, sex, or socioeconomic status (*Ley Orgánica de Educación* 66-97). Hence, Dominican principals should promote such unprejudiced environment. In the DR, the principals' role description requires them to have moral and ethical standards (Weinstein et al., 2014). Principals in the study shared some of the characteristics that they believe essential for the principalship and that coincide with what is expected from them in the leadership domain, such as "being open, positive, and hardworking" (Beth); "good interpersonal relationships" (Carmen); "listening to adolescents, to see their strengths and their weaknesses" (Karl); and "creating an oasis for children" (Ellen).

Reeves and McNeill's (2017) views on leadership coincide with what Hallinger (2005) proposed that, as leaders, principals not only lead but also manage and effectively align school activities and strategies with the school's mission. Part of the shared vision principals develop, involves building a school climate that responds to the complex adaptive challenges of society (Drago-Severson, 2012. Principals described taking care of the school climate as part of their role (Ellen).

According to Lemoine et al. (2014), and corresponding with Reeves and McNeill (2017), the effective principal sets a direction and establishes a vision for the school; has high expectations for teachers and students; as instructional leaders work with curriculum, teacher professional development, among others; builds relationship with teachers; establish a safe environment; and manage time wisely. The leadership domain entails principals setting a direction for the school and acting on it. Principals in the study commented on their lack of leadership strategies and their need for training in this area. Reeves and McNeill suggest engaging staff, distributing leadership, and developing shared responsibility. None of the principals in the study discussed distributing leadership beyond their management teams. Principals did not discuss teacher leadership.

In the DR, it is part of principals' responsibilities to develop the Educational Project for the School (PEC, acronym in Spanish). The PEC establishes a link between the administrative and pedagogical processes and helps set this direction for the school that the leadership proposes. In its development, school members participate in creating or revising the mission and vision statements, values, objectives, innovation models, process descriptions, and different profiles of school members (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013). The process of creating the PEC for each school promotes a shared vision and the alignment of

school initiatives since everybody participates in its creation. Other principals, such as Ana, discussed working with these documents and how they are developing them. She explained that on meetings with the management team, "we discuss them and reach consensus." She did not discuss integrating teachers; however, Carmen did. "(Developing those documents) takes time, because you have to work with teachers, directly with teachers. Because I believe that things have to be done to see the real issues, not to fulfill a requisite."

Principals in the study commented how they work with the documents required by the Ministry of Education, which respond to what the leadership domain entails. However, how they instill that vision for learning and achievement was not clearly expressed by principals nor did they discuss how they convey their school's goals and expectations. According to Reeves and McNeill (2017), holidays, traditions, and celebrations are part of a school's culture. Principals did discuss how they celebrate holidays and school traditions. Dominican education aims to be inclusive as stated in the educational law, but principals did not discuss how they honor diversity, which Reeves and McNeill take as part of the school's culture.

Systems. The systems domain pertains to a high quality and reliable instructional programs, that is coherent with the established curriculum and is understood by all (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). The principals in the study discussed the curricular reform and how they are implementing the changes in their schools. Karl expressed that he values the changes in education.

Gonzalez (2006) posits that in the DR principals are required to ensure quality education. One example is Irene and her assessment of her student's literacy levels, by repeating a diagnostic evaluation and developing a plan for students who did not meet their grades' standards. According to Reeves and McNeill (2017), instruction is evidence-based, and

programs are differentiated to meet all students' needs. For Maria the new competencies-based curriculum affords students with the possibility to develop their own strengths, which is consistent with what Reeves and McNeill suggest about differentiated instruction. Maria expressed that "each child will be evaluated according to their competencies because no two students are alike."

Furthermore, all principals discussed supervising instruction, walking around the school, providing feedback, and conducting meetings with teachers. Other tasks that ensure quality in instruction are "revising teachers' lesson plans" (Irene); "follow up on teachers being on time and follow the school's schedule" (Carmen); and "work with the documents that rule the educational system, make them be effective, and teachers to make them their own and put them to practice" (Crystal).

Regarding laws, policies, and regulations which according to Reeves and McNeill (2017) fall under the systems domain, principals discussed complying with Dominican education laws, policies, and regulations. Some of the actions that principals undertake in this domain have to do with school regarding school safety and student well-being factors. As such, Ana expressed that she wanted to raise funds to fix up a wall in the school and deal with mold issues. Most principals discussed the vulnerability of the areas where their schools are. However, principals did not discuss evidence-based strategies to ensure school safety, nor do they have a say in contracting maintenance, which Reeves and McNeill regard as highly effective.

Processes. Principals undertake many processes in school life, some of these have to do with building community, such as establishing relationships, inclusion, and communications (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). As such, Linda discussed how she engages in monthly meetings

with her staff to socialize the agenda. Carmen has a morning reflection with her team, which she believes fosters commitment and better relationships among staff. "Every day we do a reflection in the morning before we start our activities." This coincides with Garza et al.'s (2014) ideas that principals regard community building, as highly significant.

Each school has an Association of Fathers, Mothers, Tutors, and Friends of the School (APMAE, acronym in Spanish). APMAEs were created to serve as support for the school's leadership, as the principal or management teams. These associations are a means for building closer relationships with the community. Though APMAEs exist, Reeves and McNeill (2017) suggest that part of the principal role is to coordinate services, develop partnerships, and works with the community to provide opportunities for students and families. The principals in the study regarded the community as an issue for student development and discussed some of the actions that they take towards helping parents; however the actions that Reeves and McNeill propose are broader and reach out to more members of the community. Some of the actions that principals in the study commented have to do with motivating parents to be on time, being open, and visiting students' homes when they are absent. Ellen shared how, even if the school is in a dangerous zone with a lot of drug posts and consumers, her school does not have problems, because the people who sell and use are school parents and they protect the school.

Another aspect of the processes domain is evidence based improvement, based on collaborative inquiry and systematic use of multiple data sources (Reeves & McNeill, 2017). MINERD started administering diagnostic evaluations, which results are used as a means of data for the schools' improvement plans solely. Regarding collaboration, Reeves and McNeill (2017) suggest distributing leadership, which principals do yet only at the management team level yet the authors suggest also promoting teacher leadership.

Capacity. According to Reeves and McNeill (2017), the capacity domain has to do with human development both of the staff and of the leader. Reeves and McNeill suggest performance evaluation aims towards performance improvement and personal ownership in the evaluation process. Evaluation can lead to learning from experience, implementing change strategies, self-reflection and questioning, team learning, and promoting thinking (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). Principals require feedback from meaningful assessment processes to support high-performing schools (Hvidston et al., 2015). Ana developed an "in-school evaluation" that was aimed towards assessing the strengths that the staff foresees in the management team and how they value the work that has been done up to date since she had been on the job only for a year. "We prepared an evaluation where the whole management team was assessed, and basically me since I am the newest one."

Principals offered an array of tasks, responsibilities, and characteristics principals should embody. These tasks are inclined towards "managing teachers, support staff, and administrative staff. See how they work, guide them, and see that everybody does their job, and look for strategies so they can do it better" (Maria). Leaders are accountable for fostering and building capacity in individuals, teams, and organizations (Hirsh & Killion, 2007). Leaders who learn know how positive learning can be for everyone since it creates mechanisms and opportunities for individual learning and team learning (Preskill & Brookfield, 2008). As part of her experiences, having had a principal who trained her and set a positive example for her, Crystal stated that "a principal should be a trainer."

In conclusion, part of a leader's commitment is to build capacity in their teams (Hirsh & Killion, 2009). Hence, schools require a principal whose leadership focuses on improving student and staff learning (DuFour, 2002). These assertions coincide with Reeves and

McNeill's (2017) framework on that principals build a culture of learning and respect. In the DR, principals should take on the responsibility for teacher professional development (Gonzalez, 2006). As such, Maria explains that she "finds the way, if I see that someone can do something, support them so that they can grow." As principal, she is teaching one of the janitors to write their names and encourages young janitors to finish high-school and go to college.

One additional aspect that Reeves and McNeill (2017) suggest as part of the capacity domain is the integration and use of technology, both at a personal level and as means for teaching and learning. The principals in the study did not discuss the use of technology, either at the personal level or as a pedagogical resource. As they described their role, technology was not addressed not even as an aspect that they had to motivate in their schools with teachers, students and even parents.

Sharing Opinions: Management Teams

Management teams are an emergent strategy in DR's educational system (Weinstein et al., 2014). They are composed by the principal, vice-principal (if there is one), academic coordinator, and school psychologist. Principals in the study report their management teams as an important part of their principalship who "are in charge of managing everything that has to do with the school" (Ellen).

Management teams are an approach of distributed leadership, most of the principals in the study discussed how they include their teams in decision-making processes. According to Bush (2011), distributed leadership allows for teachers to get involved in decision-making. However, in the DR management teams rarely involve teachers in decision-making processes,

but mostly reach an agreement among themselves. For example, Crystal shared how she does not make any decisions without reaching a consensus with her management team.

Management teams highlight the importance of collaboration and the struggle to achieve a collaborative environment. As Senge (2012) posits, collaboration takes time and commitment. Principals such as Maria who has been on the job for eight months has struggled to get her management team going. "I have found myself with this experience, a non-functional management team. I am trying to rebuild it. It has been a great challenge for me." For Ana, her management team stays focused on tasks, share ideas, and compensate for each other (Northouse, 2013). They have weekly meetings and help each other in dealing with difficult situations.

Finding Balance: Instruction and Management

The *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013) states that principals are responsible for the pedagogical and administrative processes of the center and them to be carried out as established by the Ministry, not one over the other. Weinstein et al.'s (2014) report summarizes Dominican principals' tasks, which fall under both categories: management and instruction. The conclusions from this report suggest that principals should guarantee those technical and pedagogical aspects of the school function adequately.

Willer (2011) identified the perceived needs of new principals, three years in the job, concerning management, leadership and the support they need, strongly emphasizing the distinction between management and leadership in principals. Gonzalez (2006) posits that in the DR principals are required to ensure quality education. Principals' role description involves both managerial and instructional tasks, yet principals in the DR struggle to find a balance between both.

Principals offered various examples of why the balance between instruction and management is an issue for them and how the managerial aspect of the principalship is demanding much more than the instructional. Irene expressed: "there is an imbalance. However much I try to achieve balance, the managerial part demands more." This discrepancy between management and instruction is not exclusive of Dominican public-school principals, it has been a subject of study for decades (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Lynch, 2012; Rallis & Highsmith, 1986; Tubbs et al., 2011). Willer (2011) posits that principals are both managers and instructional leaders since their role entails academic and non-academic tasks (Flowers et al., 2014), which is consistent with what Reeves and McNeill (2017) propose.

In more recent studies, researchers postulate that this imbalance may be a result of the increase in expectations of the principal's role. As such, Keith (2011) suggests that being an efficient manager used to be enough for principals; while Lynch (2012), among other tasks, describes principals as a student, personnel, and resource managers. The *Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos* (2013) states that principals handle the school's resources. The budget assigned to each school will be used on the items stipulated by the institutional policy and current authority.

Principals feel unprepared to take on managerial tasks, yet Tubbs et al. (2011) explain that principals are required to have the knowledge and skills to manage their school facility and the functional operation of their building. "I fail in what has to do with school administration. Some principals know the classrooms but have weaknesses in management" (Linda). This may be due to what Kwan and Walker (2009) suggest, that principals are trained in their field of expertise, academia, and involved with instruction in schools. Such as Ellen, she says "I did not

study business administration, nor am I an accountant." The principals who reported that could achieve this balance, such as Linda, Karl, and Ellen, is because they have somebody to help them handling the managerial issues. Yet, those who do not, believe that having a balance is important, although instruction is a priority. As Linda expressed "schools are for learning."

Theme 2: Swimming Against the Current

The second theme that emerged is *Swimming Against the Current,* which describes the experiences in the pathway to the principalship and their first years on the job. This theme is divided into three categories: a) the individual, where principals shared personal experiences; b) the collective, where principals discussed experiences that involved the community and teachers; and c) the system, where principals shared experiences that pertain to the Dominican educational system. Looking at the experiences in the pathway to the principalship and their first years on the job through these three categories allows a better understanding of novice principals in the DR public-school system.

The Individual

Novice principals endure trials in their schools, regarding their training, feelings, and the diversity of their role (Petzko, 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Willer, 2011). These trials are experiences that they went through, realities that they faced, and the challenges they had on a personal level. These individual experiences show their feelings on the pathway to the principalship and as novice principals. While discussing their story, mainly their previous professional experience, and academic background, principals reveal some of their needs, particularly the things they wish they would have known.

My experiences impacted me. Principals discussed how their academic background, professional experience, and preparation programs influenced their principalship, how they entered and how they enact their role during those first years.

Professional experience. Chitpin (2014) suggests that principals rely on their previous experience to make critical decisions. Hence, principals with more years of experience enact a more assertive leadership style (Cohen, 2015). Kwan and Walker (2009) posit that principals are customarily trained in their field of expertise, academia, and involved with instruction in schools. Principals that have increased "their years of teaching experience before obtaining the principalship, have a stronger background in instructional leadership and have been striving to enhance their professional skills and knowledge base" (Rodriguez-Campos et al., 2005, p. 310).

The principals who participated in this study regard their past professional experiences as crucial on how they play out their role. Some principals expressed that they learned from their previous leaders, such as Crystal. "I learned a lot because she had great leadership and a lot of training" and Linda "I learned a great deal from that person, particularly planning and organizing."

As for teaching experience, many reported as having the most significant impact on the way they conduct themselves in their role as principals. For most of the participants, a principal that has not been in the classrooms is not suited for the principalship which coincides with what Thomson (1989) wrote four decades ago "anyone attempting to be a principal without teaching experience would be severely handicapped" (p. 15). Consistent with Rodriguez-Campos et al. (2005), Linda regards her experiences in the classroom as allowing her "to know what it is you are going to lead" and Irma expressed "understand that I have weaknesses" referring to how now she understands her own teachers.

For Beth, the experiences in the classroom have an impact on how she is as a principal. particularly in making critical decisions (Chitpin, 2014). "Because if you do not have the experience as a teacher, there are things that happen in schools that you will not understand. Some situations come up that if you do not have teaching experience, you will not be able to find alternatives or search for strategies."

Principals claim that their teaching experience makes them empathic and understanding. These assertations do not coincide with the body of research reviewed for this study. Principals who participated in the study believe their teaching experience makes them a better principal. "My teaching experience helps me as a principal because I identify with teachers' needs" (Carmen) and Crystal expressed that "having been in the classroom makes me a better principal because I am empathic with my teachers."

Academic background. Principals in the DR come into the principalship from diverse academic backgrounds (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013). Dominican public-school principals are required to have a minimum of five years of experience as teachers or in related areas (Weinstein et al., 2014); a Bachelor's Degree in Education or similar fields; and a Master's Degree in Education or similar fields (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013). The principals in this study have bachelor's degrees in education, psychology, and modern languages; as for the master's degree most of the participants did their master's in school administration, while others did in history, family therapy, and applied linguistics.

The *Ordenanza No. 4'99* [Ordinance 4'99] states satisfactorily passing the public contest for becoming public-school principal is required. This public contest for the position consists of

a test that assesses the aspiring principals' management and instructional competencies. For Irma studying for the contest helped her understand the requirements for her role.

Principals regard an academic background in leadership and administration as highly influential for their principalship. For example, Beth expressed "I need training in leadership, in leadership strategies." Karl and Ellen discussed how they came in without training in management and leadership, and how they started learning on the job. Ellen expressed that she would appreciate training in school administration and leadership.

Preparation programs: The School of Directors. Principal preparation programs have to be specific to the needs and context of schools (Waters et al., 2005); address the adaptive challenges that schools and principals face today (Bridges & Hallinger, 1997; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014); fulfill principals' training needs and requirements for the role (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). According to Oplatka (2009), one of the most significant weaknesses of these programs is when they are more focused towards theory, rather than practical knowledge. Ana explained how most of her training had been theoretical. "Always theory, it is not the same when you have to face reality."

Principal preparation programs should focus on developing effective instructional leaders with up-to-date information of what works (Salazar, 2007). Drago-Severson (2012) suggests that professional development programs that reduce isolation, encourage renewal, and improve leadership. Hallinger and Lu (2013) suggest that principal preparation programs consider alternative approaches that contemplate the changing needs of schools and school leaders.

The School of Directors or *La Escuela de Directores para la Calidad Educativa* (EDCE, Acronym in Spanish) was created in September 2011 (Weinstein et al., 2014). This principal preparation program is practical (Lynch, 2012; Oplatka, 2009), yet grounded in theory

(Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). The primary purpose of the EDCE is to train and prepare school leaders for quality education in schools in the different levels of education. Karl attended the School of Directors, and said that it "was excellent for me. It was an opportunity. You learn about public-schools. What you learn there, you can put into practice."

Principals regard this training as pertinent, practical, and that helps them become better principals (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). As such Ana explained how in this training "you learn about the schools' minimum details, what they do and how they do it, which is the most important." Also how the EDCE targeted areas where they needed training, such as Irene. "Every module is an incredible learning experience because there are many topics that you develop there that are part of the Ministry of Education, but that you just do not get… for me, the module on leadership was excellent."

Tough times. Although principals did not discuss their feelings as inherent to their career stage, they did discuss feeling isolated and overwhelmed, such as Beth, Maria, and Carmen. Lochmiller (2014) discussed that novice principals experience anxiety, isolation, and frustration, as they become accustomed to their new job. Some principals, such as Linda, discussed how they had to work through these feelings and how now she does not feel as alone as she did in the beginning.

Sciarappa and Mason (2014) explain that principals have to adapt to their new role and their different status, which may lead to peers treating them differently because they knew them before they reached that position. Beth expressed that her workmates steered clear from her. "They look at you differently," she said. As for Maria, she said that "they kept their distance. They did not see me as their workmate; they saw me as somebody who came in to supervise and boss around. I felt lonely." These feelings coincide with Lee's (2014) findings on

how the staff is distant and guarded towards them. Lee states that principals often face comparison with the previous principal. The principals who participated in this study did not discuss feeling compared to their previous principal.

Novice principals' feelings have been a subject of study, particularly how they feel overwhelmed as they begin their principalship, understand the demands of the role, and adjust to it (Oplatka & Lapidot, 2017; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Spillane et al., 2010; Wildy et al., 2010). Crystal discussed how she went through rough times in the beginning and Carmen describes the principalship as a very stressful job. Research shows that these feelings are related to letting go of their comfort zone or familiar settings (Wildy et al., 2010) which is the case of Beth who feels nostalgia for her teaching years and Maria misses her former school, where everybody got along.

Both current research and the findings from this study coincide that novice principals experience different feelings (isolation, anxiety, and stress) due to several reasons (leaving their comfort zone, the distance among peers, and the demands of the job). However, the principals who participated in this study did not express what they would have needed to overcome such feelings. A probable reason for this is that these feelings are connected to their particular stories or their circumstances. Research suggests that mentoring for principals can help ease their transition and adapt to their new role (Lochmiller, 2014; Oplatka & Lapidot, 2017), which I believe may help overcome some of the feelings that principals experience.

The Collective

Principals discussed issues that have to do with others and how those relationships impact their role. Most principals express that they promote openness in their relationships with their students and staff. Principals talked about many experiences that include other groups. The first

group is the community integrated by the school's neighbors, parents, and teachers. The second group is the teachers, which represent a challenge for principals, particularly their resistance to change.

Becoming family. Hattie (2002) emphasizes that principals should create positive home-school relations. Ordinance 9'2000 establishes the rules for the Association of Fathers, Mothers, Tutors, and Friends of the School (APMAE, acronym in Spanish). The *Ley Orgánica de Educación* 66'97 in the DR considers schools as areas of harmonious climate and that parents' participation is essential. APMAEs were created to serve as support for the school's leadership, as the principal or management teams. However, principals talked about how challenging it was to win them over. "I tell parents that the doors are always open for them… The community is responding better to me. Because when I got here, I thought that they were going to go on strike" (Ana). Another example is Crystal "I have the support of the community. I got it through having meetings with them."

APMAEs have several purposes, such as strengthening institutional development by contributing to the school's management. They also promote parents' participation in school processes as well as with the community. However, while recounting their first years' experiences on the job, principals discuss the community and the impact it has on their practice. Principals struggle with parents, families, and neighbors. Many of the principals discussed the vulnerability of their school's sector and how it influences their students, from dangerous streets, to vices, drugs, and extreme poverty. Principals in this study expressed that family cooperation is a challenge for them. For Beth "the greatest challenge is the integration of the community, the inclusion of the family."

Kafele (2015) from his experience as a principal, explained that parental and community engagement has to do with having parents on the school side as allies because parents develop a sense of belonging, hence, they support students' learning processes. One of the principals' who participated in the study main concerns is the absence of parents. "We here have to be mother and father, all of the team that works here" (Karl). "I have parents that help, excellent parents. But just like that, I have careless parents that do not want to get involved; they do not want to support. When the parents do not commit to their children's education, the burden falls on the school" (Crystal).

Brauckmann and Pashiardis (2012) describe community engagement, particularly regarding trust and collaboration as an area of interest regarding principals' needs. Many of the principals who participated in the study showed concern for their community, not only because parents were disengaged, but because the issues children face. Beth talked about how dangerous the school's street is and how one of her students got hit by a car. She discussed how the school's surroundings are filled with drugs, violence, and vices and how most families are dysfunctional. She believes the low socio-economic status is one of the leading causes. Ana talked about how shocking it was to see the trials the community faces, particularly her students. "The most significant experience that I endured as the principal is seeing the reality, crashing into the reality of the community, seeing the reality of our children — pregnant girls, family crowding, where a whole family sleeps in one bed. Yes, I had heard of that, but nothing like seeing it up close." Ellen discussed how parents in her community respect the school and value that a religious congregation runs the school. However, she expressed "this is a very dangerous area, generally in these vulnerable zones, there are a lot of drugs."

Principals did not discuss the School Boards proposed by the Ministry of Education. These School Boards are decentralized associations of management and participation, in charge of creating the links between the community, the school and its members (*Manual Operativo de Centros Educativos Públicos*, 2013). Principals made more emphasis on the parent associations, the APMAEs, as having an influence on their principalship.

A time of resistance. The current educational system in the DR is undergoing change and reform and the implementation of new initiatives to achieve excellence (MINERD, 2017). One of the initiatives the Ministry of Education is developing competency-based curricula. During times of reform, such as what is occurring in the DR, principals face additional trials (Brown, 2006).

Principals are essential in the process of curriculum change (Fullan & Newton, 1988) and are vital in the institution and integration of any change or school reform as the most important change agent (Cohen, 2015). Additionally, principals face the challenge of understanding the curriculum (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Shoho and Barnett (2010) suggest principals be involved and work with curriculum development in their preparation programs as a means to overcome this need, which was the case of some principals who participated in the curriculum changes. Crystal talked about how she learned about the changes in the curriculum with her principal when she was a teacher. As for Maria explained that all the changes happened when she a coordinator.

Starr (2011) posits that principals face issues regarding change in schools such as resistance, slowness in these changes and that usually, initiatives are short-lived. Walker and Kwan (2009) highlight that educational reform stresses changes in principals' role and increases accountability. As such requirements and demands on principals rise in order to

address these changes (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Principals see this process as a challenge, that has put on additional demands on their role. Linda states "all this change has been a challenge, a big one and it still is. We have a lot to grow, a long way to go."

Most principals express that there was resistance among teachers; but as time progressed, it diminished. They see the curricular reform as positive, yet feel accountable for how teachers react to it, like Karl: "The education sector in DR has many changes going on. They are good. Change begins with the person leading the team." Other principals discuss how they see change as a challenge. "Resistance comes. I mean if I have been doing the same thing for ten years, it is difficult for me to make a change. My advantage is that I participated in these changes. I was part of the curricular reform, so I am familiar with it" (Irene).

The System

The principals interviewed for this study work in Dominican public-schools and are ruled by the Operations Manual for Public-Schools (2013). Some of the principals discussed how issues regarding the system, in this case, the Ministry of Education, impacted their experiences starting. For example, Maria and Crystal were called in as principals a few days before school started. Irene and Carmen started the school year in an extended-day school without lunch for their students, as extended-day schools are a fairly new initiative. As for Crystal, she started the school year without staff, just one psychologist. Ana expressed that "the school district demands a lot of things, but sometimes you feel like they are not organized." These principals expressed many concerns about the educational system, particularly the lack of induction programs, mentoring, and follow up on their principalship. In this section, I discuss two subthemes: induction and mentoring and support groups.

A transition. Principals' challenges are distinctive because few new principals receive on the job training, or go through a formal induction process when starting their role (Willer, 2011), which is the case of most of the principals who participated in this study. Principals need practice and supervision before taking up the principalship (Olson, 2007). As such, Ellen expressed how she thought the mentoring should start before starting the principalship, drawing from her own experience and the transition process she was able to have with the former principal of her school. For this principal, and consistent with Olson (2007), induction and preparation should begin before starting the principalship.

Principals have to learn about their school's context and challenges while on the job, in order to prioritize how to address them (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2016). However, Eller (2010) explains that since the demands on principals are so high, it can make it difficult to acclimate to the job. These assertations highlight the importance of an induction process. Maria was given the key to the school by the former principal, she says "an induction process would have been much better."

Drawing from participants' stories, some of the principals found out about their new position just a few days before school started. One of them, Irene reports she had no transition process and says needs more follow up from the Ministry. "There are moments in where I see there is more demand than follow up." Ellen, Beth, Maria, Irene, and Crystal expressed that they felt they needed and induction process. Principals express a shared feeling of needing an induction course when they begin, such as Carmen and Crystal.

Oplatka and Lapidot (2017) conclude that mentoring can facilitate principals' transition to their new role. Drago-Severson (2007) suggests that a learning-oriented model of school leadership centers learning as a development process, by implementing four pillar practices,

which are: teaming, providing opportunities for leadership roles, engaging inquiry, and mentoring. Consistent with this, Irene expressed "principals need mentors. Highly qualified mentors, not people that get their job because of politics." Mentors may alleviate principals' need for networking with other principals and of a formal induction process (Willer, 2011).

From principal to principal. Principals have needs for networking and collaboration (Chitpin, 2014; Kafele, 2015), due to feelings of personal and professional isolation (Cairns & Mullen, 2001; Chitpin, 2014; Lochmiller, 2014). For Chitpin (2014) the support of a professional network may help alleviate principals' feelings. Thus, Chitpin posits that principals need a network of support and it should be a formal method of support (Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). These networks may result in a possibility for principals to learn from each other and encourage growth (Drago-Severson, 2012). Principals who have support groups or principal networks, as called in the DR, value them. Those who do not participate in one, such as Karl, find it valuable: "Having a network would be beneficial. It would be of great value."

Drago-Severson (2012) explains that networks may result in a possibility for principals to learn from each other and encourage growth. Consistently, with Drago-Severson, principals in this study regard their networks as an opportunity to engage with other principals, "talk from principal to principal," as Ellen stated, and learn from them. These principals, who have networks, regard sharing their experiences and listening to others as beneficial for their practice, where they can inquire about good practices (Ellen), look for alternatives (Beth), and share experiences (Irene).

Overview of Primary Research Questions

In Chapter One, I posited the research questions. The overarching research question for this study was: *How do Dominican public-school principals describe their early career*

experiences? This question is consistent with a basic interpretive qualitative methodology. The critical feature of a basic interpretive qualitative research is to make meaning of a specific phenomenon (Merriam, 2002), in this case, is the description of the experiences and the needs of novice principals. The basic interpretive qualitative methodology allowed me to make meaning of principals' significant experiences in their early years and what the different needs they bring into the principalship.

The sub-questions for the study were: (a) What do Dominican principals early career experiences reveal about their needs in preparing for and carrying out their early years in the principal role?; (b) How do novice principals describe their pathway to the principalship and their first experiences in the role?; and (c) How do novice principals describe their role as a K-12 public-school principal?

In this section, I address only the overarching question as the sub-questions were answered in the themes that emerged from the data analysis. The correspondence between the sub-questions and the emergent themes is:

a) The first sub-question: What do Dominican principals early career experiences reveal about their needs in preparing for and carrying out their early years in the principal role? Is answered by theme two, in the collective category, particularly *A Transition* and *From Principal to Principal.*

b) The second sub-question: How do novice principals describe their pathway to the principalship and their first experiences on the role? Is answered by the sub-themes of theme two in the individual category, *My Experiences Impacted Me* and *Tough Times.*

c) Theme One: *Involved in Everything* responds to the third sub-question: How do novice principals describe their role as a K-12 public-school principal?

To answer the overarching question, principals shared some of their experiences entering and during their first years as a principal and, from those experiences, explained their needs. Most of the principals expressed facing the challenges and demands of the principalship without a proper induction process. For example, Maria, who came into the principalship with a few days' notice, discussed how overwhelming dealing with everything was. As few new principals receive on the job training or go through a formal induction process when starting their role (Willer, 2011), most principals find it difficult to acclimate into their new job (Eller, 2010). The lack of an induction process is the main issue principals encountered. Some principals, as Irene described it as not having a transition process and wanting more follow up or mentoring from the Ministry.

Principals need to portray "effective and inspired leadership" (Waters et al., 2005, p. 123). Other principals such as Ellen and Beth discussed their need for training in leadership and management. Retelle (2010) posits that principal leadership is critical for creating and sustaining successful schools. Some of the issues they had to face at the beginning of their principalship demanded leadership strategies. For example, Ellen has had to deal with the excessive paperwork and demands from the Ministry and to find a balance between management and instruction. Beth has had to face the distance from her workmates and the challenges of the upkeep of the campus.

According to Brown (2006), educational change and reform put additional pressures on principals. Many of the novice principals who participated in the study express that their main challenge with this reform is teachers' resistance, more so than them taking on these changes.

For Ellen changes were already in course when she started (she has been in the position for a year). As for Crystal, her former principal worked with her when she was a teacher and helped her understand the changes in the curriculum. As Cohen (2015) suggests, principals are the most important change agent. During the interview, Karl expressed "change begins with the person leading the team."

Additional Findings

The transition from pedagogical coordinator to principal has an impact on the principalship. Principals reported having more knowledge about instructional leadership and how to handle the curriculum change. Irene explained that because she was a pedagogical coordinator she was familiar with the curriculum. "My advantage is that I participated in these changes, I worked with the curricular reform and I am familiar with it." Maria talked about how when she was coordinator her workmates encouraged her to pursue higher positions. "You have the experience (the management team said), I was the principal's right hand." Moreover, I sensed that these principals who were coordinators before discussed instruction as a priority, which is consistent with the literature on the principal's role.

Implications for Practice

Novice principals report that very few of them receive a formal training process or an induction process (Willer, 2011). Principals need practice and supervision before taking up the principalship (Olson, 2007). The findings from this study suggest that principals want a formal induction process and that this induction should begin before taking on the role. An induction process would help principals face the challenges of their new position in more assertively. Lochmiller (2014) suggests mentoring as a form of induction for principals.

Chitpin (2014) suggests that powerful leadership does not take place in preparation programs, instead, it is an ongoing development as principals continue to learn. Preparation programs consider support for their participants, particularly in the early stages of their career (Lochmiller, 2014). Since principals expressed that they would benefit from an induction or mentoring process, principal preparation programs could consider affording participants this opportunity as part of their academic program. Pierson (2014) posits that preparation programs emphasize experiences associated with success; track the information principals provide on their resume; provide attendants with the opportunity to supervise other adults; acknowledge the differences in levels (elementary, middle, and high school); and preparation programs should consider community and family. Hence, providing participants the opportunity to engage in mentoring processes with successful principals who can share their experiences and are able to follow Pierson's suggestions will result in principals that are more confident and efficient. Mentoring can help principals adapt to their new role (Lochmiller, 2014) and sustain professional development (Alsburry & Hackman, 2006). Garza et al. (2014) suggest that successful principals serve as guides and trainers for their successors, transferring effective practices.

Another implication for practice resulting from the findings from this study is that principals need training in leadership and management. Gurr and Drysdale (2015) posit that understanding principals' academic background and professional experience are necessary to better understand the principal preparation programs and principals' needs. The principals who did not attend the EDCE found that they lacked training in this area. Hence, providing all novice principals with training in the areas where they show necessities will result in principals being more successful.

A final implication for practice is the development of formal support groups or networks for novice principals (Chitpin, 2014; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). Although in the DR, many school districts have their networks, some do not hold systematic meetings. Novice principals would benefit from a professional network that helps them alleviate their initial feelings (Chitpin, 2014), as expressed by the principals who attend their network's meetings. These networks should be supported by what current literature suggests on networks as a possibility for principals to learn from each other and encourage growth (Drago-Severson, 2012). School to school networking and private to public-school networking would provide principals a broader perspective about their role and different ways to enact their leadership.

Suggestions for Further Research

The first recommendation I provide is conducting further research on how principals regard their knowledge in special education and inclusion. According to Lynch (2012), principals need better preparation regarding students with disabilities and special education policies (Nelson et al., 2008). Lynch (2012) suggests that preparation programs address special education policy and prepare principals to handle special education programs. Shoho and Barnett (2010) concluded that principals felt ill-prepared for special education. Dominican education aims to be inclusive (*Ley Orgánica de Educación* 66-97). Principals in this study did not discuss inclusion nor special education and since is part of the requirements of the educational system, conducting further research on this topic in order to better prepare them for their job.

Many new principals work in extended-day schools which is a new initiative in the DR. Extended-day schools started in 2012 *(La Jornada Escolar Extendida es Asumida como Política de Estado* [Extended-Day Schooling is Taken as a Public Policy], 2016). From this

study Linda, Karl, Irene, Carmen, and Crystal work in extended-day schools, some of them started the school. While talking to Irma, I could sense there is a prestige in being principal in an extended-day school. "One of the technicians expressed that if it were up to him he would send us (management team) to an extended-day school, with a lot of conflicts because he knew we would make it… we felt flattered." As for Beth, when she talked about her management team and handling the two shifts, she said: "we are working on becoming an extended-day school." I recommend looking into the differences in the demands and tasks for principals in extended day schools versus regular schools. Additionally, whether being a novice principal in an extended-day school puts additional strains on principals.

I also suggest research on principals' reflections on their identities, their leadership, and their stories. In the member-checking process, one of the participants found that reading through her transcript made her engage in a reflective process of her own practice. According to Senge, Hamilton, and Kania (2015) "reflection means thinking about our thinking, holding up the mirror to see the taken-for-granted assumptions we carry into any conversation and appreciating how our mental models may limit us" (p.28). Through reflective practices, principals can recognize, question, and perfect implicit knowledge and their own practice (Ossa Parra, Gutiérrez, & Aldana, 2015). I believe that investigating principals' reflective practice, will allow a deeper understanding of how they take on their role.

As a means to prepare principals for their job, it would be beneficial to further investigate the transition from pedagogical coordinator to principal. Since some of the principals that participated in the study reported having knowledge of instructional leadership because they were coordinators. Instructional leaders are learning-centered (Bush, 2011) and prioritize learning in their schools (Terosky, 2014), which was the case for the principals who were

pedagogical coordinators before taking on the principalship. Also, to better understand how these leaders manage the balance of instruction and management.

Another recommendation I provide is to look into the training that the EDCE provides and the differences in the practice of those who have not attended as to those who have. Principals in this study who attended the School of Directors, EDCE, regard it as highly influential in how they enact their role, the knowledge of the system that they have, and the strategies they put into practice. In this regard, understanding if providing principals with a standardized training that is contextualized and up to date with the current changes in the Dominican educational system has an impact in their practice may inform public policy.

Lastly, I recommend conducting research on the influence of mentors and induction programs on principals both in the private and public sectors of the Dominican educational system. Since many of the principals of this study expressed the need for induction and mentoring, I believe that looking into both sectors may better inform the benefits of receiving an induction process and mentoring.

<p align="center">**Summary**</p>

The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to explore novice Dominican public-school principals' early career experiences and how they identify their needs entering the principalship. Additionally, through portraiture, this study aimed to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. Chapter One provided an overview of the study, the background, and rationale as well as the research questions that guide the research process.

In Chapter Two, I presented the review of a literature because of the importance of contextualizing research on principals. The current Dominican educational context is thriving for educational excellence according to the Ministry's Strategic Plan. More than 10,000 principals serve in Dominican public-schools and described as the highest authority of a school, responsible for schools' functioning and its direction. In the DR context, there is little evidence or research to support decision-making processes. According to Weinstein et al.'s (2014) report for UNESCO, there is little to no research or even statistics on principals to support decisions. Hence, to understand the role of the principal the Reeves-McNeill (2017) framework was used to organize what the literature provides as a way to discuss the various roles and responsibilities currently associated with the principalship.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the methodology employed for the study. Basic interpretive qualitative research was the methodology used for this research. Portraiture was used as a method to narrate principals' stories. Criterion and snowball sampling were used for participant selection, focusing on public-school principals with one to five years on the job. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and observations. Data was analyzed through an emergent inductive process. HSIRB approval, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness were considered throughout the study.

Chapter Four presented principals' portraits. The principals who participated in the study talked openly about their experiences entering and on their first years on the job. In these portraits, principals' stories, pathways to the principalship, challenges, and background are presented and acknowledged. The portraits provide a contextual reference for the study.

Chapter Five presented the results of the study. Principals described their role, their multiple tasks, their triumphs, and challenges as novice principals. The purpose of this chapter

was to present the study's findings along with the research questions, themes, and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. The themes and sub-themes were supported with quotes from participants' interviews.

In Chapter 6, I presented a discussion of the findings, recommendations for further research, additional findings, and implications for practice. Principals shared some of their experiences entering and during their first years as a principal and, from those experiences explained their needs. Most of the principals expressed facing the challenges and demands of the principalship without a proper induction process, mentoring, or formal support. As principals discussed their experiences, they expressed different situations that happened to them individually, collectively, and that pertained specifically to the educational system. The findings from this study highlight the importance of considering context in school leadership research, as well as career stages. This study took an in-depth look at novice principal's experiences and how those experiences connect to their needs, preparation, challenges, and our educational system.

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Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
FWA00007042
IRB00000254

Date: December 18, 2018

To: Eric Archer, Principal Investigator
         Mary Francis Benzo Hernandez, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 18-12-29

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Dominican Public
School Novice Principals' Description of Their Early Career Experiences and Needs" has
been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Western Michigan
University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this
approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now
begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved.
You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., *you must
request a post-approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your
application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study"*). Failure to
obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any
unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of
this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the
IRB for consultation.

**Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date
stated below.**

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: **December 17, 2019**

Appendix B

Research Flyers in English and in Spanish

Department of Educational Leadership Research and Technology

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY FOR PRINCIPALS

Participate in a Research Study Describing Principals' Experiences and Needs coming into the Principalship

Principals:

Must work in K-12 Public Schools.

Must have 1 to 5 years as principals

FOR MORE INFORMATION
PLEASE CONTACT:
MARY FRANCIS BENZO –
809-330-7730
mfbenzo@hotmail.com -
maryfrancis.benzohernandez@wmich.edu

Department of Educational Leadership Research and Technology

OPORTUNIDAD DE INVESTIGACIÓN PARA DIRECTORES

Participa en un estudio de Investigación que describirá las Experiencias y Necesidades de los Directores cuando inician la Dirección de Centros Educativos

Los Participantes:

Deben trabajar en Escuelas Públicas de Primaria o Secundaria.

Tener de 1 a 5 años en la dirección.

PARA MAYOR INFORMACIÓN, CONTACTAR:

MARY FRANCIS BENZO –
809-330-7730

mfbenzo@hotmail.com -

maryfrancis.benzohernandez@wmich.edu

Appendix C

Recruitment Emails in English and in Spanish

Dear Principal:

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about Dominican Public-School Principals' description of their early career experiences and needs entering the principalship. This study is being conducted by Mary Francis Benzo, supervised by Dr. Eric Archer at Western Michigan University.

The purpose of this study is to explore how Dominican public-school novice principals describe their critical needs entering and carrying out their first years in the principalship. Additionally, this study aims to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. This research can be of interest and have an impact on public policy to redefine principal training programs, the requirements for the position, as well as provide accompaniment in the early years of the principalship to meet their needs. Interviews will be conducted to elicit information about your experiences.

If you would like additional information, please contact me through phone (809-330-7730) or email ([maryfrancis.benzohernandez@wmich.edu)](mailto:maryfrancis.benzohernandez@wmich.edu). Contacting me does not obligate you to participate in the study. Participating is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time you wish to.

I thank you for considering participating in this research study.

Best Regards,

Mary Francis Benzo

Querido director:

Le escribo para informarle sobre la oportunidad de participar en un estudio de investigación sobre las experiencias y neceidades de los directores principantes de las escuelas públicas dominicanas. Este estudio está dirigido por Mary Francis Benzo, supervisada por el Dr. Eric Archer en la Universidad de Western Michigan.

El propósito de este estudio es explorar cómo los directores principiantes de las escuelas públicas dominicanas describen sus experiencias como directores y reflexionan sobre sus necesidades críticas al ingresar y llevar a cabo sus primeros años en la dirección. Además, este estudio tiene como objetivo documentar las historias de vida de los directores, los antecedentes, los sentimientos y las vías para convertirse en directores. Esta investigación puede ser de interés y tener un impacto en la política pública para redefinir los principales programas de capacitación, los requisitos para el puesto, así como proporcionar acompañamiento en los primeros años de la dirección para satisfacer sus necesidades. Se llevarán a cabo entrevistas para obtener información sobre sus experiencias.

Si desea información adicional, contácteme a través del teléfono (809-330-7730) o por correo electrónico (maryfrancis.benzohernandez@wmich.edu). Contactarme no le obliga a participar en el estudio. La participación es completamente voluntaria y puede retirarse en cualquier momento que desee.

Le agradezco por considerar participar en este estudio de investigación.

Atentamente,

Mary Francis Benzo

Appendix D

Consent Forms in English and in Spanish

Western Michigan University

Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Investigator: Mary Francis Benzo
Title of Study: DOMINICAN PUBLIC-SCHOOL NOVICE PRINCIPALS'
                        DESCRIPTION OF THEIR EARLY CAREER EXPERIENCES
                        AND NEEDS ENTERING THE PRINCIPALSHIP

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled " *Dominican Public-School Principal's Description of their Early Career Experiences and Needs Entering the Principalship.*" This project will serve as Mary Francis Benzo's dissertation research for the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of this study is to explore how Dominican public-school novice principals describe their experiences and needs entering and carrying out their first years in the principalship. Additionally, this study aims to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals.

Who can participate in this study?
Public-school K-12 principals with one to five years of experience from Educational Region 15 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Where will this study take place?
This study will take place in public-schools from educational region 15 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. As stated above, interviews will be conducted in the different schools of the principals who agree to participate. Interviews will be conducted in the principal's office or conference room of the different schools. The investigator will drive to the different schools.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
Participating in this study will require one hour for the interview process and one hour for a walk-about around the school.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to contribute and share your needs entering the principalship, your professional experiences prior to becoming

principal, as well as your training and educational background in an interview. The interview questions elicit information regarding professional background and experience, among others. You will also be asked to walk-about the school with the investigator and explain some of your daily activities. Lastly, you will be emailed a transcription of your interview to ensure trustworthiness of the study.

What information is being measured during the study?
The information solicited from you will be used to describe the critical needs principals have entering the principalship, either from professional experience, preparation programs, education or training.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized? You are at risk for time loss, dedicating time to the interview and walk-throughs, rather than their obligations. Additionally, spending time reading the transcription of the interview. Also, disclosing personal information might be uncomfortable for you. You may stop your participation at any time you wish to.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
The potential benefits from participating in this study are adding to the body of knowledge about the needs principals bring into the principalship. This study may provide possible recommendations for programs and policies in the Dominican Republic context.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
The findings from this study will be part of Mary Francis Benzo's dissertation and might be presented at a conference or published in educational journals and newspapers. Your confidentiality will be ensured.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.

The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact Mary Francis Benzo (809)330-7730 or at maryfrancis.benzohernandez@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the

Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

_____

Please Print Your Name

_____   _____
Participant's signature   Date

Western Michigan University

Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Investigador: Mary Francis Benzo
Título del estudio: DESCRIPCIÓN DE LAS EXPERIENCIAS Y NECESIDADES DE
LOS DIRECTORES PRINCIPANTES DE ESCUELAS PÚBLICAS CUANDO
INICIAN EN LA DIRECCIÓN

Usted ha sido invitado a participar en un proyecto de investigación titulado "Descripción
de las experiencias y necesidades de los directores de escuelas públicas cuando inician en
la dirección". Este proyecto servirá como la investigación de disertación de Mary Francis
Benzo para los requisitos del grado de Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy). Este documento de
consentimiento explicará el propósito de este proyecto de investigación y los
compromisos de tiempo, los procedimientos utilizados en el estudio y los riesgos y
beneficios de participar en este proyecto de investigación. Lea este formulario de
consentimiento con cuidado y por completo y formule cualquier pregunta si necesita más
aclaraciones.

¿Qué estamos tratando de descubrir en este estudio?
El propósito de este estudio es explorar de qué manera los directores principiantes de las
escuelas públicas dominicanas describen sus experiencias y necesidades críticas cuando
iniciaron en la dirección. Además, este estudio tiene como objetivo documentar las
historias de vida de los directores, los antecedentes, los sentimientos y las vías para
convertirse en directores.

¿Quién puede participar en este estudio?
Directores de escuelas públicas K-12 con uno a cinco años de experiencia en las escuelas
de la Regional 15 de Santo Domingo, República Dominicana.

¿Dónde se llevará a cabo este estudio?
Este estudio tendrá lugar en las escuelas públicas de la Regional 15 en Santo Domingo,
República Dominicana. Como se indicó anteriormente, las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo
en las diferentes escuelas de los directores que acepten participar. Las entrevistas se
llevarán a cabo en la oficina del director o en la sala de conferencias de las diferentes
escuelas. La investigadora conducirá a las diferentes escuelas.

¿Cuál es el tiempo de compromiso para participar en este estudio?
Participar en este estudio requerirá una hora para el proceso de entrevista y una hora para
la caminata alrededor de la escuela.

¿Qué se te pedirá que hagas si eliges participar en este estudio?
Si elige participar en este estudio, se le pedirá que contribuya y comparta sus necesidades
en la dirección, sus experiencias profesionales antes de convertirse en director, así como
su formación y antecedentes educativos en una entrevista. Las preguntas de la entrevista
obtienen información sobre antecedentes profesionales y experiencia, entre otros. Se le

solicitará que haga una caminata alrededor de la escuela con la investigadora para explicar algunas de sus actividades diarias. Finalmente, se le pedirá que revise la transcripción de su entrevista para asegurar la confiabilidad de los resutlados.

¿Qué información se mide durante el estudio?
La información solicitada a usted se usará para describir las necesidades críticas que los directores han ingresado a la dirección, ya sea por experiencia profesional, programas de preparación, educación o capacitación.

¿Cuáles son los riesgos de participar en este estudio y cómo se minimizarán estos riesgos? Usted está en riesgo de perder tiempo, dedicando tiempo a la entrevista y la caminata, en lugar de sus obligaciones. También de invertir tiempo en revisar la transcripción de su entrevista. Además, compartir información personal puede ser incómodo para usted. Puede detener su participación en el estudio en cualquier momento que desee.

¿Cuáles son los beneficios de participar en este estudio?
Los beneficios potenciales de participar en este estudio se suman al conjunto de conocimientos sobre las necesidades que los directores aportan a la dirección. Este estudio puede proporcionar posibles recomendaciones para programas y políticas públicas en el contexto de la República Dominicana.

¿Hay algún costo asociado con la participación en este estudio?
No hay costos asociados con la participación en este estudio.

¿Hay alguna compensación por participar en este estudio?
No hay compensación por participar en este estudio.

¿Quién tendrá acceso a la información recopilada durante este estudio?
Los hallazgos de este estudio serán parte de la disertación de Mary Francis Benzo y podrían presentarse en una conferencia o publicarse en revistas y periódicos educativos. Su confidencialidad estará asegurada.

¿Qué pasa si quieres dejar de participar en este estudio?
Puede elegir dejar de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo. No sufrirá ningún perjuicio o penalización por su decisión de detener su participación. No experimentará NINGUNA consecuencia, ya sea académica o personalmente, si decide retirarse de este estudio.

El investigador también puede decidir suspender su participación en el estudio sin su consentimiento.
Si tiene alguna pregunta antes o durante el estudio, puede contactar a la investigadora Mary Francis Benzo (809)330-7730 o a maryfrancis.benzohernandez@wmich.edu. También puede comunicarse con la Presidencia, la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Sujetos Humanos al 269-387-8293 o el Vicepresidente de Investigación al 269-387-8298 si surgen preguntas durante el curso del estudio.

Este documento de consentimiento ha sido aprobado para su uso por un año por la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Sujetos Humanos (HSIRB) según lo indicado por la fecha y firma del presidente de la junta en la esquina superior derecha. No participe en este estudio si la fecha del sello es anterior a un año.

He leído este documento de consentimiento informado. Los riesgos y beneficios me han sido explicados. Acepto tomar parte en este estudio.

_____
Por favor imprima su nombre

_____ _____
Firma del participante

Appendix E

Interview Protocols in English and in Spanish

Time of interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Mary Francis Benzo
Interviewee:

Description of the Study:

As stated in the consent form, this study will explore how novice Dominican public-school principals describe their experiences and needs entering and carrying out their first years in the principalship. Additionally, this study aims to document principals' life stories, background, feelings, and pathways to becoming principals. Through the experiences shared by all of you, this study will provide a deeper understanding of how principals in the Dominican Republic understand their role and how they prepare for it. I thank you for participating in this study and for sharing your experiences.

1. How do describe your role as a K-12 principal?
2. Describe your preparation for becoming a principal? How did you choose to pursue that career? When did you decide to pursue the principalship?
3. Can you describe your pathway to the principalship?
4. What were your expectations of this job?
5. How do you reflect on your first years' experiences? What were the most significant? Which were your biggest challenges?
6. Please describe some of the needs during your first years in the principalship (training or other) that you wish you had addressed before?
7. What experiences or learnings from past experiences have shaped or influenced how you are as a principal? What are the two most important lessons you learned?
8. Is there anything you wish I would have asked you about your early years experiences in DR?

Protocolo de Entrevista

Hora de la entrevista:
Fecha:
Lugar:
Entrevistador: Mary Francis Benzo
Entrevistado:

Descripción del estudio:
Como se indica en la carta de consentimiento, este estudio explorará cómo los directores principiantes de escuelas públicas dominicanas describen sus experiencias como directores y reflexionan sobre sus necesidades al ingresar y llevar a cabo sus primeros años en la dirección. Además, este estudio tiene como objetivo documentar las historias de vida de los directores, los antecedentes, los sentimientos y las vías para convertirse en directores. A través de las experiencias compartidas por todos ustedes, este estudio proporcionará una comprensión más profunda de cómo los directores en la República Dominicana entienden su rol y cómo se preparan para él. Le agradezco su participación en este estudio y compartir tus experiencias.

1. ¿Pudieras describir tu rol como director de K-12?
2. Describe tu preparación para ser director. ¿Cómo elegiste ser director? ¿Cuándo decidió ser director?
3. ¿Pudiera describir su trayectoria para convertirse en director?
4. ¿Cómo reflexiona acerca de sus experiencias en los primeros años en la dirección? ¿Cuáles fueron las más significativas? ¿Cuáles fueron sus mayores retos?
5. Pudiera describir algunas de las necesidades que se le presentaron (de formación y otra) en los primeros años en la dirección que hubiese querido trabajar anteriotmente?
6. ¿Qué experiencias o aprendizajes de sus experiencias previas han formado o influenciado como es usted como director? ¿Cuáles son las dos lecciones más importantes que aprendió?
7. ¿Hay algo que hubiese querido que le preguntara acerca de sus experiencias en los primeros años en la dirección en en RD?

Appendix F

Participant's Profiling Guides in English and in Spanish

Name: _____

Number: _____

Academic Background: _____

Type of Bachelor's:_____

Graduated from EDCE:_____

Professional Experience: _____

Years in education:_____

Years as Principal:_____

School Level: _____

Amount of students:_____

School demographics:_____

School environment:

_____

Additional Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Guía para el Perfil del Participante

Nombre: _____

Número: _____

Estudios: _____

Tipo de Licenticatura:_____

Graduado de la EDCE:_____

Experiencia Profesional: _____

Años en Educación:_____

Años en la Dirección:_____

Nivel Escolar: _____

Cantidad de estudiantes:_____

Datos de la escuela:_____

Ambiente escolar: _____

Comentarios Adicionales:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____